

## MENDIP DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Board held on Thursday, 24 June 2021 in the Council Chamber, Mendip District Council, Cannards Grave Road, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5BT commencing at 6.30 pm.

### SCRUTINY BOARD COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Councillors Alison Barkshire, Edric Hobbs, Chris Inchley (Chair), Barbi Lund (Deputy Chair), Terry Napper, Sam Phripp and Lucie Taylor-Hood.

### SUBSTITUTES PRESENT:

None

### OTHER COUNCILLORS PRESENT (via MS Teams):

Councillors Eve Berry, Shane Collins, Nick Cottle, Michael Gay, Liz Leyshon, Lindsay MacDougall, Janine Nash, and Lois Rogers.

### OFFICERS PRESENT:

Tracy Aarons	Deputy Chief Executive
Richard Bates	Section 151 Officer
Helen Bowen	Democratic Services Officer
Dave Burn	Interim Democratic Services Manager
Sarah Gooding	Democratic Services Officer
Kelly Knight	Economic Development and Scrutiny Officer
Ben Sugg	Democratic Services Officer

Agenda Item	Subject	Actioned By
1	<p><b>Chair's Announcements</b></p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and confirmed that we would be following the Hybrid Meeting Guidance distributed to all members.</p> <p>Advice was given by the Democratic Services Manager, reminding members of the requirement to be physically in attendance in order to vote on decisions. Those attending on MS Teams would be able to take part in a debate but would not be able to vote.</p>	
2	<p><b>Apologies for Absence</b></p> <p>Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Adam Boyden, Michael Dunk, Phillip Ham, Damon Hooton, and Nigel Woollcombe-Adams.</p>	

<b>3</b>	<p><b>Declarations of Interest</b></p> <p>None</p>	
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Public Participation</b></p> <p><b>a. Items on the agenda:</b> None</p> <p><b>b. Items not on the agenda:</b> None</p>	
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Previous Minutes</b></p> <p>Councillor Lucie Taylor-Hood proposed and was seconded by Councillor Sam Phripp that the minutes of the last meeting be accepted.</p> <p>This proposal was agreed unanimously.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED:</b></p> <p>That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2021 be approved as an accurate record of the proceedings.</p>	<b>Sarah Gooding</b>
<b>6</b>	<p><b>Update from the Climate and Ecological Working Group</b></p> <p>This Working Group was led by Councillor Janine Nash and supported by the Climate Change and Resilience Officer.</p> <p>A verbal update was given which said the Scrutiny Climate Emergency Working Group (SCEWG) had made a recommendation to Cabinet on 7 June 2021 on the most appropriate Future Emissions Pathway. The recommendation had been presented to Cabinet by Councillor Tom Ronan and had illustrated Mendip's journey towards carbon neutrality by 2030 (within the Council's existing powers). At this present moment in time, current policy levers only enable a 30% reduction in emissions by 2030, which was concerning, as this level of decarbonisation required urgent and intensive action to deliver. It was noted that the Council's carbon neutrality aspirations were currently limited by Central Government and therefore, it had been recommended that the Working Group consider developing a bespoke lobbying programme, that aimed to deliver the policy</p>	<b>Hayley Warrens.</b>

reform needed to deliver on the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency ambitions.

Cabinet had unanimously approved the following:

1. Approved Pathway as recommended with the acknowledgement that this was considered the most appropriate 2030 Future Emissions Pathway for Mendip, given the Council's existing powers.
2. Approved the recommended annual emissions reduction targets and associated measures to enable fulfilment of the recommended Future Emissions Pathway.
3. Acknowledged the adopted pathway as a "working document" and request that the Scrutiny Climate and Ecological Emergency Working Group review the Pathway on an annual basis, in accordance with opportunities that may arise from updated policy, funding frameworks, or other drivers and incentives.
4. Noted that a further report would be presented to Cabinet later in the year requesting approval of a Carbon Management Plan for the District. The Plan would provide a measurable and achievable strategy for the delivery of the Future Emissions Pathway, in addition to outlining the suite of measures that were required to reduce emissions across Mendip.

The Working Group Lead went on to inform the meeting that the scoping of the agricultural emissions project had taken precedence and recommendations would be made to Cabinet in August 2021. The Working Group's 3-point action plan for 2021/2022 would be agreed in July, ready for reporting to the Scrutiny Board in August 2021.

The Working Group Lead further went on to report that the Group would develop a bespoke lobbying programme that would seek to deliver the enhanced policy and funding measures needed to close the gap to carbon neutrality.

The Working Group Lead relayed to the meeting that the Council's Climate Change and Resilience Officer would be leaving the Council at the end of July 2021. The Lead gave her congratulations to the Officer on her new position.

	<p>The vacant post had been advertised to find a replacement. The Lead explained that there was a potential that the Group may be without a Lead Officer for a short while, which may delay the progress of some actions of the Working Group.</p> <p>During the discussion that followed there had been concern from members that it was not clear how climate emergency could be pushed up the agenda. Members requested that Mendip District Council write to Government. Members felt that all government policies that related to climate change should be held in a centralised system.</p> <p>Members had asked that the requirements of the future emissions plan would be put into service plans. It was also requested that a budget and schedule for Climate Change be provided.</p> <p>Members were concerned about quarries and their environmental impact in relation to policies and the planning framework. Members requested that Officers from the planning department respond to their concerns about quarries.</p> <p>Members had commented that the Government's planning policy was not fit for purpose with regard to Mendip's local needs and concerns.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the Working Group Lead for her report.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED:</b></p> <p>That the verbal update be noted.</p>	
7	<p><b>Draft Budget Outturn Report 2020-2021</b></p> <p>The Section 151 Officer introduced the report which provided the Scrutiny Board with updates to the budget for 2020-2021.</p> <p>2020-21 had been an extremely challenging year, due to Covid, with significant strain being placed on the Council's finances during that period. Other Covid costs had been borne, either as new expenditure or had been met through the redeployment of many staff. This had put an additional strain on the Council.</p>	Richard Bates

The overall position was almost finalised, although the business rate pooling calculations were still being finalised. The outturn currently showed an overspend of £896k. This could be mitigated, as anticipated when the budget was set in February 2021, by not transferring £706k to reserves. The remaining sum would be drawn from reserves but was slightly lower than previously anticipated.

Some capital expenditure had been delayed due to the Pandemic, but a number of schemes had progressed. Spending for 2020-21 was around £3.7m.

The position of the Council's reserves at year-end was slightly better than anticipated in February. All reserves and balances and an updated version of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) would be conducted once the closedown process had been completed.

The Scrutiny Board were recommended to note the following:

a) The projected Net Revenue Outturn position for the year showing an overspend of £896k and the implications for the authority's reserves position.

b) The Net Capital Outturn figures showing expenditure of £3.7m for the year.

c) The in-year collection levels for both Council Tax and NNDR.

During the discussion that followed Members asked the Section 151 Officer, that from a finance perspective what had been key learnings from the Pandemic. Members expressed the view that it would be very useful to have a key learnings audit following the Pandemic.

In response the Section 151 Officer informed the meeting that there had been issues with changing to online and remote payments. Also, it had not been possible to identify key workers for free car parking. A small team had been drawn together to issue grants, however there were 5/6 different grant schemes running at the same time. This had a huge impact on staffing workloads.

The Deputy Chief Executive drew the meeting's attention to the reality that no one had expected the

whole country to be shut down. As such the business continuity plans had not reflected that. The plan will be reviewed again.

Members commented that licensing had carried on and income had not dropped. However, income from leisure facilities and commercial property had decreased. Members queried whether there would be negotiations over these payments. Members had also raised the issue of how Mendip District Council would collect any outstanding council taxes due.

In response the Section 151 Officer commented that some businesses had done well and that there would be a staged approach to the collection of Council Tax. Capita had 10,000 reminders for Council Tax to be sent and would take a softer approach when the courts reopened.

Members asked if there was much movement of staff. They would appreciate updates on staff leaving. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that there are quarterly reports on staff movements.

The Section 151 Officer informed the meeting that the budget had been set in February 2020 and that when the accounts are finalised, we maybe in a better position than before. This was because some items would be carried forward. The medium term financial plan would be updated, and it would be clearer if there would be monies to redeploy in the future. In terms of staffing there would be changes. He drew the meeting's attention, to the fact that during a reorganisation it would be possible that people leave or change roles.

In response the Chair commented that staff had done a phenomenal job over the last year and must be congratulated.

Members asked how much commercial Council Tax was charged for Air B&B and holiday lets. They asked if this could be reported on so that it can be identified how much housing in Mendip is used for that purpose. Members stated they would like to know how much social housing would be lost through the right to buy scheme.

In response the Section 151 Officer reported that he would consider how to demonstrate in percentage form the number of commercial holiday lets. He

	<p>stated that right to buy was currently reported on and the percentage figures could be shared.</p> <p>Members raised questions regarding the aborted library project. Members were also concerned whether the Glastonbury town project was self-funding.</p> <p>The Section 151 Officer explained that the library capital project had been cancelled as the library was not moving premises. He confirmed that the Glastonbury town project would be self-funding. He also reported that Capital expenditure had been refreshed on an annual basis and that the current strategy for capital projects would be reviewed.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the Section 151 Officer for the clear and detailed report.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED:</b></p> <p>That the report be noted.</p>	
8	<p><b>Urgent Business</b></p> <p>There was none</p>	

The meeting finished at approximately 08:00 pm.