

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETINGS OF  
THE SCRUTINY PANELS  
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON THURSDAY, 15 JANUARY 2015**

<b>Members in attendance</b>			
<b>* Denotes attendance</b>		<b>∅ Denotes apology for absence</b>	
*	Cllr K J Baldry	*	Cllr P W Hitchins
*	Cllr A D Barber	*	Cllr J M Hodgson
∅	Cllr J H Baverstock	*	Cllr T R Holway
∅	Cllr J I G Blackler	∅	Cllr L P Jones
*	Cllr I Bramble	*	Cllr D W May
*	Cllr J Brazil	*	Cllr C M Pannell
∅	Cllr C G Bruce-Spencer	*	Cllr J A Pearce
∅	Cllr B F Cane	*	Cllr J T Pennington
*	Cllr B E Carson	*	Cllr R Rowe
∅	Cllr B S Cooper	*	Cllr P C Smerdon
∅	Cllr S E Cooper	*	Cllr J W Squire
*	Cllr P Coulson	*	Cllr R C Steer
∅	Cllr P K Cuthbert	∅	Cllr M Stone
*	Cllr R J Foss	∅	Cllr R J Vint
∅	Cllr A S Gorman	∅	Cllr J A Westacott MBE
∅	Cllr M J Hannaford	∅	Cllr K R H Wingate
∅	Cllr J D Hawkins		

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Minute Ref No below refers</b>	<b>Executive Members also in attendance</b>
All agenda items		Cllrs H D Bastone, R D Gilbert, M J Hicks, R J Tucker and S A E Wright

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Minute Ref No below refers</b>	<b>Officers in attendance and participating</b>
All agenda items		Head of Paid Service, S151 Officer, Democratic Services Manager and Divisional Environmental Health Officer

**JSP.1/14 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED**

That Cllr R J Foss be elected as Chairman for the duration of this meeting.

**JSP.2/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting. These were recorded as follows:-

Cllrs P C Smerdon and J W Squire both declared a personal interest in Item 6: 'Budget Proposals 2015-2016' (Minute JSP.4/14 below refers) by virtue of representing the Council on the South Hams Community and Voluntary Services (CVS) – Executive Committee and remained in the meeting and took part in the debate and vote thereon.

JSP.3/14 **PUBLIC FORUM**

No items were raised at this meeting.

JSP.4/14 **BUDGET PROPOSALS 2015/2016**

**(a) Revenue Budget Proposals 2015/16**

**Proposal 1: That South Hams CVS should be in receipt of an additional £10,000 grant above the approved Service Level Agreement, to be potentially funded through the identified uncommitted remaining New Homes Bonus Balance (Page 43 of the Executive meeting agenda of 11 December 2014 refers)**

In discussion on this proposal, reference was made to:-

- (i) the work undertaken by the CVS. Members highlighted the value and excellent work carried out by the CVS and emphasised the severe financial pressures which were being faced by the organisation. These pressures were being faced in light of other partner authorities reducing their funding allocations to the CVS. In reply, a Member commented that he fundamentally disagreed with the principle whereby the Council increased its grant funding to offset reductions imposed by other authorities;
- (ii) funding this additional bid proposal. Members referred to page 43 of the Revenue Budget Proposals report of the Executive meeting agenda of 11 December 2014 and specifically the uncommitted Balance remaining from New Homes Bonus monies and felt that this could be a potential source of funding this proposal. Whilst this was a potential option, Members were informed that the modelling around Business Rate forecasting was still to be undertaken and the Council had a significantly underfunded Capital Programme, which would have an impact on the uncommitted balance;
- (iii) the current financial support provided by the Council to the CVS. Currently, the Council contributed £35,000 towards the core running costs of the organisation and £8,000 towards volunteer support. This was part offset by the CVS paying the Council rent and service charges of £10,280 plus VAT in 2013/14 to rent office space at Follaton House.

When put to the vote, this proposal was declared **CARRIED**.

**Proposal 2: That funding towards bringing Empty Homes back into use be funded by interest free loans as opposed to grants, with the Council retaining five year nomination rights**

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (i) This proposal being an example of how the Council could be more commercially minded in the future. In addition, the proposer informed that she objected to grant funding being used in this regard;
- (ii) In highlighting the complexities associated with bringing Empty Homes back into use, some Members highlighted the work undertaken recently by the Task and Finish Group and felt that this proposal would have an impact upon the Council's performance targets;
- (iii) It was noted that £50,000 was set aside from the Affordable Housing Capital Programme for this purpose each year. Furthermore, the maximum grant per application was £15,000 and the vast majority of grants were awarded for £10,000. As a consequence, a Member felt that the additional bureaucracy which would result from managing this revised process would be excessive when considering the total budget allocated;
- (iv) A number of Members were of the view that the status quo should be retained at this time, but that this position should be reviewed as part of the 2016/17 Budget Setting process.

When put to the vote, this proposal was declared **LOST**.

**Proposal 3: That pre-application planning fees be reviewed before the 2016/17 Budget Setting process for major developments (of 10 or more dwellings)**

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (i) the current trend whereby the Council was receiving an increased number of major (and complex) planning applications from developers. In light of the substantial amount of officer time absorbed by these applications, a Member felt that there was scope to increase planning fees. In reply, it was noted that planning fees were set nationally and the only charges which could be determined locally were pre-application charges. Nonetheless, the proposer still felt that pre-application charges should be reviewed;
- (ii) the risk of setting pre-application fees at too high a level. Some Members made the point that if the fees were set too high, then developers would simply submit an application without any pre-application discussions taking place. This would inevitably result in more officer time and resource being absorbed before an application was determined, without the Council receiving any fee income;

- (iii) pre-application fees having only been recently reviewed by Members. As a result, it was felt appropriate for a detailed review to be undertaken before the 2016/17 Budget Setting process commenced.

When put to the vote, this proposal was declared **CARRIED**.

**Proposal 4: That the Council Tax for 2015/16 be increased by 1.9%**

Members deliberated whether or not to recommend acceptance of the Council Tax Freeze Grant which was on offer from Central Government (amounting to £58,000) or to increase Council Tax by 1.9% (amounting to £101,000).

On balance, the majority of Members stated that, in light of a 1.9% increase generating an additional £43,000 into the base budget, coupled with the lack of absolute guarantee that the Council Tax Freeze Grant monies would be factored into the base budget, they would support the proposal to increase Council Tax by 1.9%.

When put to the vote, this proposal was declared **CARRIED**.

**(b) Capital Budget Proposals 2015/16**

**Proposal 1: That the work of the Disabled Facilities Grant Task and Finish Group to generate in-year savings be noted.**

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (i) Whilst it was hoped that future savings could be generated, it was noted that demand for the Grant was on the increase and it was also difficult to predict future need;
- (ii) A Member was of the view that some monies were not made best use of through this scheme and proceeded to cite a recent example from her local ward;
- (iii) In addition to the disabled, the view was expressed that there were also a number of other vulnerable groups who were really suffering as a consequence of the reduction in central government funding;
- (iv) Members welcomed the establishment of the Task and Finish Group and recognised the need to conduct an in-depth review in this regard.

When put to the vote, this proposal was declared **CARRIED**.

**Proposal 2: That any surpluses identified through the 2015/16 Budget Setting process be ringfenced for the affordable housing capital programme**

In discussion, a number of Members expressed their support for this proposal.

When put to the vote, this proposal was declared **CARRIED**.

It was then:

**RESOLVED**

That the Executive give consideration to the following views of the Scrutiny Panel:-

1. That South Hams CVS should be in receipt of an additional £10,000 grant above the approved Service Level Agreement, to be potentially funded through the identified uncommitted remaining New Homes Bonus Balance (Page 43 of the Executive meeting agenda of 11 December 2014 specifically refers);
2. That the status quo should be retained in respect of the funding for the Empty Homes Strategy, but that this should be reviewed as part of the 2016/17 Budget Setting process;
3. That pre-application planning fees should be reviewed before the 2016/17 Budget Setting process for major developments;
4. That the Council Tax for 2015/16 should be increased by 1.9%;
5. That the work of the Disabled Facilities Grant Task and Finish Group to generate in-year savings be noted; and
6. That any surpluses identified through the 2015/16 Budget Setting process should be ringfenced for the affordable housing capital programme.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 11.30 am)

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Chairman