

AMENDMENTS AND WRITTEN QUESTIONS – EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL – 15 JANUARY 2018

AMENDMENTS

No amendments have been received.

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

AGENDA ITEM 4 – HEART OF THE SOUTH WEST – JOINT COMMITTEE

Questions submitted by Councillor Mrs J Roach and the response of the Leader of the Council

1. 4.1 states that 'the JC's budgetary arrangement shall be detailed in a budget and cost sharing agreement (to be drafted)

My rough calculation is that this could be in the region of £15k, given our budgetary situation how is this going to be funded now and in future years?

Is it sensible to agree to join this committee without knowing the actual cost to this authority?

RESPONSE:

The budget will be agreed annually by the Constituent Authorities (including Mid Devon) on a recommendation by the Joint Committee – see 3.1 of the Draft Arrangements at Appendix A.

The draft estimated budget for the next 15 months is estimated at £89,000. Using existing funds to offset some of this total, Mid Devon's contribution for 18/19 is proposed as £1,400.

Beyond that, even if the proposed cost were to be equally divided amongst all members (which it isn't) I cannot possibly see how £89,000 divided across the 17 councils could be described as 'in the region of £15k'. (At an equal share it is £5,235, and the counties and unitaries contribute a larger sum than districts in any event.)

2. Can you confirm that the budgetary cost for this year will be as stated in the report?
Where is this money coming from?

RESPONSE:

Yes. The money will be allocated from the council's revenue budget.

3. Will meetings be open to the press and public? If the meetings are not open then will Councillors be allowed to observe the meetings?

RESPONSE:

Page 30 refers: '11.3 Formal meetings of the Joint Committee shall normally be held in public, in accordance with the Access to Information Rules and the Standing Orders / Rules

of Procedure of the Administering Authority'. The Administering Authority for the first two years will be Somerset County Council. Here is a link to their Constitution:

About the Council and its Constitution

For councillors who are not members of the Joint Committee (the appointed representatives of the Constituent Authorities), they will have the rights to attend the meetings as members of the public – see page 74ff of Somerset County Council's Constitution.

4. How is the work of this committee going to be monitored?

RESPONSE:

The administering authority assumes responsibility for adequacy of governance and expenditure. In addition, p31 refers: '13.1 In addition to any ad hoc reports to the Constituent Authorities, the Joint Committee shall supply an annual report of its activities to the Constituent Authorities in May of each year.'

If this question refers to scrutiny then see the answer to question 5.

As for transparency, the meetings, papers and minutes of the Joint Committee will be published by Somerset County Council, as the administering authority, on its website – as it already does with the Somerset Waste Board.

I would also highlight the point that the only matter which is delegated to the Joint Committee is the approval of the Productivity Strategy, but even that has been subject to significant consultation and input by the Constituent Authorities and the wider economic community. The draft Productivity Strategy has already been considered by this Council at the Economy PDG on 9th November 2017 and again on 11th January 2018. All other matters are "referred" only i.e. the Joint Committee can make recommendations back to the Constituent Authorities.

5. Will MDDC Scrutiny committee have a role in scrutinising the work of this committee?

RESPONSE:

If it so wishes; p 31 refers: '13.2 The Joint Committee shall co-operate with the public scrutiny arrangements of the Constituent Authorities.'

The Chairman of Mid Devon's Scrutiny Committee has already sought reassurance that his committee can exercise a role here if desired, asking this specific point when this item went through Cabinet.