

**NORTH DEVON COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at the Civic Centre, Barnstaple on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2014 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Members representing North Devon Council:

Councillor Biederman (Chairman)

Councillors Brown, Chesters, Gurney, Lane, Lucas, Luggar, Moores and White.

Officers:

Head of Legal Services (KM), Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services (JM), Finance Manager (JT), Communications Manager (CH), Community Development Officer (HH) and Democratic Services Officer (JG).

Also present:

Mr. J. Wiggin	Engagement and Volunteer Manager Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
---------------	--

**23 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Haywood and Tucker.

**24 MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2014 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In respect of minute 18 of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2014, the Committee requested that rather than writing to the Health Minister and escalating the issue to national Government, it would prefer that a letter be sent to the Clinical Chair of the Northern Locality Commissioning Group (of NHS New Devon CCG) to request further guidance and support on how the Council could more effectively contribute to the development of health services in this area, for example in the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Commissioning Services in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Committee also requested that any response received from the Clinical Chair be circulated to Members of the Committee for information.

**25 ITEM BROUGHT FORWARD BY THE CHAIRMAN**

(a) **TIMING OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE**

The Chairman referred to an e:mail circulated by officers requesting feedback on the proposed Committee Timetable for 2015/16. Members preference was that meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue to be held at 2:00 p.m.

**26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest announced.

**27 POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR DEVON AND CORNWALL**

The Committee welcomed Justin Wiggin, Engagement and Volunteer Manager for the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to the meeting.

The Committee received a presentation in respect of greater public involvement in policing highlighting the importance in volunteering, the drivers necessary to increase public involvement and retain volunteers together with police and crime plan policies.

Mr. Wiggin advised that the volunteer review was the first major piece of work to be undertaken, 80% of the action plan had already been developed and the review was anticipated to be complete within the next six weeks.

A question and answer session followed in relation to the age range of volunteers proposed to be reached, how the contribution made by volunteers was measured, what the restrictions were for becoming 'specials', the opportunities available to volunteers to work in new roles which may not have been allowed or exposed.

Mr. Wiggin advised that a volunteer satisfaction survey was being progressed to ensure that volunteers received the support they required and that volunteer groups were being utilised to identify demand in rural communities.

The Committee noted that 'Specials' annually delivered 150,000 service hours which equated to 825 'specials' working on a minimum number of hours that 'specials' were required to undertake.

The Chairman advised that in the past, Police Officers had approached Postmen and women to 'keep a look out' for stolen items for example when carrying out their rounds delivering mail. This practice had not been followed in a number of years and perhaps the Police authority may wish to consider its resurrection.

Whilst the Committee was pleased to have received an overview of the draft framework regarding volunteering, it was disappointed not to hear more about

how it would be achieved and asked that once the framework was finalised, a report be brought back to the Committee on the actions and how the Council could help to implement.

The Committee requested that Mr. Wiggin's contact details be circulated to Members of the Committee in due course.

RESOLVED, that once the review framework was finalised, a report be brought back to the Committee on the actions and how the Council could help to implement.

## **28 HOUSING STRATEGY TASK TEAM**

The Head of Environmental Health and Housing referred to the presentation given to the Committee on 10 July 2014 by the Vice-Chair and Commissioning Lead for Care Close to Home of the Northern Locality of the Northern, Eastern and Western Devon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). In particular he made reference to the document tabled at the meeting entitled "Community Services for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – A Strategic Framework" and the inadequate opportunity to critically appraise the document.

Following the presentation, it was evident to him that there was an opportunity for the authority to link its housing work with the work being undertaken by the CCG as this authority was instrumental in the delivery of public health in respect of helping people to stay in their homes.

The Head of Environmental Health and Housing advised that he had since met with Kerry Burton, the Commissioning Lead for Care Close to Home to discuss the need to work more closely with the local housing authority. Subsequent meetings with the Chairman of the Housing Strategy Task Team sought to join up the work before implementing our strategy. He further advised that a date had yet to be set for a further joint meeting but he hoped to be in a position to report back at the next meeting of the Committee on the steps taken to working jointly with the CCG and Public Health integrating their work into our own strategy with the challenge of re-directing some of the health funding to support some of our housing work.

## **29 PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT QUARTER 1 OF 2014/15**

The Committee considered a report to the Executive on 2 September 2014 by the Leader and Executive Team together with a minute extract (circulated previously) regarding the Performance and Financial Management of Quarter 1 2014/15.

The Finance Manager gave a brief overview of the first quarter of this year and took the Committee through the headline financial figures which included the possibility of external borrowing in the latter part of 2014/15 which would incur borrowing costs.

The Committee asked questions and received responses in respect of the following: -

- Barnstaple Bus Station – A variation to the capital programme was required owing to the withdrawal of an external grant from Stage Coach resulting in a change to the project.
- North Devon Link Road Litter Blitz – The litter collection did not cross district boundaries. It was understood that part of Devon County Council's responsibilities when cutting grass verges/hedges etc was to collect any litter subsequently exposed. It was suggested that the Contracts Delivery Manager be requested to liaise with contractors and the litter picking team to ensure the timings for litter picking were appropriate in terms of the timings of the cutting back of the grass verges/hedges etc.
- Borrowing Costs Forecast at £0.050m - Borrowing was always a last resort, however, owing to a small number of Capital projects materialising through the Executive, such as the replacement of kerbside recycling vehicles, replacement of refuse vehicles and works to Old Quay Head, approval had been put in place within the 2014/15 revenue budget to enable borrowing later in the financial year if required.
- Earmarked Reserves – Local Authority Mortgage Scheme – The Head of Environmental Health and Housing regretfully advised that Lloyds Bank (our lending partner) had decided to walk away from new schemes at this stage and the authority was now looking for other lending partners in order for the scheme to continue.
- Maximum borrowing limit – The authority had a maximum external borrowing limit of £5m. It was anticipated that the authority would borrow up to £3m over the long term which would be spread in tranches to minimise the risk of rates changing, the authority would continue to borrow internally initially. Borrowing was set over differing terms and matched to the length of the asset therefore predominantly over a short term basis.
- Civil Parking Enforcement Officer Post – The budget was set in February at which time it was unknown whether or not enforcement of Civil Parking would be taken over by Devon County Council and if so, how many posts would be removed from the budget. Plans were in place for the remaining post to assist in the delivery of the new barrier system project.
- Employee Salaries and Overtime – It was requested that employee salaries and overtime costs be separated in the preparation of future performance and financial management reports.
- CCTV – The Head of Environmental Health and Housing advised that there was an ongoing review of the service and a number of posts had therefore been left vacant to enable some short term overtime with the intention of reducing overall cost. He advised that the scope of the review had previously been presented to the Committee and he anticipated that a report highlighting the conclusions of the review would be brought back to the Committee before Christmas.
- Corporate Services – The Chairman requested a little more detail in the figures provided under the heading of Corporate Services in appendix I of

the report. It was suggested that the Economic Development Manager report back to a future meeting regarding staffing etc.

- Car Park Income – The Chairman advised that it would have been interesting to know which car parks had attributed to the £11k increase. The Finance Manager reported that the £11k variance came from a number of positive and negative movements across all car parks.
- Award from Regional Growth Fund – Councillor Luggar requested that conditions in respect of the £1.5m award to local employer Actavis (pharmaceuticals) from the Regional Growth Fund Round 5 for investment in their Barnstaple operations be circulated to Members of the Committee.
- Reduction in the number of complaints to the authority – these figures should have been provided in the performance report.

A debate ensued regarding whether or not the report presented to the Committee provided adequate information to inform Members that the Council was running effectively. A view was taken that key performance indicators were required to assist the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) that the decisions and recommendations of the Executive be endorsed;
- (b) that Housing Benefits staff be commended for performing way above the national average in respect of the speed in which new claims and changes to circumstances were being processed;
- (c) that conditions of the award of £1.5m to local employer Actavis (pharmaceuticals) from the Regional Growth Fund Round 5 for investment in their Barnstaple operations be circulated to Members of the Committee;
- (d) that an informal meeting be held one hour prior to the next meeting of the Committee to provide an opportunity to consider the best method for taking the work programme forward and appropriate format of future financial and performance reports.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- (e) that the Contracts Delivery Manager be requested to liaise with contractors and the litter picking team to ensure the timings for litter picking were appropriate in terms of the timings of the cutting back of the grass verges/hedges etc.;
- (f) that employee salaries and overtime costs be separated in the preparation of future performance and financial management reports;

In the meantime, Members of the Committee were invited to e:mail any particular views or requirements to the Member Services Officer prior to the information meeting in preparation.

### **30 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT 2013/14**

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer (circulated previously) regarding the Annual Treasury Management Report 2013/14.

RESOLVED, that the recommendations of the Executive be endorsed.

### **31 FIGURES FOR THE COLLECTION OF COUNCIL TAX**

The Finance Manager addressed the Committee following a previous resolution for the figures for the collection of Council Tax for those households now billed under the new Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

He advised that just under 80% of households had paid their bills under the scheme and the authority would continue to collect via the normal recovery route those 20% outstanding.

The Committee was informed of Government grants available to help fund staffing required to recover the costs. Immediate arrangements of instalment payments were considered the best way of recovering funds as court costs would simply add to the burden to those households.

### **32 EXTREME WEATHER RESILIENCE**

The Committee considered the Devon County Council Extreme weather resilience report: Devon May 2014 (circulated previously).

The Community Development Officer advised that the document was intended to be used by Devon County Council as a lobbying tool for extra funding for both repair and resilience work. She highlighted the strategic recommendations required to secure the future of the region.

In response to questions in respect of the take up of grants in flood affected areas, the Community Development Officer agreed to circulate the updated figures to Members of the Committee. She advised that it had been a difficult grant to administer and that a further community event was planned to be held in October 2014 following the success of the previous 'Get ready for winter 2013' event.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) that the Committee acknowledge that Devon was vulnerable to extreme weather events which were likely to occur more frequently in the future and that strategic

infrastructures were required to adapt to climate change and mitigate the associated transportation and economic risks;

(b) that the following strategic recommendations as set out in the report be supported and endorsed:

- The current emphasis on A and B roads needs to be maintained, with additional funding required for C road network to make it safe and more resilient. The unclassified road network also needs to be reduced and made safe with additional funding, new maintenance and greater community involvement.
- The £31.3m resilience improvement programme by Network Rail should be implemented immediately and long term resilience solutions should be identified on the Somerset levels.
- Increased funding and support is needed for the Lead Local Flood Authority flood risk management measures of approximately £1m per annum for new studies, scheme preparation and to undertake small scale improvements. This increased funding would be used to tackle new recovery and resilience requirements on top of the backlog of existing and planned work.

(c) that North Devon Council emergency planning officers continue to be engaged and involved in the prioritisation of repair and resilience work through the Local Resilience Forum;

(d) that the Community Development Officer be tasked with finding out what the £31.3m resilience improvement programme entailed and ensure that works to the Tarka Line were included within it; and

(e) that the above recommendations be reported to the Executive for information following Minute 36 of the Executive held on 6 May 2014 that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to consider the contents of the “Extreme Weather Resilience report” and report back its findings.

### **33 WORK PROGRAMME/FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered the work programme (circulated previously).

RESOLVED, that the work programme be noted.

Chairman

The meeting ended at 4.40 p.m.

**NOTE:** These minutes will be confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting of the Committee.