

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at the Civic Centre, Barnstaple on Thursday 12th February 2015 at 1.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Members representing North Devon Council:

Councillor Biederman (Chairman)

Councillors Chesters, Clark, Haywood, Lane, Lucas, Luggar, Moores, Tucker and White.

Councillors Greenslade and Moore attended the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 9 (3).

Officers:

Chief Executive, Head of Finance (JT), Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services (JM), Community Development Officer (HH) and Member Services Officer (JG).

70 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brown and Gurney.

71 MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th January 2015 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

72 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest announced.

73 NORTH DEVON RECORD OFFICE CLOSURE

Ciara Eastell, Head of Libraries, Culture and Heritage for Devon County Council together with Janel Tall from the South West Heritage Trust attended the meeting in respect of the proposed transfer of records from the North Devon Record Office based at the Barnstaple Library to the Heritage Centre based in Exeter.

They outlined the following reasons for the proposals: -

- Devon Council Council staff relocating from the Civic Centre to the Library; and
- Budget restrictions resulting in insufficient funds to resource the service locally.

Councillors Biederman and Greenslade declared a personal interest in the above item as Members of Devon County Council.

The Committee received the following responses in respect of questions relating to the proposals: -

- Approximately one third of the existing records were proposed to remain in North Devon
- A review would be undertaken as to which records could be digitised in future
- Consideration was being given to records being brought up from Exeter to North Devon upon request
- Parish Councils would not be asked to have their records returned to them however, they would be consulted upon which records would be best housed locally
- Staff in Exeter would be happy to answer queries, access documents remotely and many records could be accessed without the necessity of a visit
- It was sensible to ensure that Library and Heritage records should be kept together where possible, maintained to a particular standard within good quality accommodation
- Parish registers would be digitised and it was important to ensure that the most frequently requested records were digitised first owing to cost
- The cost/benefit figures in respect of relocating the records office could be provided to the Committee at a future date
- Devon County Council would be happy to liaise with North Devon Council and the community in respect of the types of records that could be retained in North Devon
- The footfall in the Barnstaple records office compared to that in the Exeter office was approximately one quarter Barnstaple to three quarters Exeter
- North Devon Council did engage with its Museum Service to find an alternative solution however, owing to similar budget pressures no alternative was available in the short term
- There was scope for further conversation with the Trust and Devon County Council to encourage the public to get more involved in the running of the service
- There was only one branch office based in Barnstaple, the remainder of records being held in Exeter with the exception of Plymouth and West Devon
- All public/statutory records would be moving to Exeter
- In recognition of the strength in public opinion, individual depositors were being contacted to ask for preferences in respect of which items should be retained locally
- No firm decisions had been taken as many documents held on behalf of Devon County Council were on loan
- Guidance on the process was being provided by the National Archives
- The economic benefits of retaining the records office were appreciated
- Local studies would remain in the library

- No consideration had been given towards relocating the records office in any of the schools in the area of North Devon

With the agreement of the Committee, the Chairman permitted questions and representations from members of the public as follows: -

- Local knowledge of existing staff was key
- Staff were uncertain of the security of their jobs
- Digital records were not of concern however, many records, particular to the area were not digital or indeed catalogued
- Pleased to note that the strong room would be relocated to the first floor
- The record office was a fantastic asset to the businesses and people of North Devon
- On many occasions when accessing the records office, people were present from all around the world, tracking their heritage, paying parking fees and visiting various areas within North Devon with their family
- How was it possible to extend the interest in the records by reducing the space for providing the same?

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Devon County Council be requested to attend a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide it with cost/benefit figures in respect of relocating the records office to the Heritage Centre in Exeter; and
- (b) That Devon County Council be requested to liaise with North Devon Council and the community in respect of the types of records that could be retained in North Devon.

74 ORDER OF AGENDA

RESOLVED, that items 12 and 15 be considered prior to item 6 on the agenda.

75 VALUATION OF COUNCIL ASSETS

The Committee received a presentation on the valuation of Council assets, the Service role in valuation, the evidence required to justify how valuations were arrived at together with further information in respect of the use of external valuers, advantages of in house valuation, views of external auditors and CIPFA guidance.

The Head of Property and Technical Services advised that the Authority could not sell land on which it had gained planning consent.

The Committee thanked the Property and Technical Service Team for the presentation and congratulated them on the excellent model of valuations as

recognised by the External Auditors and reported to the Audit Committee in September 2014.

76 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS AND RESTRICTION OF DOCUMENTS

RESOLVED:

(a) That under the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2000 (as amended), as made under the Local Government Act 2000, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that the item contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as described in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

(b) That all documents and reports relating to the item be confirmed as "Not for Publication".

77 CIVIC CENTRE RELOCATION UPDATE

The Committee considered and noted a report (circulated previously) highlighting the most recent position in respect of the proposed relocation of staff from the Civic Centre.

Since publication of the agenda, the Head of Property and Technical Services advised the following: -

- The ICT department had now relocated to the Brynsworthy Environment Centre (BEC)
- Works to Lynton House were progressing swiftly with staff predicted to move in March
- Meeting rooms at BEC were on track to be completed towards the end of the following week
- Planning consent had been granted in respect of the new modular building at BEC
- Works to 16 Castle Street were due to commence next week with a Members Room being provided on the ground floor
- Significant works had been uncovered in respect of major alterations to the roof on the Listed Building at Castle Lodge
- There remained a £13k under spend in respect of phase I of the project

The Committee was also advised that the Council's new website was due to 'go live' in March.

The Leader announced that an item was scheduled to be placed on the Executive agenda for consideration in March following a presentation to all Members prior to Council on 25th February 2014.

78 RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED, that the public and press be readmitted to the meeting in order for the remaining business to be transacted.

79 ORDER OF AGENDA

RESOLVED, that items 8 and 7 on the agenda be considered prior to item 9 on the agenda.

80 PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT FOR QUARTER 3 2014/15

The Committee considered a report by the Leader and Executive Team (circulated previously) together with a minute extract regarding the Performance and Financial Management for Quarter 3 2014/15.

RESOLVED, that the decisions and recommendations of the Executive be endorsed.

81 REVENUE BUDGET 2015/16 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2014/15 TO 2017/18

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer (circulated previously) together with a minute extract regarding the Revenue Budget 2015/16 and Capital Programme 2014-15 to 2017-18.

He summarised the main budget movements for 2015-16 as set out in paragraph 5.1.2.7 of the report.

The Committee acknowledged that the Council's net Capital budget had dropped significantly from £15m to £11m within a period of four years.

In accordance with the compliance of the Local Government Act 2003, the Chief Financial Officer assured the Committee of the robustness of the estimates and adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

The Committee discussed changes to the budget in respect of Phase II of the 21:21 project in so far as original proposals included retaining certain leased areas of the Civic Centre and revised proposals were to completely vacate the premises resulting in the necessity to provide a double rather than single storey building at the Brynsworthy Environment Centre together with additional works at Lynton House and Castle Lodge to accommodate the print room etc. The total 21:21 capital cost would repay itself within three years.

In response to a question regarding the deletion of the planned investment for the Pannier Market screens from the current capital programme, the Committee was advised that owing to changes to the project it was sensible

to remove it now and await a revised business case for the whole of the Pannier Market.

The Committee requested information regarding budget provision for the Leisure Centre.

The Leader advised that discussions had been on going between the Contracts Delivery Manager and the Executive Lead Member for Culture regarding the life and overall fabric of the Leisure Centre building. A report was being drafted and would be presented to the next Executive for consideration.

RESOLVED, that the decisions and recommendations of the Executive be endorsed

82 TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2015/16

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer (circulated previously) together with a minute extract regarding the Treasury Management and Annual Investment Strategy Statement 2015/16.

RESOLVED, that the decisions and recommendations of the Executive be endorsed.

83 CCTV REVIEW

The Head of Environmental Health and Housing advised that good progress had been made on the CCTV review and that he was close to putting forward a series of recommendations.

He advised that it would now be appropriate for the findings and recommendations to be shared with the staff side representation and the service staff.

RESOLVED, that the CCTV review findings be presented to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following consultation with unison and service staff as appropriate.

84 HOUSING STRATEGY

The Head of Environmental Health and Housing gave a presentation on the development of a Health and Housing Strategy setting out what had been achieved to date, key challenges ahead and responses to the findings of the strategic needs assessment together with consultations with key stakeholders.

The Committee noted the key challenges facing the Council in addressing both the housing needs and health inequalities which existed in the area and also emerging policy tensions.

He illustrated how modelling software from the BRE (Building Research Establishment) had been used to evidence how the Council's housing interventions had the potential to save the NHS money.

He advised the Committee that a stakeholder event for housing was scheduled to be held on 6 March 2015 and in the meantime both he and Councillor Moores were meeting with Kerry Burton, Commissioning Lead, Care Close to Home on 13 February 2015 to commence discussions regarding possible future collaboration in delivering housing interventions.

RESOLVED, that a copy of the presentation be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

85 WORK PROGRAMME/FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the work programme (circulated previously).

RESOLVED, that the work programme be noted.

Chairman

The meeting ended at 3.40 p.m.

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