

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at the Brynsworth Environment Centre, Barnstaple on Thursday 15th March 2018 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Members

Councillor Greenslade (Chair)

Councillors Chesters, Mathews, Webber and White.

Also Present

Councillor Brailey (present for minutes 118 to 123).

Officers

Assistant to the Head of Environmental Health and Housing (AM), Economic Growth Manager (EV) and Corporate and Community Services Officer (KJ).

118 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ley, Patrinos, Roome and Worden.

119 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th February 2018 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

120 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest announced.

121 EMPTY PROPERTIES WITHIN THE NORTH DEVON COUNCIL AREA: A BRIEF SUMMARY

The Committee considered a report by the Assistant to the Head of Environmental Health and Housing (circulated previously) regarding Empty Properties within the North Devon Council area.

The Assistant to the Head of Environmental Health and Housing addressed the Committee and brought their attention to the following:

- There was an initiative pending with Wessex Resolutions Community Interest Company which was hoped would result in empty properties being brought back into use as homes.
- Up to 2017 the Council had categorised the empty homes into four groups for Council Tax Purposes: Discount Class C3, Discount Class

C, Levy and Discount Class D12. The latter ceased to be used in April 2017, resulting in three categories currently in use.

- The net growth in the number of empty properties over the past five years was 59 across all categories.
- Reasons for properties being empty included those homes of forces personnel posted overseas, those where the owners were in residential or nursing home care, properties forming inheritance where probate was not yet granted, properties where ownership was in question and those which were undergoing major renovation.
- The figures did not include second homes, holiday rentals and commercial properties which may have lent themselves to conversion.
- The new Wessex Loan proposal was at 4.2% which was higher than current High Street lending but provided a funding route which was otherwise unavailable to certain people.
- The New Homes Bonus Grant was an incentive to get properties back into use but the quantity and the time frame involved in that process could not be guaranteed.

The Chairman confirmed that the report and update from the Assistant to the Head of Environmental Health and Housing had proved that the article printed in the Western Morning News previously had given a misleading representation of the situation. The Chairman however confirmed that the issue should be considered and efforts made to get such properties back into use. He stated that the Council's project in Castle Street, Barnstaple, (returning the property to residential use) had proved to be a good example of this.

The Committee discussed the agreement made with North Devon Homes (NDH) some years ago where they leased properties direct from the owners which the Council then used to home those in need. They also acknowledged that the figures used to ascertain the New Homes bonus previously were affected by a number of NDH-owned properties being left empty during a period of re-building. It was noted that this was no longer an issue.

The Assistant to the Head of Environmental Health and Housing advised that any further works into the issue could only be achieved by taking staff off of their other duties.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant to the Head of Environmental Health and Housing for his attendance

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the Assistant to the Head of Environmental Health and Housing contact North Devon Homes with regards to creating a similar scheme as previously discussed and that the outcome of the enquiry to be emailed to the Corporate and Community Services Officer for circulation to the Committee;
- (b) the report be noted.

122 APPOINTMENT OF A TASK AND FINISH GROUP REGARDING THE BARNSTAPLE PANNIER MARKET

The Committee discussed the need for a Task and Finish Group regarding the Barnstaple Pannier Market, as a decision had been made at Full Council that a cross-party working group would be set up to consider this.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that, although two members from each political group had been invited to become members of the working group, additional Councillors could join the cross-party working group.

RESOLVED that following the appointment of a Pannier Market Cross-party Working Group by Council, a separate Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finishing Group not be appointed.

123 APPOINTMENT OF A TASK AND FINISH GROUP REGARDING RMB CHIVENOR.

The Committee considered a draft Scoping Paper (circulated previously) and the extracts of the Special Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 13th April 2017 and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 20th April 2017 (circulated previously).

The Committee discussed the creation of a Task and Finish Group regarding RMB Chivenor.

The Chairman drew the Committee's attention to the following tabled documents: a letter from the House of Commons and an extract from the Devon County Council Cabinet meeting of 14th March 2018 titled "b. Sunset for the Royal Marines and Future Resilience". It was noted that if the Royal Marines' numbers were to reduce then they could possibly be accommodated at a 'super base' at Plymouth.

The Committee noted possible problems with the RMB Chivenor site such as: pollution, flood risks etc should it be developed.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that he had spoken to the Local Member of Parliament who had stated that a final decision had not yet been made regarding the future of RMB Chivenor.

The Committee noted that a plan would be required for the use of the land if the Marines did leave the base.

RESOLVED that the Corporate and Community Services Officer would send an invitation by email to the members of the Committee, plus Councillor Davis (as DCC ward member) and Councillor Spear (as a Braunton Councillor) to join the Task and Finishing Group.

124 PUBLIC CONVENIENCE SCHEME

The Committee considered a report by the Procurement and Service Delivery Manager presented to the Executive on 5th March 2018 (circulated previously) and the minute extract regarding the Public Convenience Scheme.

The Committee discussed the report and the implications of the closure of public toilets.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

125 EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Chairman addressed the Committee in relation to the outcome of the Local Government Association's review of the Effectiveness of Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Chairman addressed the Committee and confirmed that many of the issues were covered during the training received by the Committee on 12th February 2018. He also noted that although the Committee had the services of a clerk it did not have the use of an officer to undertake research and work on its behalf.

RESOLVED that the Corporate and Community Services Officer email the report "Local Government Association's review of the Effectiveness of Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny" Committees to the committee for information.

126 POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSION UPDATE

Councillor Mathews confirmed there were no further updates at present as they had not met since the last Committee meeting.

127 NHS UPDATE

The Chairman addressed the Committee regarding the National Health Service Update. He provided the Committee with extracts (tabled) from the minutes of the Devon County Council Cabinet meeting of 14th March 2018. The documents covered the motions carried by the Cabinet, and the questions from Councillor Greenslade regarding Accountable Care Organisations (ACOs) along with the subsequent answers.

The Committee considered the papers and noted the following:

- Sarah Wollaston MP had intervened with the Health Secretary to ensure his proposals for ACOs be considered by the Health Select Committee. A full judicial review had now been granted to determine the lawfulness of the proposals.
- Councillor Leadbetter had confirmed there were no proposals for ACOs in Devon.

- Although ACOs appear to have been ‘scrapped’ it was possible that they could re-emerge under a new name.
- Torbay already had ACOs working in their area. The Committee considered that speaking to someone from Torbay Council could be beneficial.
- It was noted that Plymouth City Council had taken over the administration of Torbay Childrens’ Services.
- That with the population growth in the area that Health Services, and the North Devon District Hospital (NDDH), should be expanding in North Devon rather than reducing.

RESOLVED that a representative from Torbay Council be invited to attend a future Committee regarding ACOs.

128 WORK PROGRAMME/FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Work Programme / Forward Plan (circulated previously).

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the items Barnstaple Assets Review, Homelessness Reduction Bill and RMB Chivenor be removed from the work programme;
- (b) the item ‘Task Group – Pannier Market’ be removed from the work programme;
- (b) the work programme be noted.

Chairman

The meeting ended at 3.30 p.m.

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