

**NORTH DEVON COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of Policy Development Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Thursday, 9th January, 2020 at 1.30 pm

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor D. Spear (Chair)

Councillors Jenkins, Mack, Walker and York

Officers:

Chief Executive, Head of Resources, Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services, Head of Place, Business Information Systems Manager, Human Resources Manager, Customer and Corporate Communications Manager and Car Parks Manager.

**34. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Campbell, Hunt, Luggar and Roome.

**35. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9TH DECEMBER 2019 (ATTACHED).**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest announced.

**37. SERVICE PLANS AND PROGRESS WITH THE CORPORATE PRIORITIES.**

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee, he advised that the new Corporate Plan had been adopted by the Council in September 2019. As part of the plan, the Council had identified four Corporate Priorities, which he outlined to the Committee as follows:

- To achieve financial security.
- To become focussed on delivering the best for our customers.
- That our environment was cherished and protected.
- That we plan for North Devon's future.

He added that the Council's Delivery Plan sat under the Corporate Plan and was a key part of the governance arrangements, which then fed into the service plans and then the staff appraisal system completing the "golden thread".

He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to challenge the Heads of Service to ascertain whether they were meeting the Council's Corporate Priorities. He then outlined the layout of the service plans and explained the headings associated with each one.

The Chair addressed the Committee and it was agreed that Car Parks should be the first area for discussion.

(a) Car Parks

The Committee welcomed the Car Parks Manager to the meeting.

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2020/21 for Car Parks (circulated previously).

In response to questions from the Committee, the Car Parks Manager confirmed that:

- Under action 02 (new): Undertake wholesale review of parking charges and enforcement action: The service was reviewing how the systems currently operated, for example, there were plans to move to a more customer focussed approach to parking charges and enforcement. The idea being that it would allow users the amount of time paid for and remove overpayments. As part of the action, the Council would need to undertake a review of the technology as a whole. She added that the technology was available and was currently being operated by Newcastle City Council. North Devon Council were currently awaiting the delivery of a trial machine to enable testing in a car park. The new machine would allow for payment upon arrival with a simple tap of a debit card and when the customer returned to the car park, the card would need to be tapped again to enable charges for time spent in the car park.
- She added that the charges were negligible and that any increased income should offset additional charges. In terms of the minimum spend of £3.30 on a credit card and the potential overhead for using such a card, she explained that this would be taken into consideration as part of the review.
- To ensure that a charge to a card would not run on if a user forgot to tap the machine upon departure. She explained that measures would be put in place to set a maximum charge depending upon the individual car park.
- Clear signage would be displayed in all Council owned car parks explaining that the maximum charge for the car park would be applied if the customer forgot to tap their debit card upon departure.
- The Council would be exploring other providers of the online service that was currently provided by Ringo, which would also assist customers with mobility issues.

- As part of the process the Council would be required to undertake an Equality and Impact Needs Assessment to ascertain the time taken for a customer with mobility issues to access the pay and display machines. Councillor Walker advised that she would be happy to assist the Car Parks Manager with assessment.
- An update was provided by the Chief Executive and the Car Parks Manager in relation to the Chivenor Development car park. The Committee was advised that discussions were currently ongoing with the Legal Department.
- The Committee discussed the shortage of resident permit parking within Barnstaple Town Centre and the Car Parks Manager advised that a review could be undertaken to ascertain residential needs within the town centre.
- Following discussions in relation to encouraging footfall within Barnstaple Town Centre, the Car Parks Manager advised that there were several different mechanisms that could be utilised to encourage footfall, which could be explored.

The Head of Resources explained that as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy there was a review of car park charges planned for the forthcoming year. However, the action had been moved to 2021/22 to allow for the Car Parks Manager to explore the various options and technology that was available to the Council.

The Chief Executive explained that meetings had been held with both the Leader and Deputy Leader of Council to look at footfall as part of the review there was a requirement for consultation with the traders within the town, which would see a change in approach to meet the needs of the customer. He added that there was a requirement to be realistic as a District Council in the way in which it approached the structure of change to serve customers.

The Committee thanked the Car Parks Manager for her attendance at the meeting.

#### (b) Environmental Health and Housing Services

The Committee welcomed the Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services to the meeting.

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2020/21 for Environmental Health and Housing Services (circulated previously).

The Chair invited the Head of Environmental Health and Housing services to address the Committee and outline the main aspects of his service plan.

The Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services outlined the headlines of the service plan and answered questions from the Committee in relation to the following:

- Action 01 (New): New and additional ways of preventing homelessness: There were plans to implement a new Homelessness Prevention Policy with a new suite of options that were more accessible and cost effective for the Council to implement. There was an increasing corporate expectation to

recover more of the money allocated. There were plans to look at new ways of preventing homelessness, which included looking at a wider range of proposals to address the issue and a report had already been taken to Senior Management Team to look at ways to reduce expenditure.

- He added that the expenditure for the prevention of homelessness was currently £240K.
- Whilst North Devon Council was a small authority and the customer contact centre/ housing team currently dealt with around seven new presentations for homelessness per day.
- Wherever possible, the Council endeavoured to assist people to remain within their own home or provided suitable temporary accommodation.
- The Council had a portfolio of eight properties, which they had purchased over the last few years and there were plans to expand the portfolio further.
- Action 04 (New): The devolution of DCC's funding for the homelessness prevention of adults: Devon County Council currently spent £1.45m a year in procuring housing support. Devon Housing Authorities were exploring with Devon County Council the potential to devolve their commissioned services to enable Districts to commission directly in order to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness (most likely to three sub-regional commissioning localities). This was a great opportunity for North Devon Council to explore the options to provide better quality of service for the future. He added that the Devon County Council contract was discretionary.
- Action 05 (New): Powers to address anti-social behaviour associated with nuisance dogs: This was a potentially extremely contentious issue and there were wider issues associated with street drinking. There were plans to implement a new Public Spaces Protection Orders under the provisions of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. The new orders would allow the Council to control and regulate powers and to include area specific restrictions on dog fouling and controlling the presence of dogs. The main objective of this action was to ensure that those two areas of control were in place prior to October 2020 when the current Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) expired. Officers were currently working on the consultation papers, which would be presented to the Strategy and Resources Committee for feedback and approval in due course. As part of the new order, officers were exploring the option of empowering third parties to regulate i.e. staff working for private beach owners.
- 06 (New): Commercialisation of aspects of the Housing Service: A number of options to commercialise aspects of the housing service have been identified. These included: The establishment of a Wholly Owned Housing Company; becoming a provider of energy efficiency measures; setting up a Home Improvement Agency and benefiting from the Governments Feed in Tariff Scheme by supporting renewable energy systems.

(c) Planning/Place

The Committee welcomed the Head of Place to the meeting.

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2020/21 for Planning/Place (circulated previously).

The Head of Place addressed the Committee and outlined the main headlines of his service plan.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Planning/Place advised of the following:

- Action 01 (New): Future High Streets Fund Delivery – Barnstaple: Projects were being developed in line with the Town Centre Vision, the Council had been announced within the second round of the bidding process. He added that Torridge District Council had also been successful and that the project was progressing well. The outline business case was due to be submitted by March 2020. The Council would be notified in April/May 2020 if it was in receipt of capital funding of £6m. There were only 100 towns benefiting from the funding. So, the Council was very fortunate to have been successful in the bidding process.
- 02 (New): Develop a database to integrate natural capital into decision making as part of future sustainability appraisals: A new database was being developed in partnership with Natural England to enable the integration of natural capital into the decision making process. The database would incorporate all natural resources and would enable the integration of an understanding through an evidence base. The new database would help to inform planning decisions and support the governments pioneering 25 year Environment plan. There was also a duty to protect special areas of conservation and a levy would be taken from each new build property.
- 03 (New): Develop a Climate Change and Biodiversity Action Plan: The next meeting of the Climate Action Team scheduled for the 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020. The reduction in carbon footprint of North Devon Council and the district as a whole would increase biodiversity.

In response to a question regarding resistance from external groups in relation to the development of a database to integrate natural capital into decision making as part of future sustainability appraisals, the Chief Executive advised that all groups were now aligned under the “Can do” banner to work jointly on the development of a database.

The Head of Place then took the Committee through the actions that were being carried forward from the previous years and raised the following:

- ED1 2019/20: Northern Devon Futures objectives 1, 3, 4: The aim of this objective was to support the creation of a cross sectoral partnership for Northern Devon and there was a general consensus that participation should be open to whole of Northern Devon. Torridge District Council had been included in the first meeting, which was scheduled for February 2020 and would be chaired by Petroc as a neutral broker. The aim was to develop a long term vision and aspiration for the area up to 2050, there would also be an overlapping of concerns in relation to health and housing. However, the partnership would allow a better mechanism for working together for a common purpose.

In response to a question in relation to what steps the Council was taking to address climate change, the Head of Place advised that the planning team was currently creating a template to ascertain which areas the Members wanted to pursue. There were a number of options available, which included photovoltaic panels on the roof, local generation of energy in communities together with working with local communities to explore ways to reduce their carbon footprint. There were also several other options which were still to be explored and these would take a number of years to work through.

The Chief Executive advised work within this area was in the early stages and that there were many options to be explored in terms of the energy efficiency of the Council's public buildings for which there was an item in the Resources service plan. He added that technology had moved on in recent years and that there were now more options available to the Council. There were plans in place to replace the fleet of recycling vehicles within the next 12 months and with the development of new electric vans coming onto the market all available options would be explored. He added that there was a motion to Full Council on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020 to re-introduce the Electricity Bill known as the Local Energy Bill and gain support from MPs to take the Bill through Parliament.

The Committee supported the Council's approach to reducing its carbon footprint and welcomed the ideas that were discussed for future solutions.

#### (d) Economic Development

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2020/21 for Economic Development (circulated previously).

The Head of Place explained that there were a number of individual initiatives within the Service Plan, which were being refreshed. These covered the areas of sector support and tourism.

The Committee thanked the Head of Place for his attendance at the meeting.

#### (e) Operational Services

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2020/21 for Operational Services (circulated previously).

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and explained that there were a number of items within the service plan. He outlined the following actions to the Committee:

- OSW01 (New): Public Conveniences Review: There were plans to undertake a review of Public Convenience allocation in conjunction with Town and Parish Councils.
- OSW02 (New): Vanguard Systems Review: Undertake a full review of the service ensuring that all processes were as efficient as possible and customer focussed. This included assessing the high volume of missed collections

together with the development of a piece of work with crew members and staff from other services within the Council to identify any issues and develop solutions moving forward to address the adverse impact upon the budget. Recommendations from this ongoing exercise were expected within the next few weeks.

In response to a question regarding facilities and technology to monitor whether a bin was put out on time, he advised that there was currently no specific technology other than the in-cab technology, which was reliant on a mobile phone signal and would not always enable the driver to input information into the system. He added that any system that the Council utilised would always be reliant on a mobile phone signal. However, he acknowledged that alternative systems could be explored. The main objective of the exercise was to address the reasons within the Council's control and then explore any technological improvements going forward.

In response to a further question, he advised that in the event of missed collections messages were posted on the Council's website. He added that there was a requirement to ensure that the service was robust prior to addressing any wider issues. As part of the review of public conveniences the provision of a changing places facility would be included.

- OSW3 (New): Fleet replacement: Investigate current options available for electric and hybrid powered commercial vehicles – consider these types of vehicles first when replacing fleet vehicles. There was a requirement to review the management of the fleet and how the vehicles were procured.
- PRO 01 16/17: Procurement: To continue to provide support and guidance on the procurement process. This action would focus on how the Council purchased vehicles, tyres and fuel.
- W&R 02 16/17: Improve Recycling Rates: Increase recycling rates by collecting more recyclable materials on the kerbside collections and reducing the amount of landfill waste collected. Investigate options to increase the range of materials that can be collected. The roll out of the three weekly collections across the district was currently on hold after it became apparent that the current system was not robust enough to manage such a change. The service would start to prepare over the next 18 months to re-introduce the three weekly service.
- OS W&R 04 17/18: Improve Workforce Engagement: Workforce engagement and buy in was key to providing an excellent service and would increase morale, teamwork, reduce costs and provide excellent customer focussed service delivery.
- OS W&R 05 17/18: Review Trade Waste Service: Review service to ensure all customers charged accordingly and records kept up to date. The Council might be required to employ another IT system such as Bartec or another provider.
- OS W&R 06 19/20: Increase the LGV vehicle capacity from 48 to 60, this action was vital as it was important to have the maximum amount of vehicles that the Council was legally allowed on the road.

In response to a question, the Chief Executive confirmed that the three weekly collection would be rolled out in a two or three stage process across the district, subject to Member agreement. For households that generated a large amount of rubbish there was a facility to address each situation on a case by case process with a view to a shift in habit and encourage a greater amount of recycling.

He added that the Council used social media to educate and encourage recycling across the district. As part of the three weekly trial area the Council had recycling advisors out on the street talking to local residents and educating them in relation to what could be recycled and as a direct result of that work the recycling rates increased for that area. However, since the advisors had been withdrawn the recycling rates had reduced. He advised that officers were reviewing the budgets with a view to the reintroduction of the recycling advisors as part of the business case.

The Committee thanked the Chief Executive for his update.

(f) ICT Service

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2020/21 for the ICT Service (circulated previously).

The Business Information Systems Manager addressed the Committee and advised that the Council was about to go live with the new Skype for Business telephony system together with three new cloud contact centres. Prior to going live with Skype, all officers were given the opportunity to select an ICT device to suit their business needs. ICT moved emails to Office 365 (in the cloud) a year ago and would now start to explore other opportunities that Office 365 would present, such as Share Point and One Drive. Another key area was to revise how the Council backed-up its data together with its ability to recover in the event of e.g. a fire in the data centres or cyber-attack. The service was also exploring the use of artificial intelligence to answer frequently asked questions on the website.

She added that the Devon WAN Group for an improved connectivity solution to the Council's sites and partners would be ending in 2021 and that the Council would need to decide whether to continue with the arrangement.

In response to a question regarding the risk of customer resilience to self-service on the website and the use of pdf forms that could be populated, she advised that there were accessibility guidelines in place which would move the Council down the route of such forms on the website. She added that the Council's Webmaster was working with the Customer and Corporate Communications Manager to address the issue. The services would be involved in pieces of work with each department to look at income generation possibilities and the option of following a digital by design route.

The Customer and Corporate Communications Manager added that there were plans underway to develop a self-service portal. However, there were issues with existing legacy systems and their compatibility with new software. Upgrades would be made to current systems to ensure that they were more user friendly.

In response to a question in relation to the completion of licensing forms online, she advised that the first licence had been generated through Firmstep and that there were plans to set all licensing forms in the same way going forward.

(g) Human Resources

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2020/21 for Human Resources (circulated previously).

The Human Resources Manager addressed the Committee and outlined the following actions to the Committee:

- HR 01 (New): Implement and embed joint HR/Payroll system: The service was in the process of implementing a joint Human Resources and Payroll system, which would avoid duplication and provide a better experience for both staff and customers and would bring the Council in line with the latest technology.

The Head of Resources added that by moving to everything becoming electronic i.e. Member's claim forms, would ensure that there was no duplication of keying in information twice as there was at the current time.

The Human Resources Manager added that new system was due to go live in April 2020 and would be rolled out in phases.

- HR 02 (New): Organisational Development: This was an ongoing action, which would explore the review of management behaviours and organisational values. The service would be looking to introduce a suite of prevention and early intervention support mechanisms such as Counselling, Occupational Health, Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) together with ongoing appropriate training and signposting.

(h) Customer and Corporate Communications

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2020/21 for Customer and Corporate Communications (circulated previously).

The Customer and Corporate Communications Manager addressed the Committee and advised that there were several crossovers with the ICT service and Human Resources service plans.

She outlined the following actions to the Committee:

- 2020/21 01: Increase number of people using self-service: The aim of this action was to look at ways to increase the number of people using self-service via the portal.
- 2020/21 02: Improving public perception and trust: There would be closer working with other service areas to promote services. The aim of this

objective was to enhance the reputation of the Council together with plans to improve social media usage.

- 2020/21 03: Streamline feedback process: This objective was focussed on back office management and the service would be seeking a software solution to implement new processes.
- 2020/21 04: Implement all features of the new contact system: Focussing on the Customer Contact centre systems and different technology that could be utilised.
- C&C 01 18/19: Review the Design, Print and Post service: This service was currently under review.

(i) Resources

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2020/21 for Resources (circulated previously).

The Head of Resources outlined the following actions to the Committee:

- R 01 (New): Develop a Commercialisation Strategy that enables the Council to become more enterprising and financially sustainable: The aim of this objective was to look at ways to make the Council more commercial and to set parameters for a way forward. With the inevitable funding reductions over the next few years, there was a requirement to become more financially independent and generate an additional income stream for the Council.
- R 02 (New): Roll out of Civica Web Financials across all service areas: This objective would focus on the scanning of invoices, electronic billing together with the reduction of paper and postage.
- R 03 (New): Implement new Payroll (including Human Resources and the time/attendance system): The introduction of a new payroll and Human Resources system for the Council.
- R 04 (New): Introducing payroll benefits with Her Majesties Revenue and Customs (HMRC): Monthly real time information from the payroll system of taxable benefits. This reduced the requirement for P11d reporting and prior year tax codes adjustments.
- R 05 (New): Implement new Council Tax support scheme for 2020/21: This had been subject to consideration by the Policy Development Committee previously and the Strategy and Resources Committee and would be adopted at Full Council on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020.
- R 06 (New): Ilfracombe Harbour and Seafront improvements: The business case for this objective had been approved for new purpose built kiosks. The next stage of the process was to relocate the historic booths to the seafront area.
- R 07 (New): Investigate Renewable Energy solutions: The Property team were currently exploring ways to reduce energy consumption and make savings on current energy costs together with the potential generation of income and the reduction of the Council's carbon footprint.

The Committee thanked the Head of Resources for his update.

The Chief Executive invited the Committee to ask any additional questions for the Heads of Service. He advised that the service plans would be approved as part of the budget. However, he added that there was an opportunity to revisit them through the course of the year should the Committee wish to.

The Committee raised and discussed the following:

- In order to reduce the Council's carbon footprint some work was required to establish what it was currently.

In response to a question regarding the operation and management of the Crematorium, the Chief Executive advised that the Crematorium was a success story for the Council and had been in operation since the 1970s and was managed by the North Devon Crematorium Joint Committee. He added that the Manager and his team were currently exploring other services which could be provided by the Crematorium in the future.

The Head of Resources advised that the service had recently undergone an internal audit and whereas most services within the Council achieved a substantive rating, the Crematorium had achieved a full assurance rating with no recommendations, which was the highest assurance that could be achieved.

The Chairman thanked the Senior Management Team for their attendance at the meeting.

### **38. WORK PROGRAMME.**

The Committee considered the work programme/forward plan for 2019/20 (circulated previously).

The Head of Resources advised that the budget was set at Full Council in February of each year having first been considered by the Strategy and Resources and Policy Development Committees.

He added that all of the relevant budget related reports were due for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

In response to a question in relation to the reduction in funding to Town and Parish Councils, he explained each element of the funding streams and the reasons for the reduction. He added that the Council Tax base would be set on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020 following which a letter would be sent to all Town and Parish Councils to allow them to set their own precepts.

There was a request to invite the Associate Director of Commissioning Northern and Eastern/ Planned Care and Cancer NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group back to attend a future meeting following his attendance at the meeting in October 2019. There was also a request to invite a representative to a future meeting to discuss the Devon Doctors out of hours service and some issues that they were experiencing with the delivery of the service.

The Chief Executive advised that he would liaise with the Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services to seek the relevant contact information for the Devon Doctors service.

RESOLVED, that the work programme be noted.

**39. TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS FOR 2020/21.**

The Chairman addressed the Committee regarding the times of the scheduled meetings for 2020/21. He added that the times of the Committees up until the end of the current financial year had been changed to 10.00am following agreement with the members of the Committee.

He sought the views of the Committee as to whether they wished to change the times of the meeting to 10.00am into the next financial year.

RECOMMENDED, that the times of future meetings for the forthcoming financial year 2020/21 be changed to 10.00am.

Chairman

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm

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