

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Building Control Joint Committee held as a Virtual - Online meeting on Thursday, 12th November, 2020 at 9.00 am

PRESENT: Members Representing MDDC

Councillor Chesterton (Chair) and Deed

Members Representing NDC

Councillor(s) Yabsley

Officers:

Building Control Manager, Head of Resources (NDC), Head of Place (NDC), Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration (MDDC) and Solicitor and Data Protection Officer (NDC)

40. VIRTUAL MEETING PROCEDURE - BRIEFING AND ETIQUETTE

The Corporate and Community Services Officer outlined the virtual meeting procedure and etiquette as well as confirming those Members and Officers present.

41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Topham (NDC) and Angela Barrett (MDDC).

42. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6TH AUGUST 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6th August 2020 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

43. ITEMS BROUGHT FORWARD WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY.

The Chair asked the Committee Members if they would consider the Building Control Service Planning report by the Building Control Manager (circulated previously).

RESOLVED that the committee consider the Building Control Service Planning report and vote on the recommendations set out in it and that it be considered after item 12 "Findings of the Devon Audit Partnership report" on the agenda.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

45. 2020/21 BUILDING CONTROL PARTNERSHIP TRADING ACCOUNT Q2

The Head of Resources presented the 2020/21 Building Control Partnership Trading Account Q2 (circulated previously) to the Joint Committee.

The Joint Committee heard the following highlights from the report:

- This report was the pooled account for both North Devon Council (NDC) and Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) covering April to September 2020
- Column one showed the sixth month budget approved for both authorities
- Column two showed the actual position for both authorities
- Each authority's apportioned expenses were split 60%/40% to NDC and MDDC respectively
- Column three detailed the 60%/40% allocations to each authority with NDC showing a £43,000 net deficit and MDDC a £28,000 net deficit after taking into account the income received and also the job retention scheme
- The combined total income was around £260,000 around £80,000 down on the same period last year. There was a 20% drop in budgeted income across both authorities
- The recently announced Government reimbursement income scheme was not reflected in this report. Councils would be reimbursed 75% of their net income losses and the details of the effect of this would be presented to Committee on the Q3 trading account
- The trading position of both authorities should hopefully improve by the end of the year following the above adjustment
- Both authorities were showing a slight surplus on chargeable activities, £7,000 to NDC and £6,000 to MDDC

RESOLVED that the 2020/21 Building Control Partnership Trading Account Q2 report be noted.

46. BUILDING CONTROL PARTNERSHIP FORECAST TRADING ACCOUNT 2020/21

The Head of Resources gave the Joint Committee a summary of the Building Control Partnership Forecast Trading Account 2020/21 report (circulated previously).

The Joint Committee heard the following:

- Column two showed a total forecast expenditure across the partnership of £715,000
- This was £25,000 higher than last year's figure of £690,000 and was due in part, to the increase in pay awards. It was in line with what had been budgeted for
- The £508,000 forecast income across the partnership was £130,000 less than last year and equated to a 20% drop
- Each authority had set aside a level of earmarked reserves to mitigate against any impact
- In relation to the Government's recently announced income loss reimbursement scheme, after the initial 5% absorption of budgeted income each authority would be reimbursed 75% of its net income losses. As a result Q3 and Q4 would show slightly better forecast positions due to the reimbursement credits received back and would be reflected in the next report

In response to a question on whether the partnership would receive no reimbursement if their chargeable income element showed as a surplus. The Head of Resources replied that nothing relating to this had been provided in the guidance from Government. The split of 75% and 25% chargeable and non-chargeable costs respectively was not shown on returns to the Government.

RESOLVED that the Building Control Partnership Forecast Trading Account 2020/21 be noted.

47. BUILDING CONTROL BUSINESS UPDATE

The Building Control Manager gave the Joint Committee a summary in relation to the Building Control Business Update Report (circulated previously).

The Joint Committee received the following:

- The trainee Building Control Officer had progressed to his next year's degree and was on track to obtain a 2:1
- Morale remained quite high within the team
- Three staff remained working in the office, two of whom were taking phone calls and distributing work
- The workload remained sufficient that no staff were being furloughed during the second lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The situation was being monitored
- Devonshire homes had decided not to leave the Partnership. North and Mid Devon Building Control along with Devonshire Homes had won the partnership of the year award at the recent LABC awards
- Internal working with MDDC Development team had reached protocols with the Planning team for handling DM1 within the Local Plan where 25% of a site with more than 10 dwellings had to provide higher levels of disabled access

- The Building Safety Bill, detailing the timetable of the transition of powers to the new Building Inspectorate was expected to be published at the end of October/beginning of November 2020 had been delayed. Full transition was expected by Government by 2023 but further information available
- Officers currently at levels four and five couldn't be progressed due to lack of information at present
- The level six validations only remained valid for four years. It was unlikely any surveyors would retain level six after this was a portfolio now needed to be provided, and due to the lack of high rise buildings in the area this would cause difficulties
- Being a predominantly rural area it would be difficult to compete for business outside of our geographical area without the credibility of experience of high rise buildings

48. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Building Control Manager gave the Joint Committee an update in relation to the Key Performance Indicators Report (circulated previously).

The Joint Committee received the following:

- There was an improvement of 38% in Q2 on the market for new dwellings. This was due to the phasing of the work
- The market share had increased to 82% in Q2
- Response to applications within three week target was at 100%
- October had been the busiest month seen for the Partnership over the last five years. Although this was slowing now due to the second lockdown

Councillor Yabsley gave thanks to the team for maintaining their services during a difficult period.

RESOLVED that the Key Performance Indicators report be noted.

49. FINDINGS OF DEVON AUDIT PARTNERSHIP REPORT

The Building Control Manger updated the Joint Committee in relation to the Findings of the Devon Audit Partnership report (circulated previously).

The Joint Committee received the following:

- An audit that was commissioned by MDDC to confirm whether the necessary steps had been taken to meet the new standards as a result of the Hackett enquiry, an assessment of the Building Control quality management system was also given an overview by the audit
- The key findings were that the department were doing what they should be

RESOLVED that the Findings of Devon Audit Partnership report be noted.

50. BUILDING CONTROL SERVICE PLANNING

The Building Control Manager gave the Joint Committee a summary in relation to the Service Planning report (circulate previously).

The Joint Committee received the following:

- This report was seeking the Joint Committees input into the 2021/22 Service plan. Discussions had been undertaken with Officers from both authorities
- Customer service was the focus of the plan and the Team's promptness to respond to customers and meeting the needs of the Building regulator
- Suggested short term objectives revolved around ensuring customer focus, with high quality record keeping thus ensuring the transparency of decision making process
- It was proposed that the medium and long term objectives remained unchanged
- Cost increases were proposed at 2% which were considered realistic considering the difficult conditions ongoing

RESOLVED that the Building Control Service Plan 2021/22 be adopted.

RECOMMENDED that the Building Control fees increase by an average of 2% for the financial year 2021/22.

51. DATES AND LOCATIONS OF FUTURE MEETINGS. TO AGREE DATES AND LOCATIONS OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR 2021/22

The Joint Committee discussed the location, time and when future meetings would be held.

RESOLVED that future meetings be held at 9.30 am on the second Thursday of May, July, November and February at the Woodlands centre, South Molton, and that the Clerk draft dates and forward an email to the Joint Committee for consideration.

Chair

The meeting ended at 9.47 am