

**NORTH DEVON COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of Policy Development Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Thursday, 27th May, 2021 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor D. Spear (Chair)

Councillors Campbell, Bulled, Hunt, Luggar, Mackie, Roome, Walker and York.

Officers:

Chief Executive, Service Lead for Environmental Protection and Service Manager for Reuse and Recycling.

Also Present:

Councillors Biederman and Mack.

**1. APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for absence received.

**2. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18TH MARCH 2021 (ATTACHED).**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendment on page 11:

“That the reference to public payment for public goods was the wrong way around and should state:

“public goods for public payment”.

Councillor Bulled abstained from the vote as she was not present at the meeting.

**3. ORDER OF AGENDA**

The Chair advised that following a request from Councillor Biederman, item 7 would be considered prior to item 6 on the agenda.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

There were no declarations of interest received.

**5. NOTICE OF MOTION FROM COUNCIL ON 24TH FEBRUARY 2021.**

The Committee considered a Notice of Motion from Councillor Biederman to Full Council on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021 in relation to the development of a Dog Strategy (circulated previously) together with minute extract of Full Council held on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021 (circulated previously).

The Committee received a presentation from the Service Lead for Environmental Protection regarding the work that the Council currently undertook in relation to the roles and responsibilities for the management of dogs within the North Devon area.

He drew the Committee's attention to the following:

- The majority of dog related work was managed within the remit of the Environmental Protection team.
- A brief summary of the work of team within the service was provided to the Committee to give an overview of where the work sat within the wider context.
- The Environmental Protection team consisted of the following:
  - 2.5 Environmental Health / Protection Officers , which were responsible for the areas of nuisance, noise, bonfires, odours, drainage, air quality, industrial pollution control, contaminated land, anti-social behaviour, planning / licensing consultations.
  - 3 Neighbourhood Officers, two of which were apprentice Environmental Health Officers and were responsible for the areas of littering, fly tipping, dog control / fouling and stray dogs.
  - 1 Private Water Sampling Officer.
  - 1½ Case Officers, who were responsible for administrative Support, Environmental permitting, public health and funerals.
- This was a high volume area of the Councils business and managed over 2500 requests for service each year.

The Council had a duty under s149 (1) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to appoint an Officer for "the purpose of discharging the functions for dealing with stray dogs found in the area of the authority". This function was incorporated into the role of the 3 Neighbourhood Officers.

There was a stray dog contract in place with two kennelling providers to support this service, which included out of hours collections. When reports of strays were received, these reports were always prioritised with engagement with the local community in whatever means possible, which included social media to enable the owner to be quickly identified and ensure the safe return of the dog.

A consultation exercise was held in 2020 to help establish the level of community need in relation to anti-social behaviour associated with irresponsible dog ownership, which generated 3,000+ responses. In early 2021, a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) was adopted to implement a series of measures, which supported the views of the consultation. These measures included restrictions on some local beaches.

The dog waste service, which was previously operated by Environmental Health was now being managed by Operational Services. However, it was recognised that the service could be delivered differently, which could provide improvements to efficiency and customer services.

The Environmental Protection team utilised a number of tools to engage with the community in relation to promoting responsible dog ownership – including using social media, education initiatives, vehicle branding, maintaining close working relationships with partners and progressing work in relation to the delegation of enforcement powers.

He explained that a strategy document was normally required to set out where the Council was – in relation to a particular subject area, where it wanted to be – to then help establish how the Council was going to get there.

Officers currently undertake a broad range of work in relation to dogs. He added that a strategy was not required to enable the work of the officers to continue or to enable development of any future initiatives - and that any future review of dog bins could be included as part of the Litter Strategy. However, a dog strategy might help identify other areas that members would wish to see addressed.

Councillor Biederman thanked the Service Manager for Refuse and Recycling and his team for the incredible amount of work that was achieved in comparison to the number of staff employed. He added that there were an increasing number of dogs living within the North Devon community and that the number would only increase with the amount of housing being built. He explained that the Council was really fortunate to have a team of enthusiastic, forward thinking officers delivering the service with both a reactive and pro-active approach to the promotion of responsible dog ownership 90% of dog owners were responsible but felt that something needed to change within the community via the route of the Town and Parish Councils and that his notice of motion was in no way a criticism of the staff. The antisocial nature of not picking dog faeces was unacceptable when there were so many dog bins located around the area.

He added that on the spot fines and greater utilisation of the court process to prosecute offenders might deter other people from not picking up after their dogs. Fremington Parish Council spent over £7K a year emptying dog bins within the parish and a dog strategy would help to enforce the importance of picking up after your dog.

The Service Lead for Environmental Protection thanked Councillor Biederman for his support of the service that was currently provided by the team and advised that there were three members of staff working within the current team and that when the PSPO was considered at Full Council in November 2020 the order referred to

delegating enforcement powers to other parties – the development of which was currently underway. He added that there was a requirement for a level of quality assurance to ensure that delegated parties were sufficiently trained.

The Committee welcomed the idea of dog exercising fields, which allowed owners to exercise their dogs in a safe enclosed area without the fear of sheep disturbance.

The Committee also discussed the utilisation of dog waste composting bins and in response to a question regarding how dog waste was currently disposed of, the Service Manager for Refuse and Recycling advised that all dog waste was currently sent for incineration. However, the Council would be open to exploring the option of composting in the future if an opportunity presented itself.

The Service Lead for Environmental Protection advised that in regards to the concerns raised in relation to interaction of dogs and sheep that the Council worked closely with the police to support their activities. He added that whilst there was no formal role there was a close partnership working arrangement in place. He explained that if a dog was off its lead and out of control on land that had clear signage to ensure enforcement, the owner can be given a fixed penalty notice of £100.00.

Councillor Biederman that everyone for their time and advised that he was satisfied that existing dog related work was already incorporated into the current litter strategy.

Councillor Roome advised that Barnstaple Town Council had recently increased their number of operatives within Rock Park and that it would be advantageous to the Council if those operatives were trained in the disposal of dog waste.

In response to a question regarding the disposal of dog waste in a normal litter bin. The Service Manager for Refuse and Recycling advised that disposal of dog waste into a normal bin was permitted and that the Council were currently producing stickers for bins within the North Devon area to make the public aware. He added that the service was also exploring options in relation to alternative bin lids to improve the customer experience of accessing the bins together with the potential for training the sweeping operatives to empty the bins as part of their existing role, as they were regularly working within the community.

In response to a question regarding the management companies of new housing estates reportedly not emptying litter bins if they contain dog waste, the Service Manager for Refuse and Recycling advised that he would investigate the claim.

In response to a further question, the Chief Executive advised that it was acceptable to include the dog strategy as part of the Litter Strategy, which would enable the Council to review the current locations of the dog bins that they managed together with a formalisation of how many dog bins that it should provide across the North Devon area, as the current level was unsustainable.

RESOLVED, that there was no requirement for a separate strategy for dogs as it was not needed for existing work to continue.

RECOMMENDED, that the Strategy and Resources Committee:

- a) Undertake a review of the locations of the existing dog waste bins together with a formalisation within the strategy of the number of bins the Council should provide;
- b) Include any review of the dog waste service as part of the existing Litter Strategy; and
- c) Address the requirement to educate the public in the correct disposal of dog waste.

Councillor Biederman thanked the operatives for all of their hard work.

Councillor Spear thanked the Service Lead for Environmental Protection, the Service Manager for Refuse and Recycling and their respective teams for the continued hard work in delivering the service.

Councillor Roome declared a personal interest as a member of Barnstaple Town Council.

## **6. NOTICE OF MOTION FROM COUNCIL ON 7TH APRIL 2021.**

The Committee considered a Notice of Motion from Councillor Mack to Full Council on 7th April 2021 in relation to voting procedures (circulated previously) together with Minute extract of Full Council held on 7th April 2021 (circulated previously).

Councillor Mack addressed the Committee and stated that with local government reorganisation was on the horizon there might be an opportunity explore options in relation to the voting system. He added that the single transferrable vote appeared to be the preferred system, in Wales each local authority can choose which process they would like to use. The Committee discussed the various different systems that could be utilised.

The Committee discussed the various different proportionate systems and Councillor Mack added that the proportional system was used across Europe and enabled more collaborative working across the various parties, increasing the interest in voting and allowing residents to feel involved in the process.

The Chief Executive provided clarity in relation to the various election system processes adding that delays were inevitable under any system. He explained that there were a number of different systems currently in place together with various different systems across wales, adding that there was advantages and disadvantages to both.

The Committee discussed the voting system in Australia whereby all residents had to vote by law and questioned whether England should explore the option of mandatory voting.

RECOMMENDED:

- a) That the Council write to the government to bring forward legislation to allow local authorities in England to choose to their own voting system; and
- b) That paragraph three of the original Notice of Motion to Full Council be reworded once the legislation to allow local authorities to change their voting system to the proportional Single Transferable Vote system had been established in Wales.

7. **ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING**

RESOLVED, that the meeting be adjourned to allow for a five minute comfort break.

RESOLVED, that the meeting be reconvened to allow for the remaining business to be transacted.

8. **LANDSCAPES REVIEW: FINAL REPORT - SUMMARY OF FINDINGS. CHIEF EXECUTIVE TO REPORT. LINK TO SUMMARY DOCUMENT (ATTACHED).**

The Chief Executive advised that the reason the item had been brought to the Committee was to make Members aware of the report following much publicity by Dartmoor National Park Authority. He added that the report was published in September 2019.

He outlined the proposal that all National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) be managed under one national service or body. He explained that the Council should wait for the publication of the government proposals prior to taking any action and that the proposals were due for publication towards the end of June 2021.

He advised that an officer from Exmoor National Park Authority was happy to attend a future meeting of the Committee once the government's proposals had been announced and the purpose of presenting to the Committee was to draw Member's attention to its existence.

Following a suggestion from the Chair, the Committee agreed to invite the AONB to the same meeting.

9. **POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - 18TH MARCH 2021: OUTCOMES FROM THE MEETING**

The Chair advised that the Clerk to the Committee had made contact with the representative from the National Farmers Union (NFU) to request clarification regarding the recommendations that they wished the Council to proceed with. On

26<sup>th</sup> May 2021, the NFU replied and the Chairman read the representative's response to the Committee. The Clerk also forwarded the email onto the Members of the Committee present.

In response to a number of questions, the Chief Executive advised that a whole range of issues were discussed at the meeting and that the Clerk had approached the representative of the NFU to ascertain which specific areas they wished the Council to canvass the government on.

The areas highlighted were as follows:

North Devon Council:

- Help co-ordinate broadband for those rural areas that were still struggling.
- Promote the British/buy local message at any opportunity. E.g. if the NFU funded them would planners allow messages along those lines in fields adjoining major routes.
- Work with farm businesses on farm modernisation plans that would increase productivity and reduce impact on environment.
- Spread the message of Countryside Code.

Government:

- Champion Great British food at home and abroad and ensure standards were protected by not agreeing to FTAs without adequate protection.
- Rural proof all primary legislation- empowering and engaging rural voice was vital if levelling up to be achieved.
- Promote the role farming had to play in STEM education: [www.farmvention.com](http://www.farmvention.com)
- Amplify green growth by ensuing country wide connectivity for all – 40% of farmers surveyed believe there broadband to be insufficient.
- Work with farmers to enable them to become global leaders in climate friendly farming.

The Committee discussed the various requests and how best to approach each one.

**RESOLVED:**

- a) That the Chief Executive respond to the representative of the NFU to set out what support the Council could provide as an authority;
- b) That as part of the Council's response to the NFU, any Devon County Council

(DCC) specific areas that should be raised by the NFU to DCC directly be identified; and

- c) That the Chief Executive send a separate letter to the government to highlight the issues identified.

Chair

The meeting ended at 12.08 pm

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