

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Strategy and Resources Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Monday, 9th May, 2022 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Worden (Chair)

Councillors Knight, Lofthouse, Patrinos, Pearson, L. Spear, Wilkinson and Yabsley

Officers:

Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, Service Lead Housing Advice and Homelessness, Head of Customer Focus, Head of Place, Property and Regeneration, Public Protection Manager and Graduate Environmental Health Officer

Also Present in person:

Councillors Roome and D. Spear

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lane and Prowse.

2. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 APRIL 2022 (ATTACHED).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 April 2022 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

(a) Informal Briefing

The Chair requested that Members of the Committee remain behind following the conclusion of the Committee meeting for an informal briefing.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS.

There were no declarations of interest received.

5. SUPPORT OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

The Committee received a presentation by the Service Lead – Housing Advice and Homelessness regarding the support of Ukrainian refugees. She outlined the following:

- The background of the Homes for Ukraine scheme which was launched on 14 March 2022 by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up and Communities.
- Guest arrival checks that were undertaken.
- The role of the sponsor in providing suitable accommodation for a period of a minimum of 6 months.
- Devon County Council's role in the completion of Enhanced DBS checks on all adults over the age of 18 living within the sponsors home.
- The District Council's responsibility for accommodation checks, safeguarding checks, welfare support and financial payments.
- An update was provided on the work that had been undertaken by the Council to date which included: carrying out property inspections; creation of an IT system to store and administer data; creation of a specific email address for both hosts and guests; creation of and updating the NDC website with links to other services; met on a weekly basis with other local external services such as the Department for Works and Pensions, Early Help and Pickwell Foundation; working with Pickwell Foundation to deliver the wrap around support for both host and guests; created a suite of letters and agreements for hosts, guests and voluntary sector; set up safe payment methods; attended Devon wide meeting in relation private sector housing, financial, support and re-hosting. A representative from the Adult Social Care had also been invited to attend the weekly meetings.
- The support that NDC had provided to-date.
- Numbers of sponsors, completed inspections, total numbers of children and adults being supported as of 5 May 2022.
- Impact on NDC services and teams.
- The reasons and stories in relation to why NDC were providing support.

In response to questions, the Service Lead – Housing Advice and Homelessness advised the following:

- There had been incidents whereby families were experiencing problems with obtaining visas. These issues had been reported to the MP and it was understood that there had now been an increase in staff involved in processing visa applications.
- There had been incidents in other areas where placements had been made with inappropriate sponsors. As a result the Council had started carrying out enhanced DBS checks. These checks would not be 100% full proof. Checks were also made with Social Services as part of the DBS checks. If there were concerns, further checks could be made with the Police. Pickwell Foundation made home visits and would have an understanding if there was a potential issue within the home. A re-matching service was already in place and had worked well. Officers were also in the process of setting up a database of "foster" hosts that could be used to accommodate families for up to 6 weeks whilst alternative accommodation was secured.

- If a family member secured accommodation, the host would still receive the £350 payment to cover costs. This would also be the case also for self-contained accommodation to cover costs.
- Officers were conscious of the potential impact on communities in relation to housing and employment and would seek to mitigate any issues arising.
- Officers were also asking sponsors if the accommodation could be used for temporary accommodation if it was not suitable to support families.

The Committee on behalf of the Council and Ukrainian refugees thanked Pickwell Foundation for their support and thanked the Service Lead – Housing Advice and Homelessness and her team for their hard work.

6. PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE COUNCIL'S AMENITY STANDARDS, MINIMUM ROOM SIZING AND MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

The Committee considered a report by the Public Protection Manager and Graduate Environmental Health Officer/Residential Licensing Officer (circulated previously) regarding proposed amendment to the Council's Amenity Standards, Minimum Room Sizing and Management Standards.

The Public Protection Manager outlined the following:

- The current Amenity Standards did not include the position surrounding the sharing of bedrooms in licensed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The Legislation was silent in terms of room sharing, albeit that a Room Standard and a Space Standard were provided for in the Housing Act 1985. The Room Standard and Space Standard were criteria used to ascertain whether a property was statutory over-crowded. As such, an amendment to the locally adopted standards under the section 'Mandatory requirements in HMOs – Space standards' was proposed.
- The first area was in terms of the prescribed standards under the section 'Personal washing facilities and WCs', which required an amendment in line with The Licensing and Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (Additional Provisions) (England) Regulations 2007 ('The 2007 Regulations').
- The second area was in terms of the 'Facilities for the storage, preparation and cooking of food (shared facilities).' A query arose with regard to the numbers of sinks and dishwashers, whereby it was not practical to install the set number of sinks and instead there was a desire to utilise a dishwasher as an alternative. It was proposed to amend the Amenity Standards to provide a proportionate response to the query raised.
- The third area was in terms of the 'Facilities for the storage, preparation and cooking of food (individual use facilities)', which required an amendment in line with The 2007 Regulations.
- Various other small amendments have also been made to the Amenity Standards document, as per the tracked changes in Appendix A of the report.

The Graduate Environmental Health Officer/Residential Licensing Officer outlined the following:

- The proposed amendments made in relation to personal washing facilities and WCs; Facilities for the storage, preparation and cooking of food (shared facilities); Facilities for the storage, preparation and cooking of food (individual use facilities); and Mandatory requirements in HMOs – Space standards.

In response to questions, the Graduate Environmental Health Officer/Residential Licensing Officer advised the following:

- Facilities to be provided in each HMO was dealt with on a case by case basis.
- The definition of a complete bathroom within the standards included a fixed shower/bath and WC. The provision of a WC could also be classed as another complete bathroom. The wording could be made more explicit in the policy.

In response to questions, the Public Protection Manager advised the following:

- There were some instances where there was no space for the storage of refuse receptacles outside of a property. The appropriateness of the storage of refuse could be considered by the Council's Environmental Wardens.

RESOLVED that a public consultation on the proposed draft revised Amenity Standards, Minimum Room Sizing and Management Standards Document (Amenity Standards) found within Appendix A be approved, and that consultation responses be reported to a future committee prior to making any approval.

7. HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE TARIFF REVIEW

The Committee considered a report by the Public Protection Manager (circulated previously) regarding the Hackney Carriage Fare Tariff Review.

The Public Protection Manager highlighted the following:

- The Licensing and Community Safety Committee at its meeting on 12 April 2022 had considered the proposed Hackney Carriage Fare Tariff Review.
- Paragraph 5.5 in the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy described the fare tariff criteria to be utilised when considering any revision.
- There was currently only 1 non-motorised vehicle, which was a horse drawn carriage operating in Ilfracombe.
- That there was a typographical error in paragraph 2.1.1., bullet point 4 and that it should read "**an amendment** to the commencement of tariff 2 and 5 (night rate) **from 11.30 pm to 9.00 pm**"
- The proposed modified table of maximum fares as detailed in Appendix A of the report.
- The Private Hire and Taxi Monthly (PHTM) Magazine published and updated the cost of a two mile hackney carriage fare on Tariff 1 (day rate) nationally every month and produced a league table of all 355 Councils. In March the position of North Devon Council was 89th . North Devon Council's position was also benchmarked against its neighbouring authorities as detailed in Appendix D of the report.

In response to questions, the Public Protection Manager advised the following:

- The fuel tariff also encompassed electric vehicles, unless the Committee wished for electric vehicles to be exempt.
- It was proposed that there be an extra charge of 10p added to the fare price when the South West average price of fuel oil exceeded £1.75 per litre based on the latest available AA Fuel Price Report with a further 10p added for each subsequent increase of 10p per litre. When this average decreased below £1.75, the 10p would not be chargeable.
- The AA fuel price data would be included on the Council's website.

RESOLVED that the recommendation made by Licensing and Community Safety Committee during their meeting of the 12 April 2022 be approved, namely that the current table of maximum fares be modified (following a satisfactory period of public consultation) in line with Appendix A, which encompasses the following amendments:

- (a) a 12.3% increase across the table with the exception of waiting time (in line with the CPI increase since the tariff became effective in April 2016);
- (b) an increased valet charge to £100.00;
- (c) an increased fare for non-motorised vehicles from £1.50 to £2.00 a minute;
- (d) an amendment to the commencement of tariff 2 and 5 (night rate) from 11.30 pm to 9.00 pm;
- (e) an extra charge of 10p added to the fare price when the South West average price of fuel oil exceeds £1.75 per litre based on the latest available AA Fuel Price Report with a further 10p added for each subsequent increase of 10p per litre.

8. LEVELLING UP FUND AND SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive (circulated previously) regarding the Levelling Up Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund.

The Chief Executive highlighted the following:

- An update had recently been provided at the Council meeting in April 2022. Full Council had approved the submission of a bid for Round 2 funding based on the original bid concentrating on Ilfracombe seafront and the Landmark Theatre.
- Officers were currently working with Members, Ilfracombe Town Council and the Regeneration Board on the bid. The deadline for the submission of the bid was by 6 July 2022.
- Since the Council meeting, further guidance and information had been received in relation to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- The allocation of the funding would be over 3 years with funding culminating in a national allocation of £1.5 billion in year 3 which would be focussed on People and Skills.
- The calculation of funding was based on indices applied by Government and the population.

- Many local authorities were aggrieved at the level of funding awarded given the level of deprivation.
- Funding would be allocated to District Councils but access to funding would only be given once an Investment Plan had been submitted to Government. This would be paid to the Council over a 3 year period: for North Devon this resulted in year 1 £180,000, year 2 £350,000 and year 3 £600,000.
- The first 2 years would be focussed on the investment priorities “Communities and Place” and “Local Businesses”. Year 3 would focus on “People and Skills”.
- The guidance also stated that Councils must identify a broad range of local stakeholders and appropriate groups in order to secure cross sector involvement. Where there was an existing collaborative partnership group, it could be designated for the purposes of the Fund. The Northern Devon Futures Board would act in this role. MPs should also be a part of the discussions and would need to sign off on the Investment Plan. There were some gaps in stakeholders such as Parish/Town Councils and religious groups which would need to be considered.
- The content of the Investment Plan was currently unclear, but it was envisaged that it would include a list of high level intervention projects to be developed in the area and that projects would then be invited to meet these interventions. The Government had issued a list of suggested interventions.
- Discussions on the investment plan were currently taking place at an officer level which would then be discussed with Torrington District Council and the Futures Board. There were opportunities to combine resources and projects with Torrington District Council for interventions that covered both areas. Members would also be included in discussions.

In response to questions, the Chief Executive advised the following:

- That Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government had acknowledged that if inflation rates continue to rise that this would reduce the effective value of the funding awarded as it was not index linked to inflation.
- That the funding that Devon would receive from the SPF over the next 3 years will be around 30% of the amount received through the EU Structural Funding.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9. HIGH STREET TASK FORCE SUPPORT

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration (circulated previously) regarding the High Street Task Force Support.

The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration highlighted the following:

- In February 2022, the High Street Task Force announced that 68 Local authorities would receive a package of expert advice and support, helping to deliver long term transformation to towns and cities in England.
- North Devon was announced as one of those Local Authorities.

- North Devon Council had to confirm acceptance of the support in March this year.
- In a webinar held on the 22 April, it had been advised that the Council needed to nominate a location for this support. The High Street Task Force require the Council to nominate its location by 27 May 2022.
- The offer was one of support rather than direct funding to boost local authority capacity, build sustainable place-making skills, provide an opportunity for information and data sharing and to co-ordinate a national approach.
- The support suggested a focus on a particular area as detailed in paragraph 4.3 of the report.
- What was included as part of the support as detailed in paragraph 4.4 of the report. The support was until June 2024.
- When considering which place to support, the Task Force suggested that the Council consider the Story so far (in an area), a focused area, need, capacity and the ongoing story. Building on existing work i.e. Future High Street Fund applicants etc.
- The development of officers' skills as part of this process would enable these skills to be transferred to other places.

The Chief Executive advised that this support did not include financial support, however it would make sense to focus the support around the Future High Street Fund project in Barnstaple. Comments had been made previously by Members regarding Ilfracombe and levelling up, however funding and resources were currently being utilised for the Watersports Centre project.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the outputs and learning gained from the High Street Task Force Support could be applied across other towns and this would provide a wider benefit to the whole of North Devon.

In response to questions, the Chief Executive advised the following:

- If the Committee were minded to focus the support on Barnstaple High Street, it would complement the work of the Future High Street Fund project.
- The support would also include how to engage with the community and stakeholders and would provide project management advice.

In response to questions, the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration advised the following:

- The Task Force had confirmed that work should not be paused in advance of support but that the experts would wrap around plans.
- Devon County Council was also working with the Council in relation to town renewal looking at governance structures in place, build town strategy and delivery plans.

RESOLVED that Barnstaple High Street be confirmed as the nomination for the High Street Task Force support.

10. URGENT DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Committee noted the urgent decisions that had been made by the Chief Executive in accordance with paragraph 3.48, Annex 2, part 3 of the Constitution (circulated previously) regarding the Watering Hole Public House, Castle Street, Barnstaple.

Chair

The meeting ended at 3.10 pm

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