

**NORTH DEVON COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of Strategy and Resources Committee held in the Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Monday, 8th January, 2024 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Roome (Chair)

Councillors Bell, Clayton, D Knight, Lane, C Leaver, Maskell, Prowse and Wilkinson

Officers:

Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Customer Focus and Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, Parking Manager, Property Manager, and Sustainability and Climate Officer

Also Present in person:

Councillors Haworth-Booth, Patrinos and Walker

Also Present virtually:

Councillors R Knight and Spear

**71. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Biederman and Crabb.

Councillor R Knight was in attendance virtually.

**72. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 DECEMBER 2023**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2023 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

There were no items brought forward, which in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered as a matter of urgency.

**74. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS.**

Councillor Lane declared a non-registerable interest in item 8, Council Tax Discounts and Premiums, as he was a second home owner.

Councillor Prowse declared a non-registerable interest in item 8, Council Tax Discounts and Premiums, as he owned an empty dwelling.

The Councillors would leave the room for the discussion of this item.

**75. BARNSTAPLE BUS STATION WAITING ROOM AND TOILET**

The Committee heard an update on the Barnstaple Bus Station and Toilets from the Leader.

The Leader highlighted the following:

- Works were ongoing at the building to bring it back into use.
- The toilets at the Barnstaple Bus station were originally closed as a result of almost continual vandalism and anti-social behaviour.
- The design and location of the toilets meant they were not visible to other users and probably encouraged that type of use.
- The District Council and Town Council had for some time discussed the future use of the building and available funding for the project meant these plans were some time off.
- Other options had been looked at to provide a use for part of the building in the nearer future.
- Current plans were to open part of the building for use as a café with a reconfiguration of toilets open to the public.
- A report would be presented to members at the February or March 2024 meeting.
- It was planned to hopefully have the café open as soon as possible and the aim was for Easter 2024.

The Leader invited the Property Manager to outline some of the options that were being looked at.

The Property Manager outlined the following:

- Previously a café had operated at the Bus Station and the toilets were only open during the commercial hours of the business operation, 8 am to 6 pm.
- The café really struggled with the anti-social behaviours that were taking place in the toilets. It did not make sense to refurbish those facilities which would undoubtedly be subjected to that type of behaviour again.
- A commercial marketer has suggested a toilet be installed in the waiting room with controlled access.
- This facility would have a baby changing area and could be used by people waiting for buses.
- The Marketer was confident they could get a contractor into the Bus station to operate as a café again.

The Leader added that this current option would not detract from plans already commenced by Barnstaple Town Council.

Councillor Maskell welcomed the news as a lot of complaints from residents had been passed to her in relation to the lack of toilet facilities at the station. Passengers waiting for buses could wait for up to an hour for a bus without access to toilet facilities. This lack of facility certainly discouraged people from travelling to the town.

The Committee noted the update given.

**76. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME**

The Committee considered a report by the Revenues and Benefits Manager (circulated previously) regarding the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The Head of Customer Focus highlighted the following:

- No changes were being proposed to the scheme for the year 2024-25.
- Members had agreed to implement a Council Tax Discount of up to 100% from 1 October 2023 for Care Leavers. This discount was to be administered via the Council Tax Reduction Exceptional Hardship Policy.
- A copy of the updated Policy reflecting the Care Leavers change could be seen at Appendix B of the report.

RECOMMENDED that Council adopts and continues with the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 to include the uprating of applicable amounts, premiums and non-dependant deductions.

**77. COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS AND PREMIUMS**

Councillors Lane and Prowse left the room.

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Customer Focus (circulated previously) regarding Council Tax Discounts and Premiums.

The Head of Customer Focus highlighted the following:

- Members agreed changes to Council Tax Discounts and Premiums in February 2023 subject to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which introduced these changes, receiving Royal Assent.
- The Bill received Royal Assent on 26 October 2023.
- The Council now needed to re-confirm its decision to introduce these changes to Premiums and Discounts.
- Legislation required that 12 months' notice be given for 100% premium on properties which were unoccupied but substantially furnished.
- If approved this premium would come into effect from 1 April 2025.
- The estimated additional income this would generate for North Devon Council would be around £420,000.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive explained the following:

- The estimated additional revenue in total from the premium was around £4.2million and North Devon Council's share was around 10% so was estimated at £420,000.

- The proposed changes to the levying of the empty homes and second homes premiums would generate additional income to be shared between the Council, the major precepting authorities and the local precepting authorities in line with their share of Council Tax.
- This additional income would be built into the 2025-2026 financial plans.
- There were discussions underway between Devon wide authorities around how this additional money should be utilised.
- The money potentially could be ring-fenced to address housing challenges. Discussions were still ongoing around this proposal.
- Once this had been agreed upon a further recommendation would be made to full council on how to utilise the additional income.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve implementing the following:

- (a) That Members re-confirm their decision to apply the 100% premium for empty dwellings after a period of one year rather than two years from 1 April 2024.
- (b) That Members re-confirm their decision to introduce a premium of 100% for all dwellings which are unoccupied but substantially furnished (included are second homes) from 1 April 2025.
- (c) That Members approve the policy detailing the Council's approach to the levying of the empty homes premium and second homes premium.
- (d) That all other existing discretionary discounts remain unchanged.

**78. 2022 2023 CARBON FOOTPRINT REPORT**

The Committee considered a report by the Sustainability and Climate Officer (circulated previously), regarding the 2022 to 2023 Carbon Footprint of the Council.

The Sustainability and Climate Officer highlighted the following:

- There was no legal need to report on the Council's Carbon footprint and no specific guidance on what to include or exclude when reporting.
- As a signatory to the Devon Climate Emergency declaration North Devon Council had agreed to "publicly report our Carbon emissions annually in accessible formats".
- A Carbon footprint was divided into Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions.
- Scope 1 was direct emissions of fuel we burnt on site i.e. the oil in our boilers to heat the building and the fuel used to run the fleet vehicles.
- Scope 2 emissions was associated with electricity only and scope 3 emissions was associated with anything else for example the Carbon emissions for anything we buy in as an organisation as well as sell.
- The baseline year of 2018/19 was used for the Carbon calculation. This calculation was calculated by Exeter University in line with UN Greenhouse Gas Protocol and HM Government Environment Reporting Guidelines: including streamlined energy and carbon reporting guidance.
- For the calculation the items under the three scopes were looked at as follows:
  - Scope 1 – council facilities and council vehicles
  - Scope 2 – electricity

- Scope 3 – well to tank emissions, business mileage, commuting mileage and red diesel sold at Ilfracombe Harbour.
- The total footprint of 3951.5 tonnes of Carbon Dioxide emissions (tCO<sub>2</sub>e) for the year was calculated.
- From 2020/21 the calculation had been made to the same standards and carried out by North Devon Council.
- The only difference was that commuting mileage was not included in this calculation as the figure used was based on UK averages and not particularly relevant to North Devon Council.
- Since the Covid-19 pandemic the Council had changed its overall staff working patterns with many staff continuing to work from home.
- For the year 2022/23 the total footprint for tonnes of Carbon Dioxide emissions was down to 3,303 tCO<sub>2</sub>e.
- Annual emissions had decreased but still some way off meeting where we needed to be to hit zero Carbon emissions by 2030.
- The projects that the Council had invested in have not yet been reported so further progress was expected.
- In summary the Council had a number of projects underway to reduce its Carbon emissions such as: Heat Decarbonisation Plans funded through Low Carbon Skills Fund, a Low energy lighting project, Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme bids for Ilfracombe Pool and Landmark Theatre, Fleet decarbonisation, Solar Photo Voltaic specification for Brynsworthy Environment Centre and the Yeo Valley woodland extension.

In response to a question about staff percentages travelling to work. The Chief Executive responded that the data for this was not collated but that there was more flexibility around staff being able to work from home more as long as the needs of Teams were being covered. The car park at the front did appear to be full but was very likely that the overflow car park at the back was not used as much. There was a spreadsheet detailing who was working in the office on any given day. There was a mini bus provided to pick up and drop off staff. As a location Brynsworthy Environment Centre was a difficult location to cycle or walk to work but car share schemes were in place.

In response to a question on whether the authority would achieve Carbon Zero. The Sustainability and Climate Officer replied that the District as a whole had agreed to be Carbon neutral by 2050, for the Council itself we had signed up to 2030. The Council could meet this target with the use of off-setting mechanisms. There would be a cost associated with this.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the results of the Carbon audit be noted,
- (b) the options for reducing these emissions be noted; and
- (c) that this report provide a basis for future discussions going forward.

79. **REVIEW OF THE NORTH DEVON COUNCIL (OFF-STREET PARKING PLACES) ORDER 2024**

The Committee considered a report by the Parking Manager (circulated previously), in relation to the Review of the North Devon Council (Off-Street parking Places) Order 2024.

The Parking Manager highlighted the following:

- Barnstaple changes to accept and adopt
- The removal of the Barnstaple Rugby Club Annual/Quarterly permits due to lack of sales. This are would revert to Pay and Display parking.
- The removal of Silver Street reserved permits, allowing the area to be Pay and Display in its entirety.
- The renaming of the 4 and 7 Day Visitor to 4 and 7 Day permit. The implication was at present that only visitors could purchase these permits, this was not the case.
- The removal of motorhomes from the 4/6/7 day Coaches/Lorries and Motorhomes now had a separate tariff.
- The removal of permits form the Albert lane car park. Reserved parking was permitted by arrangement with North Devon Council.
- The removal of condition D3, (Monday to Saturday inclusive) from Seven Brethren Can Park, and implement condition D5, (Charges apply every day).
- The removal of condition H2, (8.00 am to 6.00 pm) from Seven Brethren Van Park, and implement condition H9, (All hours).
- The removal of Tarka car park from the Barnstaple Long Stay permit, to increase the availability to those using the Leisure Centre.
- The removal of all Evening Residents permits due to lack of sales.
- The removal of condition D3, (Monday to Saturday inclusive) and the addition of condition D5, (Charges apply every day).

In response to the request for Morteohoe and Georgeham to be included in the public consultation despite there being no changes. The Parking Manager agreed this would allow residents of that ward to put forward any changes they thought should be considered.

The Parking Manager confirmed she would check that the wording “No Sleeping” would be included in the order for Croyde.

In response to a question on clarification of the definition of a Van. The Parking Manager explained that a van was a vehicle that weighed over 3 and a half tonnes un-laden. As long as a vehicle could park within the white lines it could park and pay as if classified as a car.

The Parking Manager confirmed she would check the Braunton Parish Council charge figure.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) A consultation on the amendments to the Off Street Parking Order (as detailed in Appendix A) be carried out as requested by Parishes - and include

amendments for North Devon Council Car Parks for the following, as shown in the report at sections 2.2 to 2.7 inclusive, namely:

- (i) Braunton Parish Council - Caen Street and Chaloners Road car parks;
  - (ii) Combe Martin Parish Council - Cormelles car park, High Street coach/car park, Holdstone Down, Kiln car park, Hollands Park and the Parade car park;
  - (iii) Instow Parish Council – Instow Marine car park;
  - (iv) Lynton and Lynmouth Town Council – to add Manor Foreshore car park to the Off Street Parking Order and, to accept changes to regulations on Manor Gardens Roadway;
  - (v) South Molton Town Council – South Molton Central, Sheep Pen and South Molton Coach and Lorry park and South Molton Residents permit and South Molton Long Stay Permit to allow parking on the Sheep Pen car park and the South Molton Central car park;
  - (vi) North Devon Council Car Parks – to accept a review of permits; and
- (b) That delegated power be given to the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration in consultation with the Leader, Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer to make the Order following the consultation subject to there being no material objections or amendments necessary.

**80. URGENT DECISION(S) TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ATTACHED)**

The Committee noted the urgent decision that had been made by the Deputy Chief Executive, in the absence of the Chief Executive, in accordance with paragraph 3.45, Annex 2, Part 3 of the Constitution (circulated previously) regarding the Afghanistan Resettlement Scheme.

**81. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS AND RESTRICTION OF DOCUMENTS**

RESOLVED:

- (a) That under Section 100 A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item; “Local Authority Housing Fund Round 2” as the report involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended from time to time), namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information); and
- (b) That all documents and reports relating to the item be confirmed as “Not for Publication”.

**82. LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND ROUND 2**

The Committee considered a restricted report by the Chief Executive regarding Local Authority Housing Fund Round 2.

The Chief Executive outlined the objectives of round 1 and 2. He explained that a recent announcement from Government would change the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding.

The debate continued with consideration given to what had already been achieved by the Council in relation to other authorities and regard was given to local feeling on the issues presented by the latest change from Government.

RESOLVED that the Council withdraw from round 2 of the Local Authority Housing Fund and use the allocated funds for Temporary Accommodation.

Chair

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm

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