

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Policy Development Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Thursday, 11th January, 2024 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor L. Spear (Chair).

Councillors Bishop, Bulled, Bushell, Clayton, P Leaver, Patrinos, Wilson and Worden.

Officers:

Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Environmental Enhancement and Head of Programme Management and Performance.

21. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hunt, Jones and Turton.

22. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16TH NOVEMBER 2023 (ATTACHED).

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 16th November 2023 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest announced.

24. SERVICE PLANS

The Committee discussed the Service Plans (as previously circulated).

The Chief Executive advised that the service plans were considered by the Policy Development Committee on an annual basis and that following the restructure of the Council's Senior Management Team in September 2021, Heads of Service, with support from the new Programme Management Office (PMO), were tasked with establishing 5 programmes in their portfolio area to support the delivery of our Corporate Plan objectives.

There were five programmes established each with a Senior Responsible Owner (SRO):

1. Customer Focus / Digital by Design – SRO Sarah Higgins.
2. Environmental Enhancement – SRO Mark Kentell.
3. Housing & Community Safety – SRO Nina Lake.
4. Regeneration & Economic Growth – SRO SarahJane Mackenzie-Shapland.
5. Organisational Development – SRO Nikki Gordon.

He explained that sitting above the 5 programmes, there was an overarching theme of Financial Security and associated Medium Term Financial Strategy and Commercialisation Strategy, which was assigned to the Councils Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive. These programmes were reported on a quarterly basis through both the Strategy and Resources Committee and the Policy Development Committee.

He added that the service plans did not contain strategic actions as they were now contained within the five overarching programmes and that the service plans were based on the operational functions of the Council.

The Chair's meeting was held in December 2023 where it was agreed to invite the Heads of Service for Finance, Housing and Environmental Enhancement.

The actions in the programmes were reviewed as part of the Corporate Plan workshop, which was held prior to Christmas 2023. He added that a draft Corporate Plan was currently being developed and would be presented to you in due course. He explained that each Head of Service would report their new actions to the Committee, there were historical actions which would either have updates, extension date requests or notes to explain their transferral to the overarching programmes.

He added that all service plans had been subject to consultation with Senior Management Team prior to their consideration by the Committee and any financial implications arising from the plans would then go as part of the draft budget to Full Council to be considered as part of the budgetary discussions at its February meeting.

(a) Building Control

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for Building Control (as previously circulated).

The Director of Resources addressed the Committee and provided an update on the following:

- **Recommendation PH&H 2022/23 17:** Building Control Gain approval and implement recruitment of resources to support expanded investigation and enforcement role resulting from legislative change. Recruitment was required at different levels to enable staggered development of employees making resources available over a 2-5 year period when external recruitment would be exceptionally difficult. The details regarding the positions to be recruited was detailed on page 24 of the report.
Extension of time request: 30th June 2024.

- **Recommendation PH&H 2022/23 18:** Building Control Mentoring and support to be provided to Surveyors to ensure successful validation of competency and registration with Building Safety Regulator at Levels A, B and C combined with external training where appropriate. Provision of validated resources, which were adequate for the work profile in the Partnership area.
- **Recommendation PH&H 2022/23 19:** Building Control - Maintain our quality assurance accreditation through greater understanding and compliance with ISO9001 Quality Assurance System to ensure recording of adequate audit trails is embedded in the service. This would ensure that there was a reduction in repeat non-compliance reports. New Technical Support Team would deliver this service once training had been provided to be ready for the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) in April 2024.
Extension of Time Request: 31 March 2024.
- **Recommendation NEW 2024/25 01:** Back Office System Changes to Accommodate Building Safety Regulator (BSR) standards. To be ready for the new Building Safety Regulator (BSR) operational standards and new KPI's. Awaiting Idox system software update to Uniform (ICT system was managed by MDDC). This action was due in November 2023. However, it had since been delayed and was not likely to be implemented until New Year 2024.

In response to a questions from the Committee, the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive advised the following:

- In relation to concerns raised regarding the lack of compliance with the ISO9001 Quality Assurance System and its impact upon the management of quality control. The Committee was advised that out of the original seven vacancies within the service, there were now only three vacant posts and that these posts would hopefully be filled by the end of the financial year.
- The technical team were currently working on the audit and an extension of time request had been made to enable this work to be completed.
- The office accommodation at the Woodlands Enterprise Centre in South Molton was utilised by the administration team of the Building Control Partnership and operated on a hybrid solution in line with the rest of the Council, and this arrangement would be kept under review.
- With regards to the remote working and ensuring that teams maintained a good working relationship the approach taken by the Council as a whole was to regularly ensure that teams were in the office together and this was achieved via in person team meetings, keep in touch days and management support.
- The implementation of the back office system changes to accommodate Building Safety Regulator (BSR) Standards for high rise buildings was due in November 2023. However, due to delays related to software changes

this recommendation would not be completed until early 2024.

(b) Customer Focus

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for Customer Focus (as previously circulated).

The Chief Executive provided an update on the following:

- **Recommendation CF 2023/24 01 CS:** Replace Customer Service emails with a Webform to enable a first point of contact solution. Customer Services currently receive hundreds of emails per month covering a variety of services and subjects. This is time consuming for staff and frustrating for customers as it often results in an ongoing to-way conversation to reach a resolution. By designing a single webform we can ensure we are capturing all relevant information at first point of contact. Final testing was required internally before rolling out to customers. A soft launch to direct customers to the webform rather than the email address would be rolled out to begin with. Once established and any issues were addressed, the Customer Service email address would be removed entirely. Once implemented this could then be rolled out to all services streamlining those requests and ensuring that the right information was gathered.
Extension of time request: 31st January 2024.
- **Recommendation CF 2023/24 04:** Introduction of a new Service Desk system. This included a self-service portal, contract management and assets system. The new system would enable issues to be resolved based on their priority and they would be automatically logged onto the system.

The costs associated with the implementation of the new system were as follows:

- £8000 initial environment development cost.
- Licences were £7500 per year for 12 users.
- £1500 per annum would be saved via the decommissioning of the Bank – Rec, Mortgages and Assets system.
- There would be a saving of £3700 per would from the decommissioning of the current Service Desk system.
- Costs had been factored into existing revenue budget and no additional funding was required.
- **December 2023:** The implementation of TOPDesk had been slightly delayed due to the unexpected complexity of extracting the Council's asset information from their legacy system into TOPDesk. The Council would be using the functionality within ICT from January 2024 and would have some users testing the portal with the view to rolling out to all users by March.
Extension of time request: 31st March 2024.
- **Recommendation CF 2023/24 05:** Review of Single Occupier Discounts. Working in partnership with Devon Audit Partnership (DAP), would be reviewing all households who claim single person discount. Devon Audit

Partnership (DAP) would be procuring software to support all Devon district councils to ensure the council tax database was accurate and households were billed correctly.

- **December 2023:** There had been delays in the contract with DAP and having received written assurance the Council would not be liable for any costs for the contractor services. The Council had requested that it update its own system rather than be part of the service the third party supplier provided. The supplier, Liberta, had confirmed that the Council would start the process in North Devon in April 2024 and would take four months to complete.
Extension of time request: 31st July 2024.

- **Recommendation CF 2019/20 04:** ICT Investigate Document Retention disposal modules for Core Financial System. The document disposal project had been completed for Revenues and Benefits and the team would next work on the case disposal project. Other priorities had meant this had been delayed.

Extension of time request: 31st December 2024.

- **Recommendation CF 2022/23 02:** Commercialisation Implement E-Secure & develop self-service portal (Phase IV).

- **Transfer to Programme Request:**

Work towards implementation of E-Secure and development of self-serve portal would follow once live. The recent successful recruitment of the Customer Focus Systems Administrator would aid this development.

- **Dec 2023:** The Direct Debit form had now gone live, which was part of e-secure. Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services would now work together to promote the portal and encourage sign-up over the next few months. This would give the Council its database for email addresses to implement e-billing in March/April 2025.

- **Recommendation CF 2022/23 03:** CT Move from On-site to Cloud Civica / Comino. The issues with the D360 (Comino) contract with Civica were still ongoing and currently outside the Council's control. Once resolved the Council would be able to put a timetable in place to move the images over.
Extension of time request: As part of 2024/25 Service Planning request a revised due date of 30th September 2024.

- **Recommendation CF Crematorium 2023/24 05:** Provide generator and associated electrics to enable small chapel to provide services. Improve Business Resilience in event of short-term power cut.

Extension of time request: As part of 2024/25 Service Planning request a revised due date: 30th September 2024.

- **Recommendation CF Crematorium 2023/24 06:** Comply with new legislation removing current cremation authorisation by GP and placing a significant new responsibility on officers to authorise each cremation. Legislation changes were due on 1st April 2024. However, the new

arrangements had not been clarified. Current system fees of approximately £30,000 would be phased out over 12 months from implementation (hand-over phase).

Extension of time request: As part of 2024/25 Service Planning request a revised due date: 31st March 2025.

- **Recommendation NEW 2024/25 ICT:** Switch replacement. There would be a refresh of outdated hardware that was approaching the end of life. An improved network performance and increased security features such as Network Access Control (NAC) to be implemented, which would further strengthen the Councils security posture. Conversations had begun with a trusted partner, the Council was currently in the planning phase.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Chief Executive and Heads of Service present advised the following:

- The replacement of the customer service emails with a webform was not part of the Customer Focus programme. However, the service plan action: CF 2023/24 01 CS did feed into the overarching programme.
- As part of the ongoing management of the programmes, a quick assessment was undertaken in relation to programme worthiness where the risks were assessed and evaluated. The operational day to day management of systems was contained within the ICT team.
- There were good systems in place to manage calls and complaints related to the waste and recycling service. There was also a very efficient and effective working relationship in place with the Customer Services team.
- There was a lot of effort focussed on repeated and missed collections to ensure that any mistakes were learnt from and not repeated.
- There were 45,000 - 47,000 collections carried out within the district each week and of those there was less than 1% of complaints across all collections of black waste, green waste and recycling.
- Part of the customer focus programme involved viewing systems and cultures within the various Council services.
- Complaints regarding missed collections had increased over the Christmas period. However, this was a trend that was observed on an annual basis.
- In order to comply with legislation changes regarding the removal of the current cremation authorisation by GPs and placing the responsibility on officers to authorise each cremation. Officers involved would be provided with appropriate training and supported through the process. A business continuity plan would be put in place together with the recruitment to a new post to eventually assume the management responsibility for the Crematorium.
- When an individual applied for 25% single occupier discounts for Council Tax payments, the council tax software and the electoral registration software, through the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) would highlight any discrepancies and in turn identify any incidents of potential fraud. Devon Audit Partnership were currently reviewing households who claimed single person discount for a number of Devon Authorities.

- If fraud was detected on any of the claimant's accounts, the counter fraud team within the Devon Audit Partnership would investigate cases to establish if it was a genuine oversight or potential fraud.
- There were several mechanisms and databases in place at the Council's disposal when investigating a potential case of fraud with the aim of ensuring a consistent approach across the Council.
- The introduction of a new service desk self-service portal was to improve ICT assets and was not employees.

In response to a question regarding the customer focus element of the Planning service, the Chief Executive advised that the Council had put a huge amount of effort in putting customers at the centre of the service that it provided. The Council's aim was to deliver good services to the public and the Customer Focus programme was in place to engrain that ethos into the organisation as a whole.

In response to a further question regarding extension requests for domestic applications, he advised that the extension of time requests were part of the national scheme of 8-12 weeks and reported against national indicators. He added that whilst the targets were set nationally, it was the Council's preference not to focus on the 8 week deadline, as it was important to ensure that all decisions taken were explored thoroughly and the correct decision was made.

(c) Environmental Enhancement

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for Environmental Enhancement (as previously circulated).

The Head of Environmental Enhancement addressed the Committee and provided an update on the following:

- **Recommendation EE 2020/21 02:** Customer Focus Public Convenience Review. NDC has written to Town & Parish Councils to gauge appetite for transferring asset to their control.
Extension of time Request: April 2025 to allow phased approach.
- **Recommendation EE 2021/22 01:** Environment Plant 23,500 deciduous and coniferous tree whips at the Yeo Valley woodland extension between October 2021 - March 2022. We can only plant 18,000 trees this planting season. Time extension is therefore needed for the remaining trees.
Extension of Time Request: March 2024.
- **Recommendation New for 24/25:** Relocate Parks Team to Gaydon Street or alternative site. Free space up at BEC and have Parks Team in a Town Centre location. Options report being prepared for Senior Management Team.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Chief Executive and Heads of Service present advised the following:

- The transfer of public convenience assets to the Town and Parish Councils was progressing gradually through a phased approach with draft heads of terms agreed with a number of town and parish councils.
- This would enable the Council to transfer the responsibility for the public convenience assets to Town and Parish Councils the financial year of 2024/25.
- Any undecided public convenience assets would be brought back before the Members to make a decision on the remaining public conveniences.
- Acknowledged that there was scope for strategic discussions with Members in relation to the financial pressures that the Council was facing together with the potential impact on the services that it provided.
- The Council worked closely with Barnstaple Town Council in relation to the management of the town centre.
- All rural parishes had been notified of the proposals to transfer management of the public convenience assets to the Town and Parish Councils.
- Some of the assets had been transferred across in previous years with continued support via a support grant from the Council, which would continue for the next year 2024/25. However, conversations would be held with those affected by this support stream prior to setting the budget together with the precepts for 2025/26.

(d) Environmental Health and Housing

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for Environmental Health and Housing (as previously circulated).

The Head of Programme Management and Performance addressed the Committee and provided an update on the following:

- **Recommendation New EH&H 2024/25 01:** To review the provision of Pest Control and the viability of North Devon Council providing a service to residents and businesses.
- **Recommendation New EH&H 2024/25 02:** To assess the viability of North Devon Council providing leisure water sampling (Pools and Spas) to businesses.
- **Recommendation New EH&H 2024/25 03:** Partnership project to identify women who are “hidden homeless” and are at greater risk.
- **Recommendation New EH&H 2024/25 04:** Flow: In partnership with One Northern Devon, identify residents of Ilfracombe living in precarious housing, but not reaching out for support and then provide assertive outreach support.
- **Recommendation New EH&H 2024/25 05:** Consider taking devolved powers from the Driver Vehicle Licensing Authority to enable us to deal with abandoned vehicles more efficiently with the opportunity to recover costs via the sale of vehicles.
- **Recommendation PH&H 2020/21 03:** The devolution of DCC’s funding for care leavers.

Extension of time request: Devon County Council (DCC) Update: The County Council recognised the 18+ homelessness prevention contribution contract expired on 31st March 2024, and the impact this delay in the decision making process would have. The County Council would therefore be in touch with the five providers to seek to extend the current contract by three months to 30th June 2024 to allow time to for the decision making process to be followed.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Chief Executive and Heads of Service present advised the following:

- The Council was working with DCC to discuss the situation regarding the devolution of the County Council's funding for care leavers once they reach the age of 18 years old and had pushed back forcefully regarding the proposals to discontinue the funding.
- The Chief Executive added that the issue had been raised at a Team Devon meeting on 10th January 2024 and that the County Council was continuing to work with the affected District Councils to develop a model solution that was sustainable.
- If DCC were to remove funding for care leavers the district council would not be in a position financially to continue to fund the existing service.
- The district council was in the process of exploring options to manage residential units to accommodate vulnerable care leavers and would continue to work with DCC on a model way forward. However, the Council acknowledged that currently the costs associated with any kind of continuing service were unknown.
- The costs of DCC providing residential support to vulnerable care leavers was about £150-200K per year.

(e) Governance

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for Governance (as previously circulated).

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and provided an update on the following:

- **Recommendation New G 2024/25 01:** Police & Crime Commissioners election / Parliamentary election. Police and Crime Commissioner's election on 2nd May 2024. Date of Parliamentary election not yet known but likely within 2024.
- **Recommendation New G 2024/25 02:** Tranche 2 of the Election Act 2023 changes. (Tranche 1 for May 23: Voter Id & Accessibility) Tranche 2 for May 24: Online absent vote applications, postal & proxy changes, overseas electors, postal vote handling and 'family voting'. From 7th May EU citizens voting and candidacy rights Managing new processes and spikes in workloads on going i.e. parliamentary election.

- **Recommendation New G 2024/25 03:** Review of Commercialisation Strategy. In line with the Council's corporate objective to review and refresh its commercialisation strategy.
- **Recommendation New G 2024/25 04:** Deliver the outcomes of the process mapping for Insurance and look to include property insurance valuations in the new Asset Management System. A process mapping exercise was undertaken for insurance. The outcomes needed to be evaluated and delivered. Currently the insurance property schedules were held separately, but the Council would review potential for inclusion within the new cloud based Asset Management System as part of the implementation, to reduce the risk of errors in insurance cover.
- **Recommendation G 2023/24 02:** Document retention on Civica Financial core systems. Archiving had been set up on the test Civica Financial system. Full testing required before rolling out on live. Currently on target. Half day consultancy to make changes to live system had already been purchased. No additional costs for 2024/25.
- **Recommendation G 2023/24 04:** Review and update the Procurement Strategy. A draft Devon Districts Procurement Strategy 2023 – 2027 had been produced for approval. Currently considering options for the delivery of the procurement service which might impact upon the action plan to accompany the strategy.
- **Recommendation G 2019/20 02:** Land Registry takeover of Land Charges for North Devon Area. All of the land charges data now on Master Gov. Still requiring elements of data capture for Planning, but this to be supported by the Land Registry.
Extension of time request: Land Registry had not yet issued target date but likely to be 31st December 2024.
- **Recommendation G 20/21 01:** Parish Reviews / Community Governance Reviews. To be undertaken following the Parliamentary election. Once started must be completed within 12 months.
Extension of time request: 31st December 2025, this deadline can be advanced if the Parliamentary election was called early.
- **Recommendation G 20/21 03:** Continue with Land Registration project and investigating polygon requirements of the council. Barnstaple, Chulmleigh, Bratton Fleming and Braunton remain outstanding.
Extension of time request: 30th June 2025.
- **Recommendation G 22/23 02:** Implementation of Estore2. Upgrade to webpay public to allow misc. payment types over internet and become WCAG compliant (web content accessibility guidelines). Currently on target for delivery.
- **Recommendation G 22/23 06:** Review & register delegated power nominations for each service area. An electronic register for these nominations had been produced and going to Senior Management Team (SMT) for sign off. Each Service would then be reviewed and updated
Extension of Time Request: 30th September 2024.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Chief Executive and Heads of Service advised the following:

- There were a huge amount of changes being implemented with regards electoral registration as and when they occurred.
- In regards to what support that Members could give to the evolving process, the chief executive advised that he would liaise with the electoral services team to ascertain what Members could do to support the process.
- To encourage younger residents of North Devon to vote, the Council had employed different mechanisms such as being registered to vote could improve their credit score together with obtaining a mobile phone contract, which required a person to be registered to vote.
- The Parish Reviews/Community Governance Reviews should be undertaken every 10 years. However, the process was very time consuming process, which must be completed once it had commenced within a 12 month period. This process would begin following the Parliamentary election and would be implemented prior to the next Parish and District elections in May 2027.
- Polygon requirements were the digital footprint of a map. The Council was currently working with the Land Registry to digitise the body of data that it currently held.
- There were to elements to the NDC land search fee and local authorities would still retain the Land Charges search element for private residential property purchases.
- A full local land charges search cost between £60.00 - £71.00.

(f) Planning Service

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for the Planning Service (as previously circulated).

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and provided an update on the following:

- **Recommendation P 2023/24 03:** Development Management. The Chief Executive commissioned the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to provide guidance/best practice to the Council in 2022/2023. Officers also wished to review current procedures regarding site visits and the venue used for the Planning Committee.
- **Recommendation P 2016/17 01:** Planning Review Business Processes for Application Determination and S106 Agreements.
Transfer Request: The Section 106 process and wider development management process reviews were being picked up as part of the Housing and Community Safety Programme and also from the Customer Focus Project looking at failure demand.
Extension of Time Request: 30th June 2024 to allow the commencement of monitoring of plots.
- **Recommendation P 2017/18 01:** Planning complete the electronic capture of historic planning data. With 15 years of historic Section 106 data plots were now being captured on DEF the planning system and Data Capture to enable the transfer of Local Land Charge data to HMLR was

being supported by their internal team. This would ensure the basic information required to complete a search was readily accessible.

- **Recommendation PP&H 2022/23 05:** Housing Planning viability assessments.

Transfer Request: This element of working was being picked up as part of the Local Plan review process and now that a comprehensive review had been approved and would be reported to Northern Devon Futures oversight of this would remain.

Business as Usual: The Development Management team had been working with the District Valuer to ensure that Affordable Housing was set as a priority and that they took market conditions into consideration and not just carried out a desk top assessment. The Council would continue to monitor the Viability Assessments.

Extension of Time Request: 30th September 2024.

- **Recommendation: PP&H 2022/23 06:** Planning Development Management process efficiency.

Transfer Request: This element of working was being picked up under the Housing and Community Safety Programme and also via the Customer Focus Project looking at feedback / failure demand.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Chief Executive and Heads of Service advised the following:

- The Council had employed temporary staff to ensure enforcement compliance. There were additional resources being implemented to develop the team further.
- The Council held a record of any developers/applicants where potential conflict might arise and advise officers of the appropriate action that should be taken when dealing with potentially difficult situations on site.
- The purpose of a joint compliance team across Environmental Health, Licensing and Planning was to ensure a cross population of information was shared across the teams.
- The Joint Local Plan review fell within the remit of the programmes.

(g) Organisational Development

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for Organisational Development (as previously circulated).

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and provided an update on the following:

- **Recommendation OD 2023/24 01:** Review our current Occupational Health Arrangements. This was a new element of work. There might be increased cost implications if the Council was to move away from its incumbent supplier, who had been acquired by a larger group. The Council would therefore need to assess if their offer remained right for the organisation.

Update: The Council had continued to use Smart Clinic, but were exploring other options/providers.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Chief Executive advised the following:

- The Council was very proactive in support of its employees and ensuring their mental health and wellbeing was a top priority. The Council had liaised with the Organisational Development Group, which was made up of employees from across the Council to ensure that staff surveys delivered effectively.
- There was a monthly Wellbeing Pulse survey, which was completely anonymous and allowed the Council to capture a snapshot of general moral and identify any areas of concern.
- The Council was able to put employees in touch with counselling services should they require support through talking therapy.
- There were regular catch ups/check ins between managers and employees where any issues identified could be addressed or escalated if required.

(h) Place, Property and Regeneration

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for Place, Property and Regeneration (as previously circulated).

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive addressed the Committee and provided an update on the following:

- **Recommendation PP&R 2023/24 01:** Delivery of an Asset Management System. The plan was in draft form and it was not anticipated that a further extension was required. The plan's implementation would be business as usual.
- **Recommendation PP&R 2023/24 02:** Property Maintenance Programme - Building Assets. This work and a planned maintenance schedule would inform budget setting for 2024/25.
Note: This work had started and the team had developed a schedule which had gone some way to inform budget setting. With Tech Forge in place in early 2024, the Council would expect this to develop further and so would suggest inclusion in the service plan for 2024/25 that finessed this and informed budget setting for 2025/26.
Extension of Time Request: 31st October 2024
- **Recommendation PP&R 2023/24 03:** Maintenance Programme - Engineering assets (excluding car parks).
Extension of Time Request: 31st October 2024.
- **Recommendation PP&R 2023/24 04:** Maintenance Programme - Car Parks.
Extension of Time Request: 31st October 2024.
- **Recommendation PP&R 2019/20 04:** Place One Public Estate.

Note: Some monies had moved to the GL hub but others remained. The project needed to involve both local and central government partners to ensure the rationalisation of service and the release of land for housing. There were no immediate plans for the Civic quarter but currently the Council were able to retain the funds and so it could continue to work to find appropriate projects for spend.

Extension of Time Request: 31st October 2024.

- **Recommendation PP&R 2019/20 09:** Place. Deliver Ilfracombe Seafront Masterplan. Without Central Government support, the project team were progressing the delivery of open space through S106 improvements and the delivery of the bus shelter/toilets intervention through the Rural arm of UKSPF.

Update Note: Contract had now been awarded for the delivery of the open space, requiring delivery by March 2024. Drawings were in the process of being signed off for the bus stop/kiosk project and the planning application submission imminent. Delivery on this element was due to commence by the end of March 2024. However, the delivery had moved to 31st July 2024.

Extension of Time Request: 31st July 2024.

- **Recommendation PP&R 2019/20 10:** Regeneration Ilfracombe Housing Infrastructure Fund. First drawdown made. All discharge of condition applications had been submitted, technical consents applied for and procurement of a contractor being finalised. Inox were also in detailed discussions with a delivery partner. The Council anticipated commencement of works in February 2023 and the commencement of drawdown of tranche 2.

Note: The first drawdown had been paid back to NDC. Devonshire Homes were the contracted delivery partner and work had now started on site. A paper went to Strategy and Resources Committee seeking delegated powers to withdraw from further drawdowns as delivery was happening without it. In discussion with the developer, the Council had now submitted a request to retain just the community building monies and await Homes England's response – dates to remain as were for the moment.

- **Recommendation PP&R 2022/23 02:** Culture Creation of new 5-year Museum Forward Plan to Accreditation standard. This needed to remain on the Service plan. The museum had been awarded NPO status and as such the Plan became even more important.

Further Extension of Time request: Review of the existing Plan had been carried out with staff, volunteers and Board. The next Board meeting was scheduled to be held on 16th January 2024 to discuss further.

Extension of Time Request: 30th June 2024.

- **Recommendation PP&R 2022/23 06:** Place Progress an Economic Strategy for Northern Devon. To be moved to the 2023/24 service plan.

Extension of time request: A draft strategy was being worked on – it was expected that it would be delivered by end of June 2024.

- **Recommendation PP&R 2022/23 09:** Place Extension to the Harbour Revision Order (HRO). This had been submitted to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) on behalf of the Secretary of State

(SofS) for approval. It would then go to a 12 week consultation before being passed over to the SofS.

29-Nov-23: Public consultation complete HRO now with MMO awaiting finalisation.

Extension of Time Request: 31st March 2024.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Chief Executive and Heads of Service advised the following:

- The cost of £40,000 to procure the upgrade to the Asset Management System, which recorded every asset within the Councils ownership together with calculations of their valuation and condition and fed into the Council's Property Maintenance Programme of building assets, which helped to inform budget setting and provided a planned maintenance schedule based on priority across the asset list.
- The current Asset Management System had been in place for around 15 years and now required an upgrade to ensure that it functioned effectively to manage the Council's asset portfolio, which was worth £120m.
- The payment of £40,000 was a one off payment and good value in comparison to some of the other system upgrades across the Council.
- The annual maintenance fee was built into the revenue budget.
- Feasibility work through One Public Estate, which had been identified in the areas of Barnstaple and Ilfracombe was yet to be completed.
- The first drawdown of funds of £620,000 from the Ilfracombe Housing Infrastructure Fund had been made. The second drawdown of funds was more complicated, as the developer was now on site. The Council were in discussions with the developer and Homes England to try and maximise as much drawdown of funds as possible.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the service plans be noted;
- b) That the associated actions and extension of time requests be agreed;
- c) That the typographical error in relation to the extension of time request for Recommendation EE 2020/21 02: Customer Focus Public Convenience Review **should read as** "March 2025" not 2024 be noted;
- d) That the Committee receive an update regarding the current status of the transfer of public convenience assets to town and parish councils. To include in the following information:
 - i. A summary of the current situation, the stages of contact made and the expected time-table for delivery together with a summary of approaches made/contact made and the responses received.

- e) That an update be provided to the Members to detail where the Council was in terms of the proposed changes to electoral registration; and
- f) That the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive to provide an update in regards to enforcement compliance following the meeting of the Building Control Joint Committee on Thursday 25th January 2024.

The Chair thanked the Head of Programme Management and the Head of Environmental Enhancement for their attendance at the meeting.

25. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24.

The Committee considered the work programme together (circulated previously).

The Committee discussed the work programme and the items due for consideration at the next meeting in March 2024.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the work programme be noted; and
- b) That a special meeting of the Committee be arranged to discuss dentistry services within the North Devon area.

26. BRIEFING PAPER IN RELATION TO THE PROPOSED AGRICULTURE REFORMS. COUNCILLOR BULLED TO REPORT.

The Committee considered a briefing paper prepared by Councillor Bulled in relation to the proposed agriculture reforms.

Councillor Bulled addressed the Committee and outlined the following points to the Committee:

- There appeared to be no effective Rural Policy upon which to hang the increasing environmental demands and offsets that were required within housing and economic development including carbon offsetting, biodiversity net gain, 30 by 30 expectations, climate mitigation, water issues and many more.
- This provided NDC with an opportunity to facilitate actions that promoted the opportunities to retain the economic value of such measures within our area and provide a leveraged economic benefit to the rural economy.
- The income of upland farmers had dropped by 34%.
- Some authorities had a rural policy which defined an intention to support in principle their own rural areas and economies.
- That the Council consider whether to implement a “Statement of Recognition” of the value of the rural economy, its potential role in contributing towards the Councils core objectives .

- Rural North Devon was central to the Councils visitor economy and food production as well as having the means to deliver many of the Councils environmental aspirations. A statement of support would be a good start to engaging fully with them.
- The European Union (EU) based Basic payment scheme (BPS) was due to end in 2024 and would be replaced by Environmental land management (ELM) which would eventually deliver private finance opportunities from carbon, water and biodiversity. In the meantime farming and other rural business were likely to suffer financial challenges of significant proportions.
- Farmers produced food and only 50% were self-sufficient in the United Kingdom.
- Would like the Council to support and acknowledge what farmers were doing and the value that they brought to the economy.
- The Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) was a regular income paid to farmers and the loss of this subsidy would have a huge impact upon their livelihood.
- The Committee raised concerns regarding the national failure of the government to understand or acknowledge the financial pressure that farmers were facing. The National Planning Policy framework now had food production as a priority and there was a requirement for a firm political steer.
- Farmers required support and continuity from the Council to lobby government.
- The average age of a farmer was now 57 years old and it was becoming increasingly difficult for younger people to get into farming.
- The next steps were to draw up a list in invitees to attend a meeting with the Committee to discuss agriculture.
- The Chief Executive added that Graham Allcott from North Devon + be invited to attend the meeting as a member of the panel.

The Chief Executive advised that in order to make a decision, the Council would first need to ascertain what was contained within a Rural Policy to ensure that there was no crossover with its existing policies, which might deliver a similar remit.

He added that farmers were currently supported through North Devon +, which provided advice and farm diversification. There were a couple of events scheduled for 30th January and 6th February 2024 at Holsworthy and Filleigh to meet with farmers and discuss how they could be supported.

In response to a question regarding how much farmers would lose financially as a result of the loss of the BPS, the Chief Executive advised that he would liaise with North Devon + to find out if they had that information available.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted; and

- b) That Councillor Bulled arrange an agriculture group meeting within the next couple of weeks to discuss and develop a list of panellists to invite to the Committee meeting in March 2024.

The Chair thanked Councillor Bulled for her update to the Committee.

Chair

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

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