

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Policy Development Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Thursday, 12th September, 2019 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor D. Spear (Chairman)

Councillors Campbell, Jenkins, Luggar, Roome, Walker and York

Officers:

Head of Resources

Also Present:

Councillors Tucker and Worden.

Customer and Corporate Communications Manager.

10. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mack.

11. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18TH JULY 2019.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18th July 2019 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest received.

13. NOTICE OF MOTION FROM COUNCIL ON 24TH JULY 2019 - MINUTE 21(A)

The Committee considered a notice of motion from Council on 24th July regarding minute 21(a).

The Chairman invited Councillor Tucker to address the Committee to present his notice of motion that was presented to Full Council on 24th July 2019.

Councillor Tucker advised that he had been concerned for some time in regards to the condition of the existing roads within the North Devon area. He added that following his notice of motion to Full Council he was pleased to report that the Lead Officer for the North Devon Link Road project had been invited to the next meeting of Full Council on Wednesday 25th September 2019 to give a presentation to the Members. He expressed his concern that the Council was not being kept fully informed of the progress with the Link Road project and advised that he had discussed the proposed improvements with an officer at Devon County Council who advised that whilst many of the proposals were beneficial the introduction of a third lane in certain sections together with the removal of many trees would have a devastating impact. He added that the Council should be working more closely with Devon County Council on projects that affect our area. He explained that the North Devon Council Planning Committee had considered an application in relation to the Bishops Tawton roundabout and underpass, which had been the subject of a lengthy discussion and appropriate recommendations had been made. He added that he was disappointed that no officers from Devon County Council were present at the meeting. He stated that this Council, therefore, called on Devon County Council to set up, as a matter of urgency, a comprehensive review into connectivity in North Devon. He suggested that an appropriate way forward might be to assemble a joint Committee of North Devon and Devon County Councillors to discuss the concerns of the Members within the North Devon area.

Following Councillor Tucker's address to the Committee, the Members discussed the following:

- The Committee supported the comments made by Councillor Tucker and raised concern with regard to the lack of communication with North Devon Councillors.
- Members of the North Devon Highways and Transport Orders Committee (HATOC) had received a detailed presentation which should be disseminated to other Members of the Council.
- Supported concerns raised in relation to the existing issues within the Barnstaple area and acknowledged the lack of connectivity.
- Concern was raised regarding the earmarked funding from the Larkbeare application, which was not currently progressing.
- Noted that there was only one Devon County Councillor from the North Devon area sat on the Devon County Council Planning Committee.
- Acknowledged concerns that Bishops Tawton Parish Council hadn't been kept informed of developments with the proposed underpass.
- Concern was raised that funds allocated for the maintenance of the existing road network within the North Devon area would be absorbed into the Link Road project.
- The community of Bishops Tawton was divided in its opinion upon the proposed subway and there was a need to establish a clear way forward.
- Expressed frustration that such a large planning application for the North Devon area was not determined by the North Devon Council Planning Committee.

The Leader advised that he was currently in discussions with the Chief Executive of North Devon Council and Devon County Council with a view to assembling a group of Members from both Councils to work together and discuss any projects that would have a significant impact upon the North Devon area.

RESOLVED, that the Notice of Motion be supported.

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

14. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT QUARTER 1 OF 2019/20.

The Committee considered a report to the Strategy and Resources Committee on 5th August 2019 by the Head of Resources together with a minute extract (circulated previously) regarding the Performance and Financial Management Quarter 1 of 2019/20.

The Head of Resources advised that the report had already been subject to consideration by the Strategy and Resources Committee on 5th August 2019.

He highlighted the following points to the Committee:

- As at 30 June 2019, the latest forecast net budget was £12.546m, which produced a budget deficit of £0.028m.
- The Operational Services employee costs were currently forecast to exceed the current budget by £0.090m and work was being undertaken to identify reasons and corrective actions moving forwards.
- The Shared Savings Scheme income was the Council's 50% contribution from Devon County Council savings from the reduction in residual waste collected. The £0.082m additional income was the estimate based on current activity and estimated savings per tonne.
- There had been a reduction in the forecast planning fee income of £0.065m due to a reduction in the larger applications received, which was in line with other authorities experiencing the same pressure.
- At 30th June 2019, the Council was assuming a £0.050m increase to the business rates growth already factored into the budget, the growth was now estimated at £1.552m and the Council would reflect any further changes once it had received an update from the Devon wide pool monitoring within the Quarter 2 report.
- At the 30th June 2019 total external borrowing was £1.250m. The timing of any future borrowing was dependent on how the authority managed its treasury activity and due to current low interest rates and reduced returns on investments it was prudent for the Council to 'internally borrow' and use these monies to fund the Capital Programme.
- The recommended level of general fund balance was 5%-10% of the council's net revenue budget (£0.626m to £1.252m). The forecast general fund reserve at 31st March 2019 was £1.161m, which was a level of 9.3%.

- The Budget and Financial Framework report to Executive 4th February 2019 outlined the Capital Programme for the 2019/20 financial year of £9.609m. Project under spends of £1.234m were brought forward from 2018/19 year and further variations of £14.710m were approved as part of the performance and financial management report to Strategy and Resources on 3rd June 2019 to produce a revised Capital Programme of £25.553m.
- Variations proposed to the Capital Programme for 2019/20.
- The Programme for 2019/20-2021/22 of £29.969m was funded by Capital Receipts / Borrowing (£14.064m), External Grants and Contributions (£13.530m) and Reserves (£2.375m).

In response to a number of questions, the Head of Resources advised the following:

- Business rates were chargeable on all businesses not just shops. Currently of the Business rates collected 40% of the income was retained by the Council, which equated to approximately a net figure of £4.4m, including growth.
- Business rates were considered as part of the Governments Budget Statements, which assisted Councils in finding a balance to support shop owners with their business rates.
- 97.5% of Council Tax write offs was budgeted to be collected and the Council would continue to work to recover the remaining 2.5% ongoing.
- The funding award to Barnstaple Town Centre Management would be contained within the service plan for Economic Regeneration and the allocation of funds would be detail within the plan.
- The Disabled Facilities Grant formed part of the Capital Programme funding through the Better Care Fund. North Devon had been identified as a higher demand area, which would benefit the Council through the Devon wide funding stream. The scheme operated so that any Councils that had been awarded a greater amount of funding than was required would have that amount re-distributed to support any Councils that were in greater need.
- The Council could not overspend on the Disabled Facilities Grant budget, as it covered the demand for the specific area. There was an opportunity for the Council to capitalise with increased officer time required within the Environmental Health and Housing team to support the additional work and grant award through increased resources.
- The Watersports Centre was still on target with an anticipated report to Senior Management Team within the next couple of months outlining what was required.
- The Coastal Communities Fund had provided an extension date to the grant that they had awarded to the Watersports Centre to allow further work to be undertaken on the project by the Council.
- The Strategic Contingency Reserve allocation of £10,000 for Junction 27 and the economic impacts on North Devon was originally considered by the Executive on 3rd March 2015. Funding for this work was still allocated should the project progress.
- The urgent works to Bunksland Farm, East Anstey was considered by the Executive on 4th February 2019. The Council was looking to obtain a grant from Historic England as part of urgent works to historic buildings.

RESOLVED, that the decisions and recommendations of the Strategy and Resources Committee be endorsed.

15. CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO THE DEVON AND SOMERSET FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE.

The Committee considered its response to the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service consultation document in relation to the proposed changes to the service delivery within Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service.

The Chairman addressed the Committee regarding the consultation and explained the outcome of the Member Briefing, which was held on Wednesday 11th September 2019.

The Head of Resources advised that following the Member's Briefing, the Committee and the Council had the opportunity to respond to the consultation either via online or letter. He explained that the Chief Fire Officer had outlined the context of the proposals and referred to some documents, which were available on the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service website and tabled for members of the Committee. He added that it was for the Committee to decide whether to respond individually or collectively.

The Committee discussed the following:

- Concerns had been raised by Braunton Parish Council in relation to unrealistic response times to Woolacombe from Braunton should an emergency situation arise.
- Were encouraged by the vast amount of work which had been undertaken in relation to prevention, which reduced the number of incidents and fires.
- There were concerns raised in relation to the risk to lives through a money saving exercise. However, reassurance was given following a direct question to the Chief Fire Officer that the proposals did not form part of a money saving exercise.
- There was a requirement to look at the business as a whole whilst being mindful that you could not put a price on lives.
- The proposed removal of a full time crew in Barnstaple was not in the interests of public safety.
- Barnstaple was a central hub that provided support to the whole of the North Devon area. Evidence had been based on distances travelled "as the crow flies", which was not a realistic comparison given the nature of the road network within the North Devon area. The Chief Fire Officer himself travelled along the route between Woolacombe and Braunton and agreed that suggested response time to that area was not realistic.
- The option of building a new fully manned fire station at Mullacott Cross to cover the areas of Ilfracombe and Woolacombe etc.
- The organisation was currently too top heavy and there were significant risks with access to areas such as Woolacombe and Ilfracombe.

- How to address the public perception of the Fire Service and the service that they provided, i.e. provision of support to flooding situations was not currently part of their remit.
- Whether to respond to the consultation collectively or as individual Members of the Council.
- The time constraints upon the Council in terms of responding to the consultation in relation to the deadline, which was prior to the next meeting of Full Council.
- The importance of education in terms of fire prevention.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the Chairman of the Policy Development Committee responds to the email address on behalf of the Members to advise that the Committee was strongly against Barnstaple losing 24 hour manned cover particularly at night and would like to request that Northern Devon does not lose its full time manned cover;
- (b) that Members of the Committee respond individually to the consultation process at their own discretion;
- (c) that Fire Prevention Officers from the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service be invited to attend either the meeting of Full Council or a Member's Briefing in November 2019 to explain the prevention work that they undertake within the community; and
- (d) that copies of online questionnaire to be circulated to the members of the Committee.

Following its consideration of the appropriate mechanism for responding, the Committee expressed concern in relation to the complexity of the consultation document together with the potential difficulties that any member of the public might experience in its completion.

16. WORK PROGRAMME/FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the work programme/forward plan for 2019/20 (circulated previously).

The Head of Resources addressed the Committee and outlined the work programme for 2019/20.

The Corporate and Community Services Officer advised that a date had been arranged for the item in relation to the NHS long term plan, which was currently scheduled for November 2019. The Committee would be held jointly with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Torridge District Council to meet with Mr John

Finn, Associate Director of Commissioning Northern Devon and Eastern/Planned Care and Cancer to discuss the NHS long term plan. The meeting was scheduled to be held on Tuesday 15th October 2019 at 10.00am in the Barum Room and an email would be circulated to the Committee Members following the meeting.

RESOLVED, that the Work Programme be noted.

Chairman

The meeting ended at 3.45 pm

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