

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Policy Development Committee held at Virtual - Online meeting on Thursday, 7th January, 2021 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor D. Spear (Chair)

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

Officers:

Chief Executive, Head of Environmental Health and Housing, Head of Place, Head of Resources, HR Manager, Customer and Corporate Services Manager, Business Information Systems Manager, Contracts Delivery Manager, Accountancy Services Manager and Service Manager

Also Present:

Councillors Pearson, Knight and Worden

73. APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence were received.

74. VIRTUAL MEETINGS PROCEDURE - BRIEFING AND ETIQUETTE

The Committee Clerk advised the Committee of the rules and etiquette for online meetings.

75. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19TH NOVEMBER 2020 (ATTACHED).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2020 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

76. 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 as a matter of urgency.

77. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no Declarations of Interest announced.

78. SERVICE PLANS - ANNUAL REPORTING

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

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and stressed the importance of the Service Plans and their use in achieving the Corporate Priorities and recording progress.

(a) **Car Parking**

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

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and advised of the following:

- North Devon Council had been providing a cash collection service to Torrington District Council prior to the lockdown in March 2020, for which it had received reimbursement. This service stopped during the first lockdown.
- A cashless system was being considered but it was recognised there would be some difficulty in providing this in rural and coastal settings where there was no access to, or poor connection to WiFi. Budget constraints would also need to be considered.
- The Authority was not looking to make the sizes of its car parking spaces smaller, but would be looking to reorganise car park layouts to better use. Additional spacing around the car parking bays would reduce the amount of available spaces and could result in a drop in usage and income.
- An arrangement had been made with Devon County Council (DCC) in relation to the provision of electric vehicle charging points. To withdraw from this agreement would incur financial penalties.
- A car park in Chivenor, recently created by a developer, was not yet at a stage where it could be adopted by North Devon Council.
- A project funded by the Future High Streets fund would, if successful, result in a reduction of the spaces available in the High Street and Butchers Row in Barnstaple. Additional, replacements will be sought elsewhere.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Chief

Executive advised of the following:

- Spaces were available at North Walk for 'oversized' vehicles. There had been previous studies into providing more larger spaces but it was found to result in additional costs (from re-lining the car parks), reduction in the number of available spaces, and therefore reduction in income.
- There were electric charging points in car parks in situ in Lynton, South Molton, Ilfracombe and Barnstaple.
- These charging points were available to all to use, which included Blue Badge holders.
- Additional charging points would need to be considered in future as the demand increased.
- Members would be involved in any future decisions regarding electric charging points as there would be financial implications so any decision would be considered under two corporate priorities: Financial Security, and the Environment.

(b) **Corporate and Community Services**

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for Corporate and Community Services (as previously circulated).

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information:

- Lockdown has proved that meetings can be held online, however, the Government Regulations which allowed this would come to an end in May 2021. The Government was being lobbied to extend this. A motion would be presented to Full Council to examine the Government decision. A hybrid of virtual and non-virtual meetings was anticipated.
- Software options were being considered as an alternative to the system which had been used. The Dog PSPO Consultation was an exception in relation to the number of responses involved and updated software was required to cope with such consultations.
- No decision had been made as to who would be responsible for future consultations, or who would be trained to use it.

(c) **Crematorium**

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

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information:

- The Authority had already implemented changes which enabled services to be viewed remotely prior to the start of the pandemic. This allowed services to continue.
- The service plan covered ideas about expanding services and the possibility of providing in-house funeral services, the replacement of storage facilities, and the improvement of the gardens.
- This service plan would be considered by the Joint Crematorium Committee (joint with Torridge District Council).

In response to questions from the Committee, the Chief Executive advised of the following:

- The provision of woodland sites for use as burial sites was being considered but did not fall under the remit of this service plan.
- The installation of solar panels to authority-owned property would be covered by the Resources service plan. Any renewable energy projects would be considered as business cases come forward. Those reports would be presented to the Members via the relevant Committees.

(d) **Customer and Corporate Communications**

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for Customer and Corporate Communications (as previously circulated).

The Customer and Corporate Communications Manager addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information:

An offline reporting tool would enable tablets and smart phones to be used remotely, during site visits and customer visits, to input notes and reports which would then be fed directly into the ICT system and accessible by customer service staff immediately, without need for officers to return from site visits and re-input notes from their manual notebooks, thus reducing the duplication of work.

A hybrid mail system was now required to cover the issue of staff working from home yet needing to print and post correspondence, without putting additional strain on those still in the offices. It would involve post

being sent in batches to a remote contractor.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Customer and Corporate Communications Manager advised that there was no plan to close the print service although the demand for their services had decreased.

(e) **Elections**

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

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information:

- At present the County Council Elections were still expected to go ahead in May 2021.
- A parish review would look at the wider parishes. This had previously been done on a smaller scale.
- The Land Registry had taken over some of the works previously done by the Land Charges Team. There would be a reduction in their work but some work would still be done by the team.
- Although a household canvas could be done electronically the legislation still required a form to be sent by post. The Authority currently held 42,000 verified email addresses for residents.

(f) **Environmental Health and Housing**

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

The Head of Environmental Health and Housing addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information:

- The further lockdown period had required re-negotiation for some of the proposals.
- There had been an increase on the demand for food services / food safety as during lockdown many new businesses providing catering from home had been set up. Recovery of these costs was now being considered.
- The average time for an Occupational Therapist (OT) assessment was 8-12 weeks. The time differed as OT teams performed at different rates -with hospital teams providing decisions quicker.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of

Environmental Health and Housing advised of the following:

- The Standards for Rental Accommodation document was being redrafted and could include additional reference to the pre-payment meters which were often in rental properties prior to new tenants moving in. It was noted these were usually at an inflated cost for the tenant to use. It was suggested that landlord do not install them unless there was a particular reason to do so.
- Actions noted in red on the service plans indicated a revision or agreed deadline date.
- Commitment to Armed Forces and Veterans had been considered within the Devon Home Choice policy.

In response to questions from Councillor Pearson, the Head of Environmental Health and Housing advised of the following:

- No formal response had been made to the consultation on integrated care systems.
- The arrangements currently in place in this district, with the Authority working in collaboration with One Northern Devon, were better than most. Work was ongoing as part of a multi-agency team and the links with health and social care were well established.

(g) **Human Resources**

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

The Human Resources Manager addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information:

- The use of agenda staff was being reviewed.
- The change of demand on officers to carry out site visits had resulted in a need to review the essential car users.
- The Organisational Development Group had met before Christmas and were due to meet again on 19th January 2021. Staff from across the departments were involved.

(h) **ICT**

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

The Business Information Systems Manager addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information.

- The action “Move Towards One Site” was actually phase three of the move to Brynsworthy Environment Centre (BEC). The move out of the Civic Centre had saved approximately £300,000 per annum in rent.
- Customer Services face to face staff, Car parking wardens, CCTV and museum staff would continue to be based in town.
- A survey in relation to ‘working from home’ had found the consensus to be that a hybrid approach would be favoured after the pandemic. Perhaps enabling staff to work as an example 3-2 day split over working from home and being present in the office.
- Clear desk policies and collaborated working practices would be explored, which would help with cleansing and data protection.
- A secondary data centre was held at Lynton House which would incur costs to relocate.
- Cyber security continued to be a National Tier 1 Threat nationally and the Authority needed to continue to improve the cyber security arrangements and education as part of an organisation wide approach to mitigating this risk. This was a corporate risk
- The 2021 Census project was being worked on in conjunction with the Communications team in an effort to move towards online participation.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Business Information Systems Manager advised of the following:

- The ICT team were currently working remotely with the exception of herself plus one member of the help desk team (who was working from BEC to deal with any hardware issues plus issuing of numerous laptops to ensure as many staff could work from home).
- A new WAN contract would allow the team the opportunity to review links and bandwidth. The contract could be reviewed, although not terminated. No new infrastructure was planned – just the leasing of the lines.
- There was no intention to move from the BEC site. It was well utilised and found to have improved staff connections.
- Microsoft Teams had been brought in to meet the needs of those working remotely due to Covid19. The functionality of Office 365 was being considered and there was the aim to move to use Share Point and One Drive but prior to such changes there would need to be a huge amount of preparation and ‘housekeeping’.
- The Council had a few legacy systems, some of which

had already been decommissioned, and work continued to de-commission those remaining.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Chief Executive confirmed that the BEC was not easily reachable on foot which did make access difficult, however, the site itself, and the building, were ideally suited for the Authority. There were no plans to leave BEC empty or re-site the offices. There were also no plans to remove the Authority's presence from Barnstaple town centre.

(i) **Legal Services**

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

The Chief Executive addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information:

- The Freedom of Information (FOI) procedure was being streamlined.
- The Data Protection Officer was looking at data sharing procedures to improve efficiency. This may be achieved by developing the Customer Relations Management (CRM) system currently in use.
- The Authority had acted on behalf of Parish Councils previously to assist with income recovery issues.

(j) **Operational Services**

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for Operational Services (previously circulated).

The Operational Services Service Manager addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information:

- The disposal of dog waste was recharged to the Parishes for the service. There was no recharge for litter collections.
- There were approximately 800 households receiving assisted collections. Any missed assisted collections were given priority over non-assisted when organising collections.
- To reduce the possible infection rate of any incidences of Covid among the collection teams, the teams worked in bubbles and if any of those staff members were absent the teams worked with reduced numbers.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Service

Manager advised of the following:

- A consultation may need to be carried out if the Authority considered charging the public to use public conveniences.
- The number of agency staff being used had decreased substantially. Eighteen had been employed as permanent staff members. If agency staff were used they were also subject to 'covid bubbles' whilst at work.
- 'Task and Finish' had been introduced to avoid the number of staff waiting at BEC and ultimately reduce head count in the building. It would be reassessed as and when the pandemic situation changed.

The Chief Executive advised the Committee that:

- There needed to be equity between recycling and black-bin crews as previously it had been easier for black-bin crews to finish earlier. The introduction of the blue-box recycling had reduced the time taken by the recycling crews.
- The Operational Services' plan met corporate priorities 2 and 3 as detailed at the top of the plan. Priority 3 was the Environment. There were plans to improve the fleet and process hall which would help to improve the services further.

In response to questions from Members (non-Committee Members), the Service Manager advised of the following:

- Litter-picking equipment was available for use by community and residents' groups. If the litter collected by such groups was sorted prior to collection by the teams it could be sorted as other recycling would be. If it was collected and presented in mixed black bags it would be treated as non-recyclable waste.
- It was anticipated that any equipment installed in the process hall in future would be 'future-proofed' and may be able to process items such as tetra-pacs.

The Committee wished to thank the Operational Services Team for all of their hard work throughout the pandemic and their efforts to maintain the service. It was noted that they had been willing to adapt and had been flexible with their attitudes to the challenges they faced.

(k) **Parks, Leisure and Culture**

The Committee discussed the Service Plan for Parks, Leisure

and Culture (previously circulated).

The Contracts Delivery Manager addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information:

- The project at Castle Mound had been delayed due to an issue between the funders and English Heritage. This had since been resolved and this phase of the project was now complete.
- The team were looking at additional methods to improve the Castle Mound area. The Manager advised that it would not be possible to site a replica castle on the mound itself as it was a scheduled ancient monument.
- The idea to locate a graphic of the castle on a window at the library (which would show the castle in place on the mound when viewed from within the library) was being considered.
- A replica/model castle could be displayed behind Castle Lodge as part of a play area. This was one of many ideas which had been put forward.
- The Leisure Centre project had suffered some minor delays but was now only one week behind schedule. The foundations had been laid and the steel frame was due to be installed this month (January 2021).
- The works to increasing meadow grass areas were underway.
- To date, most of the Park's Team's efforts had been concentrated on the transition from a contracted to "in house" service. Initially this had been focused on sourcing equipment and vehicles and transferring employees over to North Devon Council from Tivoli LTD. Some conversion works had been undertaken to one of the sorting sheds at BEC in order to house the incoming Grounds Maintenance operation. When the new in-house service was established it would be possible to consider taking on external contracts on behalf of other agencies and generate an income stream for the service.
- The Authority was working with other agencies to increase biodiversity in the area using planting schemes on small pockets of land owned by the Authority.

The Chief Executive advised that 23,500 trees would be planted as part of the "Yeo Valley Woodland Extension" project.

In response to a questions from Councillor Knight, the Contracts Delivery Manager advised of the following:

- Local subcontractors have been used for works previously. Using in-house staff would have provided greater flexibility. Procurement and costs would have to be considered in any decisions made.

(l) **Place**

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

The Head of Place addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information:

- The Authority had been provisionally approved for an award of £6.5 million from the Future High Street fund. The original application had been for £9.4 million and a reviewed budget plan had been requested to show how the reduced award amount would be spent. Over 100 Local Authorities had applied, of which 72 were successful and of those only 15 were awarded the amount they requested.
- The Five Year Land Supply was closely linked with the Joint Local Plan with Torridge District Council (TDC). It had been agreed that the two Authorities would continue to work together. A new framework document was being drawn up. Land owners and developers had been contacted to seek clarity regarding their plans and expected build-out dates. The Inspector, on appeal at TDC, had stated that the information previously obtained had not been robust, hence the additional work to re-examine those dates.
- Zoning issue had come about following the consultation and the Government's decision was not yet known. The Government had already changed its calculations using an algorithm.
- The Economic Development plan had been put on hold due to Covid 19 and was being re-evaluated based on the new circumstances.
- The Ilfracombe Town Plan: work was being undertaken with Team Devon and the LEP on plans for a number of settlements across Devon. Ilfracombe was viewed as a priority.
- Environmental Management System – working to ISO guidelines/British standards to create a database.
- An updated Service Plan would include the Climate Action Team (CAT) group work.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Place advised of the following:

- A first draft for the job specification for the Climate Change Officer post had been passed to TDC's Climate Action Team for consideration. TDC had approved the recruitment of a full-time permanent officer whereas NDC had wanted the post to be temporary initially.
- It was not anticipated that the Authority would be required to provide financial 'top-up' the shortfall from the Future High Street award.
- The drawings published as part of the future High Street bid were artist's impressions and not based on exact plans and any planning applications would still need to be submitted and (hopefully) approved as any other applications would. The Authority wished to see a variety of business sectors in any redeveloped areas and would adopt the role of curator for the areas. This included the Pannier Market and Butchers Row area.
- The current Local Plan had to be reviewed every five years but a system had been proposed which would result in this to be carried out every three years.
- The Authority continued to work with TDC as the areas combined and were integrated geographically and it 'made sense' economically. Although there was a Government White Paper which was reviewing boundaries in Somerset there was nothing relevant to Northern Devon.
- The Authority had an Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) which would be available shortly. The schedule would provide clarity regarding what was expected in each area, where Section 106 (s106) funds had been allocated and what had been delivered. The IFS was required to be submitted to the Government. It would first be presented to the Senior Management Team (SMT).
- The IFS was part of the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) legislation.
- Work was ongoing by the Planning team to provide a facility by which Members could access s106 information.
- The Barnstaple in Bloom campaign had been well supported in the past by local traders and the community.

The Chief Executive confirmed that:

- The White Paper did cover Somerset and two other areas (not Northern Devon) and there were no other incentives to seeking re-organisation during the current Parliament.

- The Authority had not repaid any s106 payments back to a developer for five years.
- The post of Climate Action Officer would be shared with TDC as both Districts shared the same issues. The matter of whether the post would be permanent or temporary was to be resolved.

(m) **Resources**

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

The Head of Resources addressed the Committee and advised of the following additional information:

- The new actions included the review of the Council Tax Support Scheme. This was a localised scheme which had seen an increase on demand for the financial support it provided. The scheme had been reviewed in line with Government guidance. A consultation had been carried out. The report had already been presented to Strategy and Resources Committee and would be going to Full Council on 13th January 2021.
- The Payroll and HR systems had previously required information to be input into each systems separately. The new system was integrated and required information to be input once. Staff could also view the information in relation to their own personal record and view payslips online. Therefore reducing the need to post 400 payslips each month. Reducing paper use and postage costs.
- The potential future relocation of the Ilfracombe Harbour office to the Cove area would help to regenerate that area and provide a more central location for running the Harbour and the proposed Water-sports Centre. This could allow the existing premises to be used for potential new businesses and income generation.
- A marine training centre could be run from the existing harbour office.

RESOLVED that the Service Plans be noted.

79. WORK PROGRAMME 2020-2021

The Committee considered the Work Programme 2020-021 (circulated previously).

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

Chair

The meeting ended at 1.09 pm

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