

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Strategy and Resources Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Monday, 6th September, 2021 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Worden (Chair)

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

Officers:

Chief Executive, Service Lead Housing Advice and Homelessness, Solicitor and Data Protection Officer, Head of Environmental Enhancement, Head of Planning, Housing and Health and Accountancy Services Manager

Also Present:

Councillors D. Spear and Mack

56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

57. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 AUGUST 2021 (ATTACHED).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 August 2021 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

(a) Consultation on the powers of the Police and Crime Commissioner

The Chief Executive reported the receipt of a letter on 2 September 2021 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government regarding consultation of the powers of the Police and Crime Commissioner. Consultation was being undertaken on two options:

- (1) Police and Crime Commissioner to have a wider functional power of competence
- (2) Police and Crime Commissioner to have a general power of competence, as held by Local Authorities

He advised the Committee that the consultation closed on 27 October 2021. He had sought agreement from Group Leaders for the consultation response to be considered at the next meeting of the Committee on 4 October 2021. A copy of the email would be forwarded to Members.

(b) Informal Briefing

The Chair advised Members that an informal briefing would be held immediately following the conclusion of the formal Committee meeting.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS.

The following declarations of interest were announced:

Councillor Lofthouse – Item 9 personal interest as a trustee of the Bridge Trust

Councillor Lane – Item 9 personal interest as a private landlord

Councillor L. Spear - Item 9 personal interest as a private landlord

Councillor Prowse - Item 9 personal interest as a private landlord

Councillor Yabsley - Item 9 personal interest as a private landlord

60. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT QUARTER 1 2021/22

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive (circulated previously) regarding the Performance and Financial Management for Quarter 1 of 2021/22.

The Accountancy Services Manager highlighted the following:

- The revenue budget for 2021/22 was approved at Council on 24th February 2021 at £13,639,000.
- As at 30 June 2021, the latest forecast net budget was £13,630,000, which produced a forecast budget surplus of £9,000. Details were shown in “Appendix A – Variations in the Revenue Budget”
- There was still pressure on the 2021/22 budget due to the Covid-19 pandemic with continued additional costs being incurred and forecast decline in core income sources.
- Included within the approved budget a government grant had been factored in relation to Covid-19 pressures of £536,710 and also budgeted for £375,000 of additional costs and reduced income, these had already been incorporated into Appendix A along with the latest forecast for each service area.
- The grant of £536,710 had been approved and received and it was also anticipated that £80,000 re-imbursment would be received for Quarter 1 loss of Sales, Fees and charges, from the continued Government 75% income reimbursement scheme. This was an estimate as the scheme was extended to include the period April to June 2021 only.

- At the end of 2020/21 NDC placed £375,000 into a Covid Budget management reserve to help mitigate any further adverse variances due to the pandemic in 2021/22, this future protection was still available if required.
- As at 31 March 2021 the Collection Fund reserve balance was £9,810,252.
- “Appendix B – Movement in reserves and Balances” detailed the movements to and from earmarked reserves in 2021/22.
- Full details of the Strategic Contingency Reserve movements and commitments were detailed in “Appendix C – Strategic Contingency Reserve”.
- The 2021/22 Capital Programme was detailed in “Appendix D – Capital Programme 2021/22”.
- The Budget and Financial Framework report to Full Council on 24 February 2021 outlined the Capital Programme for the 2021/22 financial year of £22,419,916. Project underspend of £917,121 were brought forward from 2020/21 year and further variations of £1,379,087 were approved as part of the performance and financial management report to Strategy and Resources Committee, to produce a revised 2021/22 Capital Programme of £24,716,124.
- Overall variations of £99,978 proposed to the 2021/22 Capital Programme were detailed in paragraph 4.4.3 of the report.
- The overall Capital Programme for 2021/22 to 2024/25 was £37,135,687 and detailed in paragraph 4.4.6 of the report.
- The Programme of £37,135,687 was funded by Capital Receipts/Borrowing (£18,866,483), External Grants and Contributions (£16,042,616) and Reserves (£2,226,588).
- Release of Funds for 2021/22 Capital Programme as detailed in paragraph 4.4.10 of the report.
- Treasury Management as detailed in paragraph 4.5 of the report.
- Debt Management as detailed in paragraph 4.6 of the report.
- General Debtors as detailed in paragraph 4.7 of the report.

In response to questions, the Accountancy Services Manager advised the following:

- The figures in red in Appendix A were better than forecast and the figures in black were worse than forecast. The Car Parks Pay and Display income forecast was down by £225,000.
- A breakdown of the figures in Appendix A would be circulated to the Committee.
- The total surplus of £9,000 in Appendix A was the forecast for the whole of the financial year and took into account the additional Government grant which would be received for loss of sales, fees and charges.
- The Accountant for the CCTV service was in the process of discussing the arrangements for the recovery of CCTV income with the Town Centre, Pannier Market and CCTV Manager.
- Acquisition of corporate property £250,000 as detailed in Appendix D was for the acquisition of the property at Boutport Street as part of the High Street fund.
- There was a slight reduction in the levels of collections of Business Rates and Council Tax, which was due to Covid 19. Following consultation with the Revenues and Benefits Manager he would provide Members with an update

on the potential financial impact of Covid 19 on the collection of Business Rates and Council Tax on this year and future financial years.

- Clarification would be sought from the Revenues and Benefits Manager regarding no write off for Quarter 1. It was understood that there had been no write offs as there had been a change in the way that debts were being collected as a result of Covid 19.

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

- The vehicle contract would commence on 1 October 2021.
- In relation to the reduction in car park income, the Government 75% income reimbursement scheme ended in June 2021.

The Committee thanked Officers for their hard work in achieving the current financial position.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the actions being taken to ensure that performance was at the desired level be noted;
- (b) That the contributions to/from earmarked reserves be approved as detailed in section 4.2 of the report;
- (c) That the movement on the Strategic Contingency Reserve as detailed in section 4.3 of the report be noted.
- (d) That funds be released for the capital schemes listed in section 4.4.10 of the report;
- (e) That the sections dealing with Treasury Management (section 4.5 of the report), and Debt Management (sections 4.6 and 4.7 of the report) be noted.

RECOMMENDED:

- (f) That Council approve the variations to the Capital Programme 2021/22 to 2024/25 as detailed in section 4.4.3 of the report.

61. TARKA LEISURE CENTRE UPDATE

The Committee received an update from the Head of Environmental Enhancement regarding the Tarka Leisure Centre project. He highlighted the following:

- Since the last update to the Committee in July 2021, the project was still just 1 week behind schedule for completion in April 2022.
- Monthly project team meetings were held, where target dates were reviewed and challenged. Assurances had been given by the contractor that the works would be completed by April 2022.
- If there was a delay in completion, this would be an issue for Parkwood.
- The project was now entering a phase of large pay outs being made to the contractor and costs would now start to increase to around £1m per month as move towards the end of the project.
- Both swimming pool tanks had been filled and water tested. There had been minor leaks in the learner pool, but these had now been fixed.

- Works were now commencing on back filling around the tank.
- Stud work was now being constructed internally showing the layout of the building.
- A meeting would be taking place with the Showmen on site this week to discuss the arrangements for the fair which was taking place next week. The fair would be held on a smaller area around the new leisure centre due to the Covid testing centre remaining.

In response to questions, the Head of Environmental Enhancement advised the following:

- Whilst the fair was being held the majority of external work would cease and internal works would be carried out.
- The contractor had levelled the site to enable the heavy vehicles for the fair to get to the area.
- The scope of the project did not include improvements to highways apart from the reprioritisation of the car park.
- Parkwood had not made any further requests for financial assistance from the Council. Parts of the leisure contract were up and running and performing well such as Tarka Tennis and the all weather pitch.

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

- That discussions would be held with the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration regarding the areas of highway which had not been adopted at Seven Brethren.

The Committee thanked the Head of Environmental Enhancement and the project team for their work to date on the project.

62. SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN - UPDATE

The Committee received an update by the Service Lead for Housing Advice and Homeless regarding the situation in Afghanistan.

The Service Lead for Housing Advice and Homeless highlighted the following:

- A report had been presented to the Committee in July 2021 regarding the relocation of up to 2 households as part of the Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme. This scheme was for interpreters or those who had worked with the Ministry of Defence.
- 1 property had been secured to date. A new private landlord had contacted the Council and offered a 3 bedroom property at affordable rent. This property had now been put forward to Devon County Council who will forward onto South West Councils and the Home Office for approval. Devon County Council (DCC) would check the property and the Home Office would match individuals to the property. North Devon Council and Teignbridge Council were the only Councils to put forward properties to the Home Office.
- The Council's role was to secure the properties and DCC would provide the families with the appropriate level of support. DCC was working with

Hipmack, who had a hub located in Barnstaple and history of working with refugees in the country, to put support arrangements in place for families to integrate within the community. It would be easier to integrate families into the community as the main family member would be able to speak English.

- The private landlord was looking to purchase another 3 bedroomed property which could also be used for this scheme. The Council would be working closely with the new landlord.
- This would mean that properties would not be taken out of the private rented sector pool.
- There had been a lot of positive feedback from the local communities and offers of rooms in shared houses. South West Councils had now confirmed that 1 bedroom properties could be used for couples. The Council had also been approached by other potential landlords who were currently using their properties for Air BnB and wished to help the Council with other schemes.
- It was hoped that the first family would be located within the next month and the second family would be located in the next couple of months.

In response to questions, the Service Lead for Housing Advice and Homeless advised the following:

- The Government had advised that if the rent was higher than affordable, that they would fund the difference for a period of 12 months. However this would be difficult for the families after the first 12 months to fund the difference, therefore it was important to secure affordable rent for properties.
- The Government's current priority was to accommodate those who had previously worked for the Ministry of Defence and it would then consider widening the scheme to include other refugees. The Government was also considering combining the Syrian and Afghan schemes into a single scheme.
- The Council had not yet advertised for potential landlords to come forward. The Council now had an opportunity to work with the landlords that had come forward for this scheme and other types of accommodation.
- The Royal Marine Base based at Chivenor were not currently engaging with the scheme.
- At this time, the Government had only requested Local Authorities for assistance.

The Committee requested that the Service Lead for Housing Advice and Homeless provide an update on the Afghan scheme to all Members.

63. HOUSING ISSUES WITHIN NORTH DEVON

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive (circulated previously) regarding housing issues within North Devon.

The Committee had a brief discussion regarding the difficulties currently being faced by individuals and families seeking accommodation, issues around the current housing crisis and potential actions that the Council could take as a Local Authority. The housing crisis also had an impact on the tourism and hospitality sector as staff had nowhere to live.

The Chief Executive advised that the Devon District Forum was in the process of formulating a paper to be sent to all Devon MP's next week. This paper would include the impact on the local economy. Some businesses had indicated that they would be seeking to relocate as they could not provide accommodation for staff.

In response to questions, the Chief Executive advised:

- The Council did not have a housing revenue account as it did not have a housing stock. The maximum number of properties that the Council could own was 200.
- An informal meeting of the Policy Development was in the process of being arranged on a date in October 2021. It was suggested that the Panel consist of members of the Policy Development Committee, Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and the Lead Member for Housing. Other Members could also attend. A report would then be presented to either the Policy Development Committee or Strategy and Resources Committee and then on to full Council.

RESOLVED that the Council hold an informal Panel meeting by the end of October 2021, inviting relevant organisations and individuals to make representations, with a view to preparing a set of actions and recommendations.

64. RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON CHANGES TO LINK SERVICES IN NORTH DEVON

The Chief Executive advised the Committee that Devon County Council was currently undertaking consultation on the proposed changes to the North Devon Link Services and that the consultation was due to close shortly. He advised the Committee of the following:

- Devon County Council provided North Devon Link Service centres in Bideford, Holsworthy, Ilfracombe and Barnstaple. Since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, these centres had been closed.
- The consultation proposed that the service was redesigned from a buildings based service to one that works with people in their community to address their needs and enable them to live as independently as possible.
- The consultation was primarily targeted at individuals who used the service.
- The consultation had gained a lot publicity.
- It was suggested that Members may wish to submit their own response as part of the consultation.

RESOLVED that the Chief Executive be instructed to write to Devon County Council:

- (a) objecting to the changes proposed to the North Devon Link Service highlighting that the physical centres had provided a lifeline during the Coronavirus pandemic and that the closure was counterproductive on the health and Police services; and
- (b) requesting that the matter be referred to the Devon County Council Health and Wellbeing Committee for consideration.

65. DOG STRATEGY AND LITTER STRATEGY

The Committee considered recommendation 5 from the Policy Development Committee on 27 May 2021 regarding the Dog Strategy and Litter Strategy.

The Committee noted that an item had been included on the agenda for the Policy Development Committee meeting on 9 September 2021 and it had been recommended that a Task Team be appointed to undertake a strategic review of the litter bin and dog bin strategy.

The Chief Executive advised the Committee that the Litter Working Group had already been set up and would be undertaking a strategic review of the litter bin and dog bin strategy and therefore there was no requirement to establish a separate task team.

RESOLVED that recommendation 5 from the Policy Development Committee on 27 May 2021 regarding the Dog Strategy and Litter Strategy be referred to the Litter Working Group for consideration.

66. URGENT DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Committee noted the urgent decisions that had been made by the Chief Executive in accordance with paragraph 3.48, Annex 2, part 3 of the Constitution (circulated previously) regarding the provision of managing agents required for the running of a strategic asset being purchase in North Devon.

Chair

The meeting ended at 11.52 am

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