

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Building Control Joint Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Thursday, 8th July, 2021 at 9.30 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Yabsley (Chair)

Councillors Chesterton, Deed and Tucker

Officers:

Building Control Manager, Accountancy Services Manager and Solicitor and Data Protection Officer

Also Present:

Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration (Mid Devon District Council), Corporate Manager for Finance (Mid Devon District Council) and Accountant (Mid Devon District Council).

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR 2021/22.

RESOLVED that Councillor Yabsley be appointed Chairman of the Joint Committee for a period of one year from date of appointment.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR 2021/22

RESOLVED that Councillor Deed be appointed Vice Chairman of the Joint Committee for a period of one year from date of appointment.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

4. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11TH FEBRUARY 2021 (ATTACHED)

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th February 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Councillor Deed abstained from voting, as he was not present at the meeting.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

6. 2020/21 BUILDING CONTROL PARTNERSHIP TRADING ACCOUNT. REPORT BY NORTH DEVON COUNCIL HEAD OF RESOURCES

The Joint Committee considered a report by Report by North Devon Council Head of Resources (circulated previously) regarding the 2020/21 Building Control Partnership Trading Account.

The Accountancy Services manager (NDC), gave the Committee the following summary:

- Section one of the trading account showed the budget for each Council.
- Section two showed the actuals expenditure and income.
- Section three showed the percentage split of trade income between the two authorities, with the trading position for North Devon Council at £46K and Mid Devon District Council at 24K.

He added that there was underspend on the supplies and services budget of £15k together with same amount for the job retention scheme. This gave a surplus saving for North Devon Council of approximately £30K.

In response to a question regarding the income compensation scheme, the Accountancy Services Manager advised that there was a small surplus balance in the trading account, which the Council could utilise if required. The Corporate Manager for Finance at Mid Devon District Council added that there was also a small provision set aside in their budget.

The Committee noted the Building Control Partnership Trading Account 2020-21 4th Quarter.

7. BUILDING CONTROL BUSINESS UPDATE. REPORT BY BUILDING CONTROL MANAGER (ATTACHED).

The Joint Committee considered a report by the Building Control Manager (circulated previously) regarding the Building Control Business update.

The Building Control Manager advised that workloads had remained high and there appeared to be a shift in the ratio of work between North and Mid Devon to approximately 50:50 rather than the 60:40 split previously seen. He added that this was due to an increase in the general volume of work in each area of the service rather than any large projects or change in the market share. There was a distortion in workloads within individual teams and this was exacerbated by technical issues related to the reporting module, which delayed the use of reports to identify the issue

and contributed to a reduction in the Performance Indicators (PIs). The resources were now being redistributed with a member of the Surveying team transferring across the Mid Devon boarder to balance the workloads of the teams.

He explained that the backlog in the listing of cases for the Magistrates Court appeared to easing, which enabled the Councils to move ahead with actions under Section 77. There has been one complaint escalated to Stage 2 regarding lack of action in relation to an empty derelict property at Croyde. This complaint had now been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant. The Technical Support Team Leader was due to retire in January 2022 and to enable sufficient resource planning, had formally resigned with six months' notice. This had enabled the post to be advertised internally and an existing Technical Support Officer had been appointed.

In response to a question regarding the increased workload on the Mid Devon side of the business. The Building Control Manager advised that the majority of the work, was located within the south east boarder, with Cullumpton and Credition being a wealthy area, which could also be seen in the figures and was driving the domestic market in terms of housing.

In response to a further question regarding the surge in house prices together with the rising cost of building materials and the supply and demand implications. The Building Control Manager advised that because the surge in prices was domestically driven, the windfall generated by Covid in the housing market could stop at any time and could have an impact on the business in the future. He explained that there was a requirement to address the resources for balance.

8. SERVICE PLAN PRIORITIES.

The Joint Committee considered a report by the Building Control Manager (circulated previously) regarding the Service Plan Priorities.

The Building Control Manager advised that the competency of all Surveyors to undertake their role must be validated in order for them to be registered with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) and become a licensed Building Inspector. He added that the validation process was expected to dominate the next 12 months, with registration applications to the BSR opening from 22nd October 2022. As yet it was still unclear as to the nature of the process validation for domestic and commercial Surveyors together with the immediate consequences of failure to register or the potential impact on new recruits.

He explained that there would be a significant impact on front line resources together with financial implications due to the time needed to prepare and support staff through the process. There was also a requirement to undertake a review of job descriptions and potential job evaluation, which would be further complicated by the differing approaches by the two Local Authorities and the need to maintain equity and fairness.

In response to a question regarding how the joint Committee could support the process, the Accountancy Services Manager advised that the service plan was a key element to ensuring that all relevant funding was secured from the existing reserves.

In response to a further question in relation to resources, the Building Control Manager advised that there was a long term shortage of Building Control officers and not enough professionals available to undertake the work. He added that Human Resources were due to review the job descriptions and roles as part of a major review of the Building Control service to ensure that employees were retained.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the Chief Executive Officers of both Councils jointly approach the appropriate Government Ministers and MPs to express their concerns in relation to Councils registering with the BSR.

9. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS. REPORT BY THE BUILDING CONTROL MANAGER (ATTACHED).

The Joint Committee considered a report by the Building Control Manager (circulated previously) regarding Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

The Building Control Manager advised that Building Regulation applications considered within three weeks had slipped below target for the first time for the first part of quarter one, however, the target was now 90%. The Market share for number of applications was 77% for quarter three.

In response to a question regarding the Councils ability to retain business from larger customers, the Building Control Manager advised that the Councils were still competitive and that they were also being commissioned for work from smaller companies, which was encouraging. He added that the first quarter of 2021/22 had an estimated figure of 360 applications received.

RESOLVED, that the report be noted.

10. DATES AND LOCATIONS OF FUTURE MEETINGS. TO AGREE DATES AND LOCATIONS OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR 2021/22.

The Joint Committee considered the scheduled dates of future meetings (circulated previously).

In response to a question regarding the meaning of "Chairman's partner authority" in the note under item 12 on the agenda, the Solicitor and Data Protection Officer advised that it meant the "authority of the Chairman".

He added that the Constitution of the Joint Committee provides that the meetings of the Joint Committee shall be held at the offices of the Member appointed as the Chair, unless otherwise agreed by the Joint Committee, which to date had been agreed to be held at the Woodlands Enterprise Centre, South Molton.

However, to ensure that meetings were held safely in line with Covid 19 guidelines and social distancing rules, the existing venue was not sufficient in size to allow for safe social distancing. As the Chair of the Joint Committee for the forthcoming year was a North Devon Councillor, it had been agreed that meetings be held the venue had reverted to being North Devon Council owned premises at Brynsworthy Environment Centre. Where there was a designated Committee room, which remained permanently set up to safely manage all face to face meetings going forward.

Chair

The meeting ended at 10.28 am