

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Building Control Joint Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Thursday, 4th November, 2021 at 9.30 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Yabsley (Chair)

Councillors Chesterton, Deed and Tucker

Officers:

Head of Planning, Housing and Health, Building Control Manager, Accountancy Services Manager and Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Also Present:

Director of Place (Mid Devon District Council) and Accountant (Mid Devon District Council).

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Paul Deal, Mid Devon District Council.

12. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8TH JULY 2021 (ATTACHED)

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

14. 2021/22 Q2 FORECAST BUILDING CONTROL PARTNERSHIP TRADING ACCOUNT

The Joint Committee considered a report by North Devon Council Head of Resources (circulated previously) regarding the 2021/22 Q2 Forecast Building Control Partnership Trading Account.

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

- Column one of the trading account showed the budget for each Council.
- Column two showed the actuals expenditure and income.

- Column three showed the percentage split of trade income between the two authorities, with the trading position for North Devon Council at 56% and Mid Devon District Council at 43%.

He added that for revenue monitoring purposes shown in the reconciliation table there was a forecast surplus of £11K for North Devon Council and £12K for Mid Devon District Council.

He added that since the publication of the agenda, there had been an adjustment to the Q2 forecast figures as officers hadn't removed the depreciation costs for the IT system and that the revised figures would be circulated to the Joint Committee following the meeting. The actuals column three trading figures for both authorities were now as follows:

- North Devon Council - £1,097.
- Mid Devon District Council - £832.

RESOLVED, that the report and the revision to the figures be noted.

15. BUILDING CONTROL BUSINESS UPDATE

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 he had just returned from sick leave, so the report was prepared whilst he was unwell and as a result was not as detailed as it would usually be.

He explained that the workload had reduced in July and August of 2021 and recovered in September before reducing again in October. However, the service was moving a long on budget during a slowness in the industry.

Individual officer workloads remained high despite a reduction in applications in July and August as the decrease took time to filter through to impact day to day activity.

One of the team's surveyors retired in October 2021 and the vacancy had been filled via the appointment of the trainee, who had recently completed their apprenticeship and obtained a first class honours degree in Public Service Building Control.

There had been some staffing issues due to sickness, with four surveyors within a team of nine having contracted Covid-19 on separate occasions. However, with all staff currently working from home there had been no risks to other members of staff and those affected were able to work from home once well enough to do so.

As previously reported there was an application to the Magistrates Court for an order under Section 77 for the building Act regarding Rowan Cottage, Chittlehampton, which was heard and granted by the Magistrate on 28th September 2021. The authority was now waiting to see if the owner will take action.

As anticipated with the transition to the new regime for Building Control under the Building Safety Regulator, Approved Inspectors were reviewing their operations and cleaning up their books. As a result the service was experiencing an increase in Initial Notice cancellations and reversions as Approved Inspectors return projects to the Local Authority that they were not able to bring to a satisfactory completion.

In addition, Construction Industry Council Approved Inspector Register (CICAIR) who were currently responsible for monitoring Approved Inspectors had withdrawn approval of Celtech Consultancy Ltd and Campagna Ltd following their failure to meet the required standards during re-approval audit of their systems and processes. He advised that their licences would be valid until April 2022 to enable them to wind down their operations in a timely manner. He explained that the service had already received Initial Notice cancellations from Celtech Consultancy Ltd, who had some existing projects in that area.

The Building Control Manager was currently exploring options to address the additional work and advised that one way to mitigate the situation would be to recruit two trainees to the service instead of one.

In response to a question regarding the timescale for enforcement action if the owner does not respond regarding Rowan Cottage, Chittlehampton. The Building Control Manager advised that there was some confusion in the lead up to the hearing in that the defendant was non-responsive. Officers considered asking for an adjournment. However, the decision was taken not to and the North Devon Council's solicitor had written to the court to ascertain how long the authority should wait prior to taking any further action, adding that it was usually 60 days. Reimbursement of the Council's expenses would then be sought from the defendant.

In response to a question regarding the opportunity to employ additional trainees from Petroc, the Building Control Manager advised that he would need to have a separate conversation with the Head of Planning, Housing and Health in relation to the suggestion as previous attempts to recruit trainees from Petroc had seen no applications. He added that the most successful recruitment in previous years had been via applicants that were already working within the industry.

Councillor Deed advised that he had attended the graduation event at Petroc recently and that the Human Resources Director would be happy to discuss trainee opportunities with the Council.

In response to a suggestion regarding the importance of establishing a working relationship with Petroc together with the suggestion that officers visit the college to explain the building control process, the Building Control Manager advised that he would be happy to be involved in such a process.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health added that at the current time, there was a challenge for technical roles across the board. He explained that there was a requirement to develop a wider strategy to recruit officers into service areas such as Building Control, Planning, Environmental Health and Housing. He added that the government were incentivising councils to recruit and train people through the government funded graduate scheme. The scheme allowed people to gain

qualifications, which would be funded by the Council and then required to work for the Council for a period of time following their qualification or they would be required to repay the fees.

The Building Control Manager advised that trainees required a lot of time investment, which was dependent on the level at which they were brought to the role, which inevitably put additional pressure on an already stretched service.

The Director of Place, Mid Devon District Council echoed the comments made by the Head of Planning, Housing and Health, North Devon Council and welcomed the opportunity to explore how to address resources going forward. He added that from his previous experiences with Petroc that work experience placements had been very successful in allowing students to gain an insight into roles within the Building Control service.

The Joint Committee discussed the following points:

- The unfortunate situation regarding Building Inspectors losing their licence but also acknowledged the importance of ensuring that residents live in properties that were built to a safe and satisfactory standard.
- The ongoing issue with the supply of building materials.
- The aspirations to raise the standards with the risk being the speed of change together with the lack of available resources to inspect buildings.
- The major shortage of Building Inspectors with only 3,500 currently working within the UK.
- Agreed that there was a requirement to explore all avenues of recruitment potential.

RESOLVED, that the report be noted.

The Joint Committee expressed its congratulations to the member of staff on their achievement.

16. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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

The Building Control Manager advised that the KPIs for the service were in a steady position.

He provided an update in relation to the following areas:

- The number of Building Regulation applications that were examined within a three week period was at 98% against a target of 95%.
- The average time to first response in days was 7.5 against a target of 10.
- Since the report was published, the figures for October had been produced and they showed a market share for the number of applications was 83%

against a target of 75% and the Joint Committee was advised that the figure was the highest ever seen.

- The market share for new housing completions was 39% against a target of 40%.
- The financial position indicated a surplus of £81K.
- The number of applications received had reduced to 105 in October 2021.

In response to a question regarding a slow in the housing market, the Building Control Manager advised that housing completions had slowed recently.

In response to a further question regarding the service's financial position, the Building Control Manager advised that many Councils were generating an income from their Building Control service. He added that when we face another recession there will be difficult years and the cost of the service delivery would increase.

RESOLVED, that the report be noted.

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

The Joint Committee noted the date of the next meeting, which was scheduled to be held on Thursday 10th February 2022.

Chair

The meeting ended at 10.16 am