

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Building Control Joint Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Thursday, 12th May, 2022 at 9.30 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Deed (Chair)

Councillors Tucker and Yabsley

Officers:

Head of Planning, Housing and Health and Accountancy Services
Manager (North Devon Council).

Also Present:

Head of Place – Mid Devon District Council, Principle Building
Surveyor - North Devon Council and Corporate Manager for Finance
(Mid Devon District Council) and Accountant - Mid Devon District
Council (Virtually).

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR 2022/23

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

Councillor Deed took the Chair and thanked Councillor Yabsley from North Devon Council for his service to the Joint Committee as Chair for the year 2021/22.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR FOR 2022/23.

The Chair requested clarification regarding the appointment of Vice Chair and whether the Member appointed should be a Member from North Devon Council or Mid Devon District Council.

RESOLVED, that the appointment of the position of Vice Chair be deferred until the next meeting.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Chesterton from Mid Devon District Council.

4. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10TH FEBRUARY 2022 (ATTACHED)

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 10th February 2022 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendments:

Minute 21, paragraph six, which should state:

- The Chair added that “he” not “she”.

Minute 22, page three bullet point two, there was a typographical error, which should say:

- This would be further exacerbated not “exasperated”.

In response an update regarding staff morale, the Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that he would address the issue of staff morale in his presentation as part of the last item on the agenda.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest announced.

6. 2021/22 BUILDING CONTROL PARTNERSHIP TRADING ACCOUNT QUARTER 4.

The Joint Committee considered a report by North Devon Council Accountancy Services Manager (circulated previously) regarding the 2021/22 Q3 Forecast Building Control Partnership Trading Account.

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

- Section one of the trading account showed the yearly budget for each Council.
- Section two showed the actuals for the year.
- Section three showed the percentage split of trade income between the two authorities, with the trading position for North Devon at 58.43% for North Devon Council and 41.57% for Mid Devon District Council.

The surplus for the 12 month period was £32K for North Devon Council and £31K for Mid Devon District Council.

In response to a question regarding how the partnership managed the surplus, the Accountancy Services Manager advised that in previous years the surplus have been put into the reserves and that it was a decision for each authority to decide how to manage the surplus funds. The Head of Planning, Housing and Health for North

Devon Council advised that the surplus should be retained for the future requirements and financial challenges of the service.

The Principle Building Surveyor for North Devon Council provided an update in relation to the Building Control Business update (circulated separately as a supplement).

He advised that the key performance data indicated that the Partnership had had another strong performance for the financial year. The overall market share had dropped slightly to 79% for quarter four, which gave an average of 80% market share across the year 2021/2022. This level of market share was high for a local authority and could only be maintained if the service was able to continue to provide service at a level that customers expect. The workload had remained high for individuals since the retirement of one of the Building Control Surveyors in September 2021. Covid had impacted on already reduced resources and despite continuing to work remotely, in the last quarter of 2021/22, four of the surveying staff contracted Covid and had time off sick and been self-isolating at home. To date, no replacement had been appointed for the vacant Building Control Manager's post which had led to significant pressure being placed on the Technical Support Team Leader and the two Principle Surveyors. Validation Training Programme Level 5 and 6 Surveyor. Impact on the Building Control resource was already being felt with Level 5 Surveyor training in progress for one of the Building Control Surveying Team members in North Devon. Training required the Surveyor to attend an online full learning day every Wednesday for 10 weeks. In June, the remaining Surveying Staff would be commencing validation training for Level 5 and 6 Fire Safety Training and Level 6 Enforcement Training. The details of this training were yet to be confirmed but it was understood each of the surveyors would be required to attend an online session for three hours a week (during the working day) on a Wednesday or Friday for a period of 20 weeks.

He explained that an additional 20 hour Technical Support Staff post had been advertised. However, a suitable candidate was not found. In June 2022, there were changes being introduced to Approved Document F, which related to the requirements for ventilation to buildings and a new Approved Document S was being introduced, this would require Electric Charging points to be provided for new dwellings. However, the most significant changes to report were those being introduced to Approved Document L, which related to Conservation of Fuel and Power.

As with previous changes to the requirements, he added that the Government had advised on the transitional provisions proposed. The transitional provisions allowed an applicant to commence work on an application before 15th June 2023 and use the current standard as long as that application had been deposited before 15th June 2022. Applications deposited on or after 15th June 2022 would need to comply with the new standard. Applications deposited before 15th June 2022, but had not commence by 15th June 2023 would have to meet the new standard.

In response to a question, the Principle Building Surveyor for North Devon Council advised that there was currently no pressure from the private sector with regard to the removal of licences. The Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that

assurance would be given in relation to the current operating model as part of the next item.

The Chair thanked the Principle Building Surveyor for North Devon Council for his update.

7. **LOCAL AUTHORITY BUILDING CONTROL (LABC).
PRESENTATION BY THE HEAD OF PLANNING, HOUSING AND
HEALTH.**

The Joint Committee received a presentation from the Head of Planning, Housing and Health regarding the Local Authority Building Control (LABC) Event to cascade key messages from the Local Authority Briefing event held in Bridgwater on 6th April 2022.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised that a copy of the presentation would be made available after the meeting.

He drew the Joint Committee's attention to the following:

- The Building Safety Regulator, which covered the guidance together with the three core aims, specific responsibilities for higher risk buildings and competency requirements.
- The proposed regime.
- New legislation.
- Multi-disciplinary team with new responsibilities.
- Operational and performance standards.
- Registration of the profession.
- The challenges for local authorities, which included salary and service delivery.
- The current operating model of service had been unsuccessful in appointing a manager for the service.
- There had been similar challenges in East Devon, Somerset and Torridge areas, with most areas in the South West facing similar challenges in relation to recruitment.
- Additional resources via agency staff had been adopted in the short-term. However, whilst there was concern regarding this course of action it was right for the service in the short-term. Alternative options for the recruitment of a new Building Control Manager and Principle Surveyor would be explored further.
- The long-term plan was to increase the resilience of the service via the employment of further resources.
- The service was looking to facilitate a number of new apprentice qualifications, which could be funded by the surplus funds from the trading account.

He added that he would report back to a future meeting regarding a proposed operating model for the Joint Committee's consideration. He expressed his thanks to the Building Control service for their continued efforts to sustain the service during a very difficult time.

The Joint Committee fully acknowledged the pressures that the service was under but expressed concern regarding the frustration of existing customers when calls go unanswered.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health recognised the frustrations felt by the Joint Committee and acknowledged the challenges the service faced to recruit to all roles. However, he emphasised that the current priority was to recruit a Manager to steer the team and develop the most appropriate structure going forward.

The Principle Building Surveyor for North Devon Council added that it was vital to recruit trainees to progress through the team and that model was a good one to follow.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health for North Devon Council added that it was important to provide the joint Committee with evidence of the key issues that were currently impacting upon the service to ensure that the correct operating model was developed going forward.

8. **DATES AND LOCATIONS OF FUTURE MEETINGS. TO AGREE
DATES AND LOCATIONS OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE
COMMITTEE FOR 2022/23.**

The Joint Committee noted the scheduled dates of the meetings for 2022/23, which were scheduled to be held on the following dates:

- Thursday 7th July 2022 at 9.30am.
- Thursday 10th November 2022 at 9.30am.
- Thursday 16th February 2023 at 9.30am.

The Chair sought clarification with regard to the venue for future meetings and requested a return to the original venue of the Woodlands Enterprise Centre in South Molton.

The Joint Committee agreed that this could be an option for future meetings and that a risk assessment would need to be undertaken prior to any change to the COVID secure arrangements.

The Committee thanked officers for their continued hard work.

Chair

The meeting ended at 10.22 am

