

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Strategy and Resources Committee held in the Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Monday, 7th November, 2022 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Worden (Chair)

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

Officers:

Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, Property Manager, Service Manager (Refuse and Recycling), Head of Customer Focus, Head of Environmental Enhancement, Public Protection Manager and Housing Enabling Officer

Also Present in person:

Councillors D. Spear and Tucker

56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lofthouse and Yabsley.

57. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5TH SEPTEMBER 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2022 (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.

The Chair asked Members of the Committee to stay back after the end of the meeting for an informal briefing.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS.

The following declaration of interest was announced:

Councillor Netti Pearson declared an other registrable interest in item 12, Biclescombe Nursery Site as she was a founding member of the Ilfracombe Community Land Trust.

60. ORDER OF AGENDA

RESOLVED that to allow the member of the public and external contractor to be able to leave the meeting that item 12, Biclescombe Nursery Site be prior to item 6, Mid-Year Treasury Management Report 2022/23 on the agenda.

61. BICLESCOMBE NURSERY SITE

The Committee considered a report by the Property Manager, (circulated previously) in respect of Biclescombe Nursery Site.

The Property Manager highlighted the following to the Committee:

- There had been a lot of input from the Housing Team.
- In September 2021 the Property Manager successfully bid for funding to allow the site to be developed for Self and Custom Build Housing.
- At that stage contract, terms with a local developer had been agreed but had not proceeded through completion and the purchaser withdrew from the acquisition.
- This site would create potentially 17 socially rented units for the town of Ilfracombe.
- The site presented development challenges with the topography of the site being most difficult due to the substantial changes in levels.
- Consideration had been given to the retention of an existing building on the site. The location of the building would make it's separation from the main site a barrier and create further difficulty to the main schemes of development. The passing of this building to the Ilfracombe Community Land Trust would discharge risks for the Council and would generate a further capital receipt.

Councillor Pearson addressed the Committee briefly on her aspirations for the site and then left the room during the consideration of this item.

Terry Elliott, member of Ilfracombe Community Land Trust addressed the committee.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive advised that any future capital receipt from this scheme could be ring fenced to replenish the Community Housing Fund initiative budget but would need to come forward as a separate report for Member decision and that decision could not be taken today.

The Chief Executive added that a report on the topic of Community Led Developments would be presented to a future meeting of the Strategy and Resources committee and could be added to that report.

The Property Manager confirmed that the units being built on the site were for socially rented tenants and not for open market sale.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the Bicclescombe Nursery Site be passed by disposal of freehold to the Ilfracombe Community Land Trust and the Community Land Trust in partnership with the chosen Registered Housing Provider for the development of Custom Build Social Housing in association with Middlemarch as facilitator;
- (b) The Community Land Trust actively lead the project to enable community development; and
- (c) The negotiation of capital receipt be carried out in conjunction with the Chief Executive.

62. MID-YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT 2022 - 23

The Committee considered a report by Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive (circulated previously) regarding the Mid-Year Treasury Management Report for 2022-23.

The Head of Governance highlighted the following:

- The Council was required through regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003 to produce a mid-year treasury report reviewing treasury management activities and the prudential and treasury indicators for 2022/23.
- Council approved the Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2022/23 on 23 February 2022.
- The underlying Treasury Management Strategy Statement, previously approved, required updating in light of economic and operational movements during the year.
- The proposed changes, as set out in 4.1 of the report, were as follows;
 - Capital Financing Requirement, original estimate of £29.3m was now revised to £25m.
 - Operational Boundary, original estimate of £24.7m was now revised to £10.5m.
 - Maturity Structure of borrowing between 12 months to 2 years – upper limit, original estimate of 60%, was now revised to 70%.
- Section 4.3 of the report provided further information on the Capital Financial Requirement and the Operational Boundary. The change to the upper borrowing limit between 12 months and 2 years would allow greater flexibility for short-term borrowing given the current interest rate forecast.
- Revised estimates for capital expenditure and the changes since the capital programme was agreed as part of the budget as detailed in paragraph 4.2 of the report.
- Changes to the capital-financing requirement as detailed in paragraph 4.3 of the report. The forecast Capital Financing Requirement had decreased by circa £4.3m from the original budget. This was due to the re-profiling of the capital programme with expenditure being slipped to future financial years for projects such as Seven Brethren redevelopment and Green Lanes capital improvements.
- The forecast external Public Works Loan Board borrowing had decreased by £13.5m from the original budget in part by the reduced capital expenditure as

above and higher yearend cash flow balance projections. Section 4.5 looked at the borrowing strategy in more detail.

- Annual Investment Strategy as detailed in paragraph 4.8 of the report. The Council held £17m of investments as at 30 September 2022 (£18m at 31 March 2022) and the investment portfolio yield for the first six months of the year was 0.59% against the benchmark 7 day SONIA of 1.19%.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That the changes to the prudential indicators be approved; and
- (b) That the report and the treasury activity be noted.

**63. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT Q2 REPORT
2022 - 23**

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, (circulated previously) regarding the Performance and Financial Management for Quarter 2 of 2022/23.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive highlighted the following:

- The revenue budget for 2022/23 was approved at Council on 23 February 2022 at £13,721,640.
- As at 30 September 2022, the latest forecast net budget was £13,681,640, which produced a forecast budget surplus of £40,000. Details were shown in “Appendix A – Variations in the Revenue Budget”.
- The original budget for 2022/23 included a forecast to achieve £250,000 worth of salary vacancy savings. The current position forecasts the Council would achieve £441,000. The additional £191,000 was due to timings of filling the capacity building posts throughout the year, which were approved as part of the original 2022/23 budget.
- Temporary Accommodation was under additional cost pressure due to the increase in homelessness cases; the in-year impact of this £200,000 forecast increase in costs had been mitigated by utilising balances from the Homelessness earmarked reserve. Whilst this alleviated the pressure this year, it does mean this one-off amount from the homelessness reserve could not be utilised for other homelessness initiatives.
- Within the joint Building Control Services, partnership with Mid Devon District Council there had been a decline in income, and due to challenges in recruiting to vacant posts, an increase in the use of agency staffing costs which had negatively impacted the trading account. The Council was now forecasting a net deficit of £67,000; this included utilising a £50,000 contribution from the Building Control reserve built up through prior year trading surpluses.
- Further to the report to Strategy and Resources Committee on 4 July 2022, which detailed the in-year inflationary pressures that the Council were likely to experience this year, most of those forecasts were still in line with the July 2022 forecast; with the exception of the potential additional employee costs from the staff pay award being negotiated which was now being predicted at a higher cost following the National Employers pay offer to the Unions.

- The largest variance, as detailed within Appendix A, was the £804,000 National pay award potential additional staffing costs over and above the £280,000 already built into the base budget; this estimate was based on the offered pay award put forward to the Unions by the National Employers pay review body for the 2022-23 year. The pay offer was based upon £1,925 per full time equivalent employee.
- Other inflationary pressures built into the forecast included additional fuel costs across the Council's fleet of £104,000 and additional energy costs of £63,000.
- The inflationary cost pressures mentioned were looking to be funded in-year through utilisation of the budget management reserve; this reserve, which was set aside to deal with fluctuations within the budget and built up over the last couple of financial years, had provided the Council with the protection needed in 2022/23. Moving forwards to future years 2023/24 onwards, the Council would not have the benefit of this level of protection and the inflationary pressures being experienced this year would continue onto the future year's budget gap previously highlighted to Members.
- The other significant in-year cost pressure that had not been included in the current figures was the award of costs claim in relation to the Yelland planning appeal; once this amount was known a report would be brought to Members detailing the award of costs amount and setting out how the Council would be funding this cost.
- As at 31 March 2022 the Collection Fund reserve balance was £5,722,000 as detailed in paragraphs 4.1.11 and 4.1.12 of the report.
- This reserve included a £4,523,000 balance that would be utilised in 2022/23 and 2023/24 to mitigate timing differences of business rate reliefs awarded in 2021/22 and an in-year £400,000 transfer into the budget management reserve to replenish this reserve balance to help mitigate future budget fluctuations, thus leaving the fund reserve with a residual balance of £800,000 protection against future volatility. This level of reserve protected the Council against a 40% share of a £2million overall Business Rates income volatility.
- At the 30 September 2022 total external borrowing was £3,000,000. This had resulted in a forecast £160,000 reduction in loan interest payments in 2022/23 and it was proposed to place this amount into a new Treasury Management reserve to mitigate against higher interest rates moving into the 2023/24 financial year.
- The recommended level of general fund balance was 5%-10% of the council's net revenue budget £686,082 to £1,372,164. The forecast general fund reserve at 31 March 2023 was £1,211,000, which was a level of 8.8%.
- "Appendix B – Movement in reserves and Balances" detailed the movements to and from earmarked reserves in 2022/23.
- A residual balance of around £30,000 from the Economic Financial Hardship earmarked reserve was being utilised to launch a Community Warm Spaces Fund. This fund was aimed at not-for-profit community groups to help them providing a warm space for members of the community to access.
- Full details of the Strategic Contingency Reserve movements and commitments were shown at "Appendix C – Strategic Contingency Reserve".
- The 2022/23 Capital Programme was detailed at "Appendix D – Capital Programme 2022/23".

- The Budget and Financial Framework report to Full Council 23 February 2022, outlined the Capital Programme for the 2022/23 financial year of £15,833,023. Project underspend of £2,031,062 was brought forward from 2021/22 year and further variations of £873,280 were approved as part of the performance and financial management report to Strategy and Resources Committee, to produce a revised 2022/23 Capital Programme of £18,737,365.
- Overall variations of £5,924,591 were proposed to the 2022/23 Capital Programme as detailed in paragraph 4.4.3 of the report.
- Actual spend on the 2022/23 Capital Programme as at 30 September 2022 was £3,502,949.
- The overall Capital Programme for 2022/23 to 2025/26 was £29,122,631 and the break down detail was shown at paragraph 4.4.7 of the report.
- A successful PAG capital bid for the Harbour infrastructure had secured external funding of £216,235. The Water Sports Centre Commercial Complex at Ilfracombe had also successfully been awarded capital budget of £177,328 which would allow the further provision of storage space for users of the Centre. This additional storage would increase usage of the Water Sports Centre and create additional financial viability for the centre associated café.
- The Programme of £29,122,631 was funded by Capital Receipts / Borrowing (£11,119,824), External Grants and Contributions (£15,259,161), and Reserves (£2,743,646).
- It was recommended that the following funds be released from the 2022/23 Capital Programme:
 - All S106 schemes approved at Strategy and Resources Committee on 5 September 2022, total £278,462.
 - Harbour Infrastructure PAG bid £430,489.
 - Water Sports Commercial Complex £177,328.
 - ICT VDI Licenses £70,000.
 - Fremington Quay River Wall repair £51,348.
 - Seven Brethren Flood Defence £1,150,000.
- 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.
 - The debt, aged 3 weeks to 6 months above, included a one off invoice for £1,150,000 raised on 8th September 2022 in relation to flood defence contributions. Without this one-off invoice, the total outstanding debt would have been £1,420,000 a reduction in aged debt of £494,000 from the previous year (reduction of 26%).
- Performance information as detailed in Appendix E of the report.

In response to a question about the drop in domestic waste and recycling figure. The Head of Environmental Enhancement advised that the service had struggled with staffing coverage. The Council's social media platforms were being used to advertise vacancies.

In response to questions, the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive advised the following:

- Information on the land ownership at the Fremington Quay site could be confirmed.
- The debtor invoice of £1,150,000 had to be raised to allow payment of the funds from the Solicitors.

- The Trade Waste service was provided by the Council so would not be shown as separate financial accounts. If there was a variation in budgeted figures then this would be reported as part of this report.
- The Building control services charging structure was being reviewed to ensure it was still competitive and covering the cost of providing the service.
- The number of agency staff being used to fill gaps in the planning team was currently three. A recruitment drive was currently underway but the market was very challenging.

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 as detailed in section 4.4.11 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 and

RECOMMENDED:

- (f) That Council approve the variations to the Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2025/26 as detailed in sections 4.4.3 of the report.

64. ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY - PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION

The Committee considered a report by the Sustainability and Climate Officer (circulated previously) regarding the Environmental Policy – Progress on Implementation.

The Head of Environmental Enhancement highlighted the following to the Committee:

- This report was a requirement of the Environment Policy's objectives, namely to regularly review and report on progress.
- Investigation was ongoing to install solar panels at Brynsworthy, Barnstaple and the Pannier Market, Barnstaple
- Further Low Carbon Skills Funding had been obtained to produce heat decarbonisation plans for Council owned and tenanted properties.
- In adapting to climate change the Local Government Association Adaptation Toolkit had been supported and an adaptation plan for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly was being developed.
- The Yeo Valley Community Woodland extension was going ahead with the planting of 19,000 trees this planting season (starting December 2022).

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

- The report was realistic in terms of what we could achieve and within the budget available.
- There was no completion date on some projects at present, due to their complexity and wide ranging scope. Lots of research and baselining had taken place over the last year and the pace of delivery would pick up now that the initial 12-month baseline had completed. The baseline gave a clear picture of what the Carbon footprint of the Council looked like and where action was needed to be taken.

RESOLVED, that the progress of the Environment Policy be noted.

65. ADOPTION OF WORKS IN DEFAULT POLICY

The Committee considered a report by the Legal Services Officer (circulated previously), regarding the Adoption of Works in Default Policy.

The Senior Solicitor highlighted the following to the Committee:

- This policy sets out the procedures officers should take if works fall into default.
- The adoption of this policy would fulfil an audit requirement to have such a policy in place.
- The policy provided information on who decided when works were in default, and the enforcement action that should be taken.
- The policy also set out at what level and how the Council would work in partnership with other bodies in terms of works in default.

RESOLVED that the Works in Default Policy be adopted.

66. ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

RESOLVED that it being 11.22 am the meeting be adjourned due to the noise disturbance outside the building.

RESOLVED that it being 11.30 am the meeting reconvene.

67. ENERGY COMPANY OBLIGATION (ECO)

The Committee considered a report by the Service Lead – Home Adaptations, Improvements and Energy Efficiency, (circulated previously) regarding the Energy Company Obligation.

The Service Lead – Home Adaptations, Improvements and Energy Efficiency highlighted the following to the Committee:

- The Government Energy Efficient Scheme started in April 2013.
- In 2017 the Local Authority Flexible Eligibility was introduced into the scheme. This allowed Councils to set their own eligibility criteria for private sector residents not in receipt of any state benefits.

- The criteria for eligibility was published in a Statement of Intent and must support vulnerable people in, or at risk of fuel poverty.
- The Council issued its first Statement of Intent in August 2018 which was amended in January 2021.
- Most declarations signed off were for insulation improvements (loft and/or cavity), first time central heating and boiler replacements.
- Since 2018 there had been 800 declarations signed off and unfortunately a significant drop during the two years of the pandemic.
- The latest version of the scheme, Energy Company Obligation 4, would run until March 2026. Its primary aim was to support low-income households to upgrade their homes and took a fabric first approach.
- One of the most significant changes in this scheme was the requirement for homes at an F or G Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating to be improved to D.
- The Energy Company Obligation 4 scheme outlined four separate routes to identify low-income and vulnerable households that could be used under the Local Authority Flexible eligibility.
- North Devon Council would initially be using Route 1 – Household Income. Households living in private tenure in band D, E, F or G homes and with a gross annual income less than £31,000, but aimed to utilise all four routes as detailed in paragraph 4.8 of the report.
- An online application form was being developed with relevant verification check processes.
- The Council would be considering charging a nominal fee for declarations signed, to be levied at the approved installer with the understanding that this cost would not be passed onto the household.
- The Council will ensure a Best Practice for trading standards around ECO Flex/other retrofit grant schemes with the signing of the Charter.

In response to questions, the Service Lead – Home Adaptations, Improvements and Energy Efficiency advised the following:

- It was not always possible to find local traders able to carry out the works.
- The Council could instruct the providers to target certain areas i.e. Victorian era properties.
- The number of declarations signed off only related to those households not eligible under ECO standard eligibility criteria and that it would be important to promote effectively the new ECO 4 scheme.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) The revised Statement of Intent, as shown in Appendix A of the report be adopted;
- (b) The Head of Planning, Housing and Health be given delegated authority to evaluate, and if relevant implement the charging for declarations signed, following consultation with the Lead Member for Housing; and

- (c) That the Lead Member for Housing be authorised to act as a signatory of the Charter – best practice for trading standards around Energy Company Obligation Flex and or other retrofit grant schemes.

68. HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING POLICY AMENDMENTS

The Committee considered a report by the Public Protection Manager (circulated previously) regarding Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy Amendments.

The Public Protection Manager highlighted the following to the Committee:

- The Licensing and Community Safety Committee at its meeting on 22 September 2022 considered the results of a public consultation exercise carried out on the proposed changes to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing policy.
- The Council received 52 responses, which were shown in full at Appendix B of the report.
- The amendments proposed as a result of the consultation responses included the following:
 - Amendment to the proposal to update vehicle age criteria, with the proposal to reduce the upper age limit for first plating to three years amended to maintaining the current five year upper age limit, but with the additional criteria of the vehicle being compliant with the Euro 6 emission standard;
 - Changes to the proposal to introduce an upper age-limit for renewal, from an age-related-criteria (10 years maximum), to an emission-related-criteria. “Vehicles must comply with the Euro 6 emission standard or above) or recognised UK equivalent)”. It was also proposed to delay the implementation of this policy point until 1 January 2026 to take account of the financial impact of Covid-19, and the current volatility in used-car prices; and
 - Similarly, for wheelchair accessible vehicles the proposal had also been amended to an emission rather than age-related-criteria. “Diesel vehicles must comply with the Euro 5 emission standard or above (or recognised UK equivalent). Petrol vehicles must comply with the Euro 4 emission standard or above (or recognised UK equivalent)”.
- In addition to the proposed amendments as a result of the consultation exercise a number of other minor amendments were being proposed for approval, as detailed in paragraph 4.6 of the report.

RESOLVED that the revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy as detailed at Appendix A of the report, be approved.

69. BRINGING THE THREE WEEKLY COLLECTIONS TRIAL TO AN END

The Committee considered a report by the Service Manager (Refuse and Recycling), (circulated previously), regarding Bringing the Three Weekly Collections Trial to an End.

The Service Manager (Refuse and Recycling) highlighted the following to the Committee:

- In 2017, the Council selected 3,500 properties (as detailed at Appendix 1 of the report) to take part in a three-weekly recycling trial. These properties in and around Barnstaple had their black bins collected every three weeks and their (unlimited) recycling collected weekly. The trial aimed to reduce black refuse and increase recycling.
- The trial had now run for 5 years but had initially meant to run for six months.
- The Council was currently experiencing difficulties in maintaining an efficient and effective recycling service across the district due to resource issues and was not yet in a position to roll out three-weekly collections across the district. If the trial were brought to a close and Council reverted to fortnightly black bin collections across the district, crews and drivers could be reallocated to recycling rounds.
- There were benefits to the trial but at present the Council did not have the resources available to handle the volume of recycling to be collected.
- Ending the three-weekly trial would bring everyone in the district under the same service.

In response to a question on how the end of the trial was better than continuing with it. The Service Manager (Refuse and Recycling) explained that bringing the whole district in line with the same frequency collections meant all the crews could be deployed more efficiently and resolve the operational issues currently experienced.

In response to concerns over communities who had worked hard to reduce waste and recycle more taking a step backwards. The Chief Executive advised that the capacity and resources were not currently available to cope with the situation as it was. The idea of moving to three weekly collections had not been abandoned but the Council needed the time to improve resources.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive added that there was a commitment to improving the service infrastructure with £750,000 already earmarked in the approved Capital Programme towards the investment. A report would be presented to members detailing the upgrades that were required at a future full council meeting.

In response to a question about not disenchanting the public from recycling and allowing extra containers to be collected. The Head of Environmental Enhancement responded that it was important to allow everyone to recycle.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) The three weekly trial be brought to a close, with black bin collections returning to fortnightly in line with the rest of the district;
- (b) Drivers, crews and vehicles from the trial area rounds be redeployed on recycling rounds; and

- (c) The Council evaluate three weekly black bin collections across the whole district when recycling rounds were fully resourced, operating satisfactorily and the infrastructure is in place to handle the material collected; and
- (d) The infrastructure improvements needed to be agreed in principle and that a further report be presented to full Council.

70. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

The Committee considered a report by the Revenues and Benefits Manager, (circulated previously) regarding the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The Head of Customer Focus highlighted the following:

- In April 2013, as part of the national welfare reform, the Government changed the way financial support for Council Tax was managed. This meant that the national Council Tax Benefit system, which helped people with low incomes meet their Council Tax obligations, was replaced by new Council Tax Reduction schemes designed, administered and managed by Local Authorities.
- This change did not affect pension age claimants whose scheme was prescribed by central Government.
- Each year the scheme was reviewed. The Devon Revenues and Benefits Officers Group work together in reviewing schemes across the County.
- Since 2013, the majority of authorities have required all working age applicants to pay a minimum payment. In North Devon our working age applicants pay at least 20 per cent of their charge.
- Working age applicants in the Teignbridge District Council area still receive 100 per cent support towards their Council Tax. As with many Council's nationwide, other Devon Councils are now considering increasing support to 100 per cent for those households on the lowest of incomes. The proposal for 2023-2024 is that we at North Devon increase ours.
- In addition its proposed to disregard emergency increases in national welfare benefits and certain crisis payments paid to taxpayers.
- Many households had struggled to pay the minimum 20 percent contribution. This had led to additional costs being added to the balance on Council Tax bills, court and enforcement action and, in many cases, the amounts demanded were eventually written off as they were deemed uncollectable.
- There were 520 households who had an attachment to their benefits with a further 836 households awaiting an attachment to their benefit to collect unpaid council tax.
- The Council undertook a comprehensive consultation on the proposals during the period 7 September 2022 – 19 October 2022. This consultation was promoted in the following ways;
 - Press release in local newspaper;
 - North Devon Council website; and
 - On Social media accounts such as Facebook and Twitter.
- A total of 96 responses to the consultation were received. The results were shown in full, in Appendix B. The majority of responses received were in favour of the proposed changes.

- Precepting Authorities and the local Citizens Advice were also consulted and their responses, where received, are shown in Appendix C (Fire service) and Appendix D (Devon County Council).
- An increase in the cost of the scheme, although this was offset in part by reduced cost of resource in the collection of unpaid Council Tax.
- The Council Tax collection rate currently budgeted for in North Devon was 97 percent. It was higher but the adoption of the Council Tax Reduction scheme in 2013; saw collection rates overall start to fall. This was because collecting the 20 percent Council Tax from the poorest families was a challenge. These debts were proving to be very difficult to collect. The impact from this within the current collection fund was an ever-growing debt in this area, together with increased bad debt provision – so this was a growing cost within the collection fund. These proposals would enable the Council to free up resources to concentrate on increasing the tax base and recovering collectable debt.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive added that the overall collection rate would likely continue to decrease if a change was not made. The response from Devon County Council, shown in Appendix D of the report, in relation to the proposed changes, reassurances had been given to Devon County Council that the collection rates would likely increase as a result of the amendments to the scheme.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (a) The Council Tax Reduction scheme, as detailed at Appendix A of the report, to help households on the lowest incomes be adopted; and
- (b) The amendment to include disregards for any emergency increases in national welfare benefits and certain crisis payments made to taxpayers (Local Welfare Provision).

71. 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 3.45, Annex 2, part 3 of the Constitution (circulated previously) regarding the North Devon Policy Household Support Fund 3 and the urgent works to 47 High Street, Green Lanes, Barnstaple.

Chair

The meeting ended at 12.20 pm

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