

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Strategy and Resources Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Monday, 9th January, 2023 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Worden (Chair)

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

Officers:

Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, Head of Programme Management and Performance, Head of Planning, Housing and Health and Sustainability and Climate Officer

Also Present in person:

Councillors D. Spear and Tucker

79. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Yabsley.

80. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 DECEMBER 2022 (ATTACHED)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2022 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

(a) Informal Briefing for Members

The Chair requested that Members remain behind following the conclusion of the Committee meeting for an informal briefing in relation to the Cattle Market public conveniences.

(b) Local Authority Housing Fund

The Chief Executive provided an update to the Committee regarding the Local Authority Housing Fund.

The Chief Executive advised the following:

- The Government had announced the release of the Local Authority Housing Fund shortly before Christmas.
- The Fund was £500m for capital funding to support Local Authority areas which had supported the Ukrainian and Afghan Resettlement schemes. The purpose of the scheme was to provide settled accommodation for those that had been resettled in the country and to provide support for Local Authority areas which were under pressure to provide accommodation.
- The Fund could be used for housing stock acquisition which included purchasing of properties, refurbishment, utilising empty properties and working Registered Social Landlords. Local Authorities could decide the most appropriate mechanism.
- There were two elements of the Fund which were conditional that the Council increased its number of pledges under both resettlement schemes:
 - The Council would be allocated £800k for capital schemes and would be expected to deliver 8 units of accommodation.
 - Bridging accommodation capital fund of £200k would be allocated for the procurement of a minimum of 1 larger 4 bedroomed property.
- The fund would be paid in two tranches. The first tranche of 30% of the fund would be paid in February/March and the second tranche of 70% would be paid around August, however the Council would only receive the second tranche if it had spent at least 60% of the first tranche.
- The grant would be limited to 40% of the property purchase price and the Council would be expected to fund 60% of the purchase. Therefore the Council would be required to fund 60% of the purchase of 8 – 9 properties.
- The Council would be required to determine the tenure and level of rent in accordance with the objectives of the scheme.
- When the accommodation was no longer required under the Afghan and Ukraine Resettlement schemes, the accommodation could then be used by the Local Authority for the provision of affordable housing.
- If the Council decided not to take up the funding, the fund would be returned to the Government. If the Council decided to go ahead, it would need to be prepared to provide capital funding.
- The first webinar was due to be held today, which Officers would be attending to ascertain further information.
- The Council could consider entering into an agreement with a housing provider to buy properties on the open market.
- The Council needed to be aware of the community tensions if it decided to go ahead with the scheme and purchase properties as part of the Afghan and Ukraine Resettlement schemes.
- The timescales were tight and the deadline for the submission of a bid to the fund setting out how the fund would be used was by 25 January 2023. The Head of Planning, Housing and Health and his team would consider the best scheme to be put forward. As the deadline was prior to the next meeting of

the Committee, any submission would need to be approved as an urgent decision.

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

- That if the Council did not submit a bid, the down side would be the Government's perception of the Council. The Government had introduced the fund as a response to risk and to make a fund available to Local Authorities to top up the purchase of additional properties to take the pressure off of authorities in securing accommodation for homeless.
- There were no powers for the Council to compulsory purchase properties.
- A meeting had been arranged with housing groups on 13 January 2023 to communicate the requirements of the fund.
- Initial conversations had taken place with local Registered Social Landlords.
- Officers would feedback the challenging timescales to the Government via the webinars.
- The fund was only for capital and could not be used to cover officer time.

82. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS.

There were no declarations of interest received.

83. TO AGREE THE AGENDA BETWEEN PART 'A' AND PART 'B' (CONFIDENTIAL RESTRICTED INFORMATION).

RESOLVED that item 10 be considered following item 7 on the agenda to allow the Head of Planning, Housing and Health to attend the webinar on the Local Authority Housing Fund.

84. DEVON CARBON PLAN

The Committee considered a report by the Sustainability and Climate Officer (circulated previously) regarding the Devon Carbon Plan.

The Sustainability and Climate Officer highlighted the following:

- The Devon Carbon Plan had been officially launched on 27 September 2022.
- The Devon Climate Emergency Partnership had led the collaboration and alignment of almost 30 organisations across the county.
- The Plan provided an evidence led plan which formed a roadmap which encourages each partner organisation, and organisations and communities beyond the partnership to help deliver it.

In response to questions, the Sustainability and Climate Officer advised the following:

- North Devon Council's to reach net zero emissions by 2030 was a target for the Council as an organisation.
- The Devon Carbon Plan's target to reach net zero emissions by 2050 was a target for the county as a whole which included all businesses and organisations which was in line with the Government's commitments.

- These targets were reflected in the Council's Climate Emergency Declaration and Carbon Reduction Plan.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Devon Carbon Plan be endorsed;
- (b) That the Council continue to work in collaboration with the Devon Climate Emergency Partnership in reducing carbon emissions across the County.

85. HOUSING STANDARDS - LETTERS FROM SECRETARY OF STATE

The Committee considered letters received from the Secretary of State and responses sent by the Head of Planning, Housing and Health in relation to Housing Standards in Rented Properties in England (circulated previously).

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health highlighted the following:

- The response dated 13 December 2022 set out the Council's understanding of its responsibilities under Section 3 of the Housing Act 2004 to keep housing conditions in its area under review. It also set out the Council's interventions to address damp and mould within rented properties.
- Further to the initial letters, the Government had now requested that further details in a proforma by 27 January 2023.
- The scope of the Councils responsibilities.
- Damp and mould in the context of the Council's wider responsibility for private sector housing as this was only one area of responsibility.
- The Council's current focus on home energy and efficiency was an effective way of reducing the prevalence of damp and mould.
- Any specific programme of intervention to address this particular hazard was not recommended at this time. This reflected the needs of our communities. The issues experienced in the communities were poor and cold homes.
- The purpose of the update was to provide the Committee with details of the requests being made by Government and to provide reassurance of the programme of the Council's activity which was commensurate with the needs of the community.

In response to questions, the Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised the following:

- It was expected that the Government would provide further guidance on regulation and further guidance for the private housing sector.
- There was concern regarding the number of properties in category 1 and 2. 1 in 5 properties in North Devon were in categories 1 and 2. Damp and mould in properties compromised residents health.
- The Council had seen evidence that some occupiers of social housing were removing gas from their homes due to concerns regarding the cost of heating.
- Water vapour impact on cold surfaces.

- There were a number of Government programmes and interventions that were available to households. Eco 4 was available to the Council. There was a need to ensure that local residents received the maximum benefits of the schemes.
- The Council licensed Houses in Multiple Occupation and conditions were included within the conditions of the licence.

86. NMD BUILDING CONTROL

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Planning, Housing and Health (circulated previously) regarding NMD Building Control fees.

The Head of Planning, Housing and Health highlighted the following:

- The NMD Building Control service was facing a challenging time following the departure of a number of employees since September 2022.
- The current salary levels and benefits package was considered to be a contributing factor in the service's inability to retain and attract staff. The private sector offered very attractive financial packages.
- Current surveyor salaries need to be enhanced to be competitive with the private sector.
- A market supplement of 10% of basic for the surveyor positions could be accommodated by an 8% increase in fees to make the positions more attractive in the market place.

In response to questions, the Head of Planning, Housing and Health advised the following:

- Officers had carried out analysis of the private sector building control fees.
- Elements of the Building Control service was a statutory function and there were aspects that could only be delivered by a Local Authority.

Councillors Lane and Prowse declared non-registerable interests as they used the NMD Building Control service as part of his work.

RECOMMENDED that Building Control fees be increased by 8% with immediate effect, subject to there being no adverse representations received following the notice of intention to make this change.

87. CORPORATE PLAN DELIVERY HIGHLIGHT REPORT

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Programme Management and Performance (circulated previously) regarding the Corporate Plan Delivery highlight report.

The Head of Programme Management and Performance highlighted the following:

- In December 2021 the Heads of Services presented their emerging programmes to Members to test their proposed direction of travel and to give

Members an opportunity to identify any other areas they felt needed to be considered within the scope of these programmes.

- This was the first highlight report presented to the Committee and it provided an update on progress being made on the four emerging programmes to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan.
- Feedback on the layout of the report was welcomed.
- Page 41 showed a pyramid diagram which set out the thread of activity and how this hangs together.
- The Policy Development Committee at its meeting on 5 January 2023 approved the service plans.
- The table under paragraph 1.10 of the report, set out all of the projects sitting under the four programmes, the project manager/lead and the status of that project.
- Further work was required to test the performance measures to ensure that they were progressive rather than reflective.

In response to questions, the Head of Programme Management and Performance advised the following:

- The frequency of reporting progress on the Corporate Plan delivery to Members was a decision for the Committee.
- The Lead Members could present the progress reports to the Committee.
- The balanced scorecard provided the totals of the number of projects that contributed to each corporate priority. It showed that the number of projects were quite balanced across all of the Council's corporate priorities.
- Regular update reports were provided to the Senior Management Team and further work required to be completed for critical paths were considered.

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

- There had been no change in policy in relation to changing holiday homes to permanent homes. Where a planning application was submitted to change the use of a property, Officers would consider the planning balance. Due to the current housing problem, this was a material consideration when determining applications.
- The Government was currently carrying out consultation in relation to the introduction of a registration scheme for holiday homes and the requirement for planning consent for the change of use of accommodation to a holiday home.
- The Street Marshalls patrolled during the daytime and evenings. Prior to the temporary closure of the public conveniences at the Cattle Market, Barnstaple, the Street Marshalls patrolled this area on an hourly basis.
- Considered that the highlight report should be presented to the Committee on a regular basis i.e. quarterly or half yearly as it provided an update on the programmes which delivered the Council's corporate objectives. If quarterly this could be presented either alongside or within the performance and financial management report. Presenting the report on an annual basis was too long a period.

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

- That if the highlight report was incorporated within the current quarterly performance and financial management report that it would then be presented to the Strategy and Resources Committee, Policy Development Committee and onto full Council and therefore all Members would be kept informed. Discussions would take place regarding how it could be embedded within the quarterly performance and financial management.

The Committee noted a typographical error on page 65 of the report and that the “Environment Bill” should be amended to the “Environment Act”.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress made to date on delivering these programmes be noted;
- (b) That where possible Lead Members report on progress made on programmes within their portfolio on a quarterly basis to the Committee.

88. LITTER WORKING GROUP

The Committee considered a report by the Lead Member for Environment and the Ilfracombe Harbour Master (circulated previously) regarding the Litter Working Group.

The Lead Member for Environment outlined the Litter Working Group report on Binrastructure to the Committee. She advised that this report concluded the work of the Working Group and thanked Members of the Group and Officers who had supported the Group.

In response to questions, the Lead Member advised the following:

- Some engagement work had taken place with Petroc which resulted in some limited success in terms of littering, however the problem had now returned.
- Business could sign up to a voluntary code of conduct in terms of litter.
- Under the Environment Act, businesses would be responsible for the disposal of plastic.
- If businesses persistently allowed litter on their land, then it could be cleared by the Council and the business would then be recharged.
- Litter enforcement was really important.

In response, the Chief Executive advised the following:

- The use of mobile cameras was highly regulated. The Council was regulated by RIPA and the Council was not able to carry out covert surveillance unless a court order was approved by the Magistrates Court.
- The Council was able to use overt cameras which some officers wore as body cameras.
- Civil Enforcement Officers had powers to enforce some elements of the Public Spaces Protection Order.

- In accordance with the Data Protection Act, the Council was required to have specific reasons to collate data.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the report be and that its proposals reflect the Litter Strategy agreed by Strategy and Resources in February 2021, and that a better record of our assets and improvement in procedures was necessary in order to manage litter more effectively be noted;

(b) That it be noted that the Harbour Master had made a funding bid to support the harbour binrastructure changes, and that if the bid was not successful that a future bid, or request for funding from NDC, would be needed;

(c) That it also be noted that the Environment Enhancement Service had set a target of the end of March to achieve an up-to-date record of bins in the bin mapping tool; that this target included a system for requesting mapping updates in line with bin requests.

Councillor Worden thanked Councillor Pearson, the Harbour Master and Members of the Litter Working Group for their work.

89. 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 Homes for Ukraine Host payments.

The Chief Executive advised that prior to the implementation of this urgent decision had been taken, the Government had announced an increase in the payment and a further urgent decision had been taken.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the Government had now increased the host payment fee to £500 a month per family who have been in the country for over a year.

Chair

The meeting ended at 11.29 am

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