

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Policy Development Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Thursday, 7th March, 2024 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor L. Spear (Chair).

Councillors Patrinos, Bishop, Bushell, Clayton, Jones, Wilson and Worden.

Officers:

Clerk to the Committee.

Also Present in person:

Councillor Maddocks.

5. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bulled, Hunt and P. Leaver.

6. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12TH FEBRUARY 2024 (ATTACHED).

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th February 2024 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following:

(a) Minute 30 (b): That a letter be sent to the Member of Parliament for North Devon and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to request funding to continue to deliver the provision of Street Marshals together with their views in relation to the success of the scheme; and

(b) That in future when actions were requested by the Committee that the name of the officer required to provide any updates was stated within the minutes.

Councillor Wilson abstained from the vote as she was not present at the meeting.

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest announced.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2024-25.

The Committee considered the work programme for 2024/25 (circulated previously).

The Vice Chair addressed the Committee and outlined the reason for the meeting, which was to discuss the work programme for the Committee for the forthcoming year.

He advised that the Committee had adopted this approach for 2023/24 to brainstorm and discuss potential items of interest for the Committee.

Having just completed the special meeting regarding water quality, the Committee would next focus on the areas of agriculture and dentistry as well as any additional areas of interest that members might wish to raise.

Councillor Jones requested that the Committee discuss the outcomes from the special meeting, together with the next steps.

The Clerk to the Committee advised that as the special meeting was not an item on the agenda it could not be discussed at the meeting.

Councillor Jones advised that the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, who was not in attendance at the meeting had circulated an email to advise that the next steps would be discussed.

The Clerk advised that she was unaware of the email and that the agenda for the meeting had been published prior to the special meeting of the Committee. So, the item in relation to water quality would not have been on there anyway and at no point was she advised that it should be added.

RESOLVED, that the Committee SUSPEND Standing Orders to enable discussions to take place in relation to water quality.

Councillor Jones addressed the members present and proposed the following next steps:

- That a meeting be organised with the members from Torridge District Council to discuss their concerns regarding water quality.
- That a Notice of Motion be considered by Full Council requesting that North Devon Council support the work of the Westcountry Rivers Trust in both a pro-active promotional and if possible a financial capacity.
- The members were keen to support and invest in water testing.
- Determine whether the Rivers Trust was eligible to apply for Community Councillor Grant funding to support testing of water?
- Could North Devon Council provide any financial support in the purchase of testing kits at a cost of £40.00 each?
- Request a report from the Development Manager to ascertain the impact that SWW had on the planning application process.

The Committee discussed and debated the following:

- That South West Water (SWW) had to determine their response to an application based on the information that was available to them at that time.
- Issues often occurred with locations of water points on applications for housing developments where the developer indicated a location for a point on their plans that was not in fact anywhere near its actual location.
- There needed to be more collaborative working between the planning authority and SWW.
- There was a requirement to establish how the planning department at the Council integrated with the water infrastructure and where improvements could be made.
- The planning department at North Devon Council held regular meetings with SWW to address issues. This was not the case at Torrington District Council.
- When the planning department had a meeting with SWW to discuss an application, they should provide an update to the Planning Committee to make them aware of their comments.

The Chair advised that she was disappointed by the poor member attendance at the presentation by SWW at Caddesdown Business Support Centre in Bideford on Friday 1st March 2024.

RESOLVED, that Standing Orders be REINSTATED to enable the remaining business to be transacted.

At its next meeting on 11th April 2024, the Committee agreed that it would like to resolve the following:

- Organise a joint meeting with Torrington District Council to discuss how the two authorities could work together.
- Promote and support as a Council the Westcountry Rivers Trust potentially through funding but certainly by supporting their activities on social media; and
- That all stakeholders be invited to a special meeting in 6 to 12 months' to keep the channel of discussions open and under regular review.

The Chair advised that the special meeting in relation to agriculture would now be arranged for early/mid May 2024.

The Vice Chair raised the dentistry item and advised that he was keen to arrange a meeting to discuss the issues as soon as possible. He added that it was vital to streamline the process for the arrangements for special meetings of the Committee going forward.

Councillor Bushell advised that delays with government announcements together with the lambing season had impacted upon the agriculture group's ability to progress with arrangements for the special meeting.

The Clerk advised that she would need the contact details for the panellists to progress the arrangements for the special meeting in relation to agriculture.

The Committee debated the reasons for considering agriculture next as opposed to dentistry and acknowledged that if the meeting didn't happen in May it would have to wait until the autumn when the farmers were not as busy.

Councillor Bushell raised the issue of available resources and the workload that would be involved for the Clerk to the Committee.

The Committee discussed potential issues for its work programme for the forthcoming year 2024/25, the following ideas were considered:

- GP Surgeries – Issues with overcapacity and demographic rurality.
- Housing and health inequalities.
- Waste and recycling focussing on in-house improvements. Members agreed that this service received the most complaints of any other service provided by the Council. The complaints procedure was also part of the issue and whether the process could be managed in a more effective way?
- Issues with road infrastructure together with public transport, such as bus and rail services.

The Committee agreed that the housing portfolio was being managed effectively by the Lead Member for Housing and decided not to pursue as an item for the Committee to get involved with.

The Committee agreed to focus on the following subjects for 2024/25 and appointed members to each subject:

- Transport and infrastructure: Councillors Bushell and Worden.
- Health inequality and GP Surgeries: Councillors Wilson (Group Lead), Bushell, Patrinos and Spear.

Councillor Clayton addressed the Committee regarding an additional area of concern that was previously raised by Councillor P. Leaver regarding services that were previously delivered by the district council, which had since been devolved to the Town and Parish Councils and the financial impact that this had had on them.

RESOLVED:

- a) That a briefing be provided by the Service Manager at the next meeting of the Committee on 11th April 2024 in relation to how the NDC planning team liaise with stakeholders from the water companies particularly around developments and the capacity of existing infrastructure for sewage and waste water;

- b) That the special meeting with regards to dentistry be scheduled for July 2024;
- c) That the Head of Service for Environmental Enhancement be invited to attend a future meeting of the Policy Development Committee to answer questions in relation to the Waste and Recycling Service;
- d) That a report be prepared by the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Chief Executive regarding the services that had been devolved to the Town and Parish Councils in recent years and how this had impacted upon their relationship;
- e) That the above internal items be added to the draft agenda for discussion with the Chair and Vice Chair prior to the next meeting as to the Committee's approach;
- f) That a special meeting of the Committee be arranged to consider Health inequality and GP Surgeries be arranged for either September or October 2024; and
- g) That a special meeting of the Committee be arranged to consider Transport and infrastructure for March 2025.

Councillor Worden arrived at 6:48pm.

Chair

The meeting ended at 7.52 pm

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

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