

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Policy Development Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Thursday, 11th April, 2024 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor L. Spear (Chair).

Councillors Bulled, Bushell, Clayton, Jones, P Leaver, Williams, Wilson and Worden.

Officers:

Head of Governance.

Also Present in person:

Councillor Maddocks.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bishop, Patrinos and Turton.

2. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 29TH FEBRUARY 2024 AND 7TH MARCH 2024 (ATTACHED).

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the special meeting held on held on 29th February 2024 and the minutes of the meeting held on 7th March 2024 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

The Chair addressed the Committee regarding the response received from the North Devon MP regarding the long term funding for Street Marshalls, which had been circulated to all members of the Committee via email.

RESOLVED, that the response together with the content of the letter be noted.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest announced.

5. ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES FROM THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON 29TH FEBRUARY 2024.

The Committee considered and discussed the actions and outcomes from the special meeting held on 29th February 2024 and agreed in principal at the meeting held on 7th March 2024, which were detailed on page 27 of the agenda.

In response to a statement made by a Member of the Committee that Members from Torridge District Council had not been invited to attend the special meeting on 29th February 2024. The Clerk and the Chair both confirmed that this was not the case and that an email had been sent to the Democratic Services team at Torridge District Council and that their Clerk advised that she would forward the invitation on to the members of the Committee.

During their discussions, the Committee raised the following:

- Members of the Committee expressed their disappointment that there were no planning officers from North Devon Council in attendance at the briefing to members from South West Water (SWW) on 1st March 2024 at Caddsdow Business Support Centre, Bideford.
- A suggestion was made by a member of the Committee with regards to the actions and approach that should be taken regarding the outcomes of the special meeting:
 - Focus on water catchment area management.
 - Look at offsetting processes to address problems further upstream.
 - Challenge why there was nothing in the Councils planning policies with regards to water runoff, which meant that the Council was unable to reinforce.
 - Request that the Service Manager for the Planning department listen to the recording of the special meeting held on 29th February 2024 together with the minutes and come up with some actions that the Committee could realistically address.
 - Explore the ecological side of the planning process and utilising nature to clean the water i.e. reed beds and willow trees.
 - Understand why soakaways were identified on planning applications but were not being installed as part of the build project.
 - Explore how much influence the planning officers had with regard to surface run off, soakaways and permeable surfacing.
 - Acknowledged the shortage of enforcement officers nationally.
 - Agreed that Planning/Building Control should work together more closely.
- The SWW embargo on developers connecting to existing sewage networks meant that septic tanks were installed as part of planning applications for new builds. However, when the existing system was upgraded, those properties were linked to the existing system.
- There were things that we could do as a Council to strengthen our local plan.
- When allocating development land as part of the emerging local plan, planners will often look at an area and identify potential sites where

developers might build and often conclude that the existing sewage system had capacity. However, in reality that was not always the case.

- Lobby the government to change the planning process.
- Acknowledged the requirement for changes to the sequential test for sewage and how it was applied, as currently the Councils was restricted by national policy.
- Acknowledged that sewage management needed to be dealt with further up the chain of national legislation. There was a requirement to look at the bigger picture and only then could the Council put forward a comprehensive case.
- Acknowledged that the problem wasn't sewage but rather surface water and if that could be reduced there would be improvements made the sewage issues.
- Georgeham Parish Council was working in collaboration with Parkdean holiday park in Croyde to potentially purchase a water quality testing machine, which could be loaned out to other areas.
- The training that was previously provided by the Westcountry Rivers Trust in Braunton had been really positive. However, owing to the departure from the company of the officer responsible for arranging the training and the distribution of the testing kits; some of the testers had still not received their testing kits.
- Councillor Jones advised that he was happy to deliver the training in his own time provided that the financial side for the purchase of the testing kits was covered by SWW.
- The water quality testing database was managed by the Westcountry Rivers trust and they also had a map of where they wanted testing to take place.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the water quality group meet informally via Microsoft Teams to discuss the next steps and provide feedback to the Committee;
- b) That Councillor Jones liaise with the relevant Members at TDC and for the Clerk to the Committee to approach their equivalent from TDC to see how they wish to progress jointly regarding water quality;
- c) That Councillor Jones to approach SWW to follow up on their promise of financial contribution towards water quality testing kits;
- d) That the Clerk to the Committee email the Harbour Master to ascertain which type of water quality testing kit she had and what she had used it to test;
- e) That the Clerk to the Committee seek clarification as to whether or not the Westcountry Rivers Trust were eligible to apply for a CCG for the purchase of water quality testing kits;
- f) That the Communications team be requested to regularly promote the work of the Westcountry Rivers trust together with the work of the Citizens Science Project through its various social media channels;

- g) That the issues and actions that were identified by the panel of experts at the special meeting of the Committee be emailed to the Service Manager together with a request that she read through the minutes of the special meeting to determine the main points that the Council could take forward and identify any areas for challenge where the Council was restricted by national policy;
- h) That the recording of the briefing held on 1st March 2024 to be sent to members of the Committee; and
- i) That the date of a further special meeting be delayed until such a time that the Committee was in a position to move forward with a plan of action.

6. WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25.

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

The Clerk to the Committee advised that a provisional date of Thursday 23rd May 2024 had been agreed to hold a special meeting of the Committee to discuss agriculture. She added the date would be confirmed as soon as the final organisation had confirmed their panel member.

In response to a question regarding building control, Councillor P. Leaver advised that regulations were set by central government. However, he had been appointed to the Building Control Joint Committee and would mention the Committee's concerns regarding the lack of communications from the Building Control service.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the work programme be noted; and
- b) That the item in relation to transport and infrastructure be added to the meeting in March 2025 as agreed at the meeting of the Committee on 7th March 2024.

Chair

The meeting ended at 7.39 pm

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