

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Strategy and Resources Committee held in the Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Monday, 13th May, 2024 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Roome (Chair)

Councillors Clayton, Hunt, D Knight, R Knight, C Leaver, Maskell, Milton, Prowse and Wilkinson

Officers:

Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, Parking Manager and Head of Environmental Enhancement

Also Present in person:

Councillor Walker

7. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bell.

It was noted that Councillors Crabb and Lane had given their apologies after the meeting had started.

8. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 APRIL 2024 (ATTACHED).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2024 (circulated previously), be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

The Chair brought the following item forward as a matter of urgency:

The North Devon Records Office

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council had been approached by the North Devon Records office in relation to a request for financial help with a shortfall of £6,000.

This request was a one off amount to allow for further funding applications to other stakeholders to be made. It was felt justified to offer £3,000 of the amount needed as Torrington District Council were being approached also. The Strategic Contingency reserves held by the Council could cover this one off payment and a steer from Members on whether they agreed to this was being sought today.

The Records office had held files and documents specifically for the Council since 1974 when North Devon District Council began.

In a response to a question about how this fit in with the Council's corporate strategy. The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive responded that this was linked to the Financial Security priority.

Councillor Prowse added that the Records office attracted many visitors from abroad and could also be linked to the Council's Tourism and Economic strategy.

Councillor Walker added that having spent a week's work experience at the office. The cost of the special preservation room, which used Xenon gas to protect fragile documents, was an area of speciality that would be a far greater cost to the Council to replicate elsewhere.

Members were unanimous in their agreement that they were happy for £3,000 to come out of the Strategic Contingency reserve towards the £6,000 shortfall.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS.

The following declaration of interest was announced:

Councillor Milton declared a non-registrable interest in item 9, North Devon Council Biodiversity Duty and Actions as he was a Board member of the Devon Local Nature Partnership.

11. RESIDENTIAL PARK HOME SITES, FEES AND LICENSING AND COMPLIANCE POLICIES

The Committee considered a report by the Environmental Health Officer (circulated previously) regarding the Residential Park Home Sites, Fees and Licensing and Compliance Policies.

The Environmental Health Officer highlighted the following:

- The main purpose of the report was to provide feedback on the results of the six-week consultation exercise, and to seek recommendation for approval to Full Council regarding a new set of fees for residential caravan site licences, contained in a Fees Policy and to approve a Policy on the Licensing and Compliance of Residential Park Home Sites.
- The Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 (as amended by the Mobile Homes Act 2013) (the Act), authorises Local Authorities to issue licences in respect of caravan sites. The Council may require applications for 'relevant protected sites' (more commonly referred to as residential park homes sites licences) to be accompanied by a fee fixed by the Authority.

Fees may also be charged for applications to transfer site licences, to change conditions on site licences, and to deposit site rules with the Authority. Separate fees may also be charged for enforcement and Local Authorities may charge for the administration and monitoring of site licences by levy of an annual fee.

- The fees for caravan site licensing were 'locally set', meaning that fees were not prescribed by statute. The Council had yet to approve fees since April 2014, when the amendments to the Act became effective, and it was now necessary to adopt a fees policy to ensure that the Council better recovered its costs.
- A draft copy of the Fees Policy and the Policy on the licensing and Compliance of Residential Park Home Sites was presented to the Strategy and Resources Committee of 4 December 2023, and a consultation on the proposed implementation of the policies was subsequently approved.
- The six-week consultation exercise ran between 22 January 2024 to 4 March 2024.
- Correspondence with details of the consultation was sent to site owners, residents Associations (where known), the general public (via social media release), the British Holiday and Home Parks Association, and the National Association of Park Home Residents.
- 14 online responses were received in total. The full results could be seen at Appendix C of the report.
- 9 respondents agreed with the banding structure of the fees policy proposed, and 5 respondents disagreed. 5 respondents left further feedback in respect of this question.
- 9 respondents agreed that the fees policy was clear and concise and 5 respondents disagreed. 1 respondent left further feedback in relation to this question.
- 9 respondents agreed that the Council's Policy on the Licensing and Compliance of Residential Park Home Sites was clear and concise, and 5 respondents disagreed. 1 respondent left further feedback in relation to this question.
- 8 respondents agreed with the principle of the two new policies, and 6 respondents disagreed. 3 respondents left further feedback in relation to this question.
- It was necessary to clarify the Council's position with regards to site licence compliance. The Policy on the Licensing and Compliance of Residential Park Homes Sites had been designed to support the Fees Policy. It set out how this licensing regime was to be administered and regulated, and provided enhanced transparency and robustness in respect of the Council's licensing procedures.

The report was welcomed by Councillor Wilkinson.

RESOLVED to note the feedback of the public consultation exercise, as seen at Appendix C of the report, and;

RECOMMENDED for adoption of the following by Full Council:

- (a) The Residential Park Homes Fees Policy; and
- (b) The Licensing and Compliance of Residential Park Home Sites Policy.

12. A PROPOSAL TO REDUCE THE COUNCIL'S CARBON EMISSIONS BY REPLACING SELECTED VEHICLES WITH ELECTRIC VEHICLES

The Committee considered a report by the Sustainability and Climate Officer (circulated previously) regarding a proposal to reduce the Council's carbon emissions by replacing selected vehicles with Electric vehicles.

The Head of Environmental Enhancement highlighted the following:

- This was the first steps to move the Works and Recycling fleet to electric vehicles. It was hoped that two vehicles would be switched to electric the Ford Transit 3.5 tonne Tipper and a Mercedes Transit 3.5 tonne Panel Van.
- There was a financial implication to consider, as there was an existing contract to be terminated early with penalty.
- The Council's Parks team had been trialling the new vehicles and had found them easy to drive and use.
- North Devon Council had declared a climate emergency, and made a commitment to be net zero carbon as an organisation by 2030. The carbon footprint for the Council for the year 2022-2023, as reported to this committee on 8 January 2024, showed that the works and recycling fleet contributed approximately a third of the Council's total carbon dioxide emissions. Section 4.2 of the report showed a table of where those emissions were generated.
- Based on current mileage figures, there would be a total carbon saving of 10.56 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per year by making the switch to the two electric vans. The equated to 1% of the current carbon emissions from the Council's fleet transport.
- Indicative settlement figures had been received from Specialist Fleet Services (SFS).
- The technology still wasn't available to move the Heavy Goods Vehicles to electric.
- Exeter University were in conversation with users of hydrogen vehicles.
- Infrastructure costs related to the installation of charging points would be a separate report to come to this committee.

The Committee acknowledged that this was a small step but a welcome one.

In response to a question on how the Council was progressing compared to other Local Authorities. The Head of Environmental Enhancement advised he had attended online forums with other Local Authorities present and most other rural authorities around the country were in the same position as North Devon. A poll found that many rural authorities had yet to transition to any form of electric vehicles. Most Urban authorities had started to make the switch.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That one Ford Transit 3.5 tonne Tipper and one Mercedes Transit 3.5 tonne Panel Van be replaced with electric vehicle alternatives,

- (b) That further work be undertaken to establish costs for the installation of more Electric Vehicle charge points at Brynsworthy Environment Centre and other North Devon Council owned facilities, with a view to switching more of the Council's small fleet vehicles from diesel to electric; and
- (c) That a further report is brought back to Strategy and Resources Committee when the findings of the work carried out in point (b) above are complete.

13. NORTH DEVON (OFF-STREET PARKING PLACES) ORDER - VARIATION

The Committee considered a report by the Parking Manager (circulated previously) regarding North Devon (Off-Street Parking Places) Order – Variation.

The Parking Manager advised that there was a change to the scale of charges in relation to the Annual Instow Permit. The Permit would increase to £220 + VAT (from £175 + VAT).

RESOLVED that:

- (a) The variations to charges for Instow Marine car park, the annual permit cost to increase to £220 plus VAT be adopted; and
- (b) Delegated power be given to the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration, in consultation with the Leader and Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, to make the necessary Notice of Variation pursuant to section 35C Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

14. CHANGE OF ORDER OF ITEMS

To allow the Officer presenting the report to arrive at the meeting it was decided to bring forward the Urgent Decision item 10.

RESOLVED to consider Item 9, Biodiversity after Item 10, Urgent Decision(s) Taken by the Chief Executive.

15. URGENT DECISION(S) TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ATTACHED)

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive (circulated previously) in relation to Urgent Decision taken by the Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive highlighted the following:

- The Urgent Decision was made in respect of the Adoption of the Household Support Fund – round 5 of the Scheme.
- It had been necessary to undertake this decision ahead of the meeting today as round 5 became live on 7 May 2024.

RESOLVED that the Urgent Decision Taken by the Chief Executive in relation to the Adoption of the Household Support Fund 5 Scheme be noted.

16. NORTH DEVON COUNCIL BIODIVERSITY DUTY AND ACTIONS

The Committee considered a report from the Sustainability Officer (circulated previously) regarding North Devon Council Biodiversity Duty and Actions.

The Head of Environmental Enhancement highlighted the following:

- This update report related to the Council's Corporate and Planning roles and responsibilities under the Environment Act 2021 for protecting and enhancing biodiversity across the District.
- This links to a training session members received in the summer of 2023.
- Mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for all major development came into force in January 2024. For the remaining non-exempt development mandatory 10%, BNG will come into force in April 2024. Using the Council's 2018 adopted Local Plan Policy ST14: Enhancing Environmental Assets 'providing a net gain in northern Devon's biodiversity where possible, through positive management of an enhanced and expanded network of designated sites and green infrastructure, including retention and enhancement of critical environmental capital' and the National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 174(d) and 179(b) the Council ensures all new development contributes towards biodiversity.
- The Environment Act 2021 amended section 40 of the Natural ENVIRONMENT AND Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act).
- The original duty was replaced with a more proactive duty (new section 40(1)) to "From time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective".
- In complying with this biodiversity duty, all public authorities must agree policies and objectives they consider appropriate to comply with the biodiversity duty. In making the consideration and taking any subsequent action, public authorities must have regard to:
 - Any relevant local nature recovery strategy, and
 - Any relevant species conservation strategy or protected site strategy prepared by Natural England.

The Committee felt this was a positive report that would present challenges but also opportunities. There would be an extra pressure on the Council to monitor compliance.

RESOLVED that the requirements of the Biodiversity Duty and the actions taken be noted.

Chair

The meeting ended at 10.42 am

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