

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy Environment Centre on Tuesday, 15th January, 2019 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Patrinos (Chairman)

Councillors J Cann, Chesters, Croft, Ley and Spear

Officers:

Chief Executive, Head of Environmental Health and Housing, Head of Operational Services, Head of Corporate and Community Services, Head of Place, Business Information Systems Manager and Housing Services Manager

63. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bonds, Mathews, Roome, White and Worden.

64. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest announced.

65. SERVICE PLANS.

The Chairman addressed the Committee and advised that although all service plans had been provided within the agenda, four had been selected for discussion with the appropriate Heads of Services or Business Managers present at the Committee. He advised that other plans could be discussed if the Committee had any questions. It had been agreed that the Head of Operational Services, Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services, Head of Place and the BIS Manager be invited to attend the Committee to present their service plans. He invited each to address the Committee with a short summary of their service plan, after which questions would be received from the Committee.

(a) ICT

The Committee welcomed the BIS Manager to the meeting.

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2019/20 for ICT (circulated previously).

The BIS Manager addressed the Committee and confirmed that the next 12 months would be very busy for the IT department. Their works included the moving of the email system to Office 365, upgrading to 'Windows 10', installing the new desktop solutions, upgrading servers and introducing a new telephony system.

In response to questions from the Committee, the BIS Manager confirmed that:

- All agendas and minutes would be accessible via the new Committee Management System (Modern.gov) from May 2019. This would be via iPads which would be issued to all Councillors following the elections in May 2019. Only those with a medical reason for requiring paper copies would be exempt.
- Council emails would no longer be accessible via mobile phones. They would be accessed via the iPads. This enabled added security to the email system.
- There would be no facility to print from the iPads as they would not be connected to the Council's printers.
- Full training would be provided by the Corporate and Community Services team.

She provided the following information to the Committee:

- ICT 01 (New 2019/20) Objective one – Upgrade all 2008 R2 servers to 2012 or 2016. It was now considered that the cost would be in the region of £58k although this could not be confirmed until further suppliers had been approached and their costs established.
- ICT 03 (2018/19) Objective one – Work with DCC to negotiate an extension to the existing contract, for which there is no current option. This work was being carried out between North Devon Council, Torridge District Council and Mid Devon District Council together. It covered how the Councils linked sites. It was essential that all of the contract was negotiated and the existing contract extended as a change to supplier could incur additional costs. A meeting was to be held with Devon County Council (DCC) next month.

The Committee thanked the BIS Manager for her attendance at the meeting.

(b) ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND HOUSING SERVICES

The Committee welcomed the Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services and Housing Services Manager to the meeting.

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2019/20 for Environmental Health and Housing Services (circulated previously).

The Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services explained that the first two objectives listed on the plan were the most significant areas of change. These were:

- H1 (New 2019/20) Objective two – Mitigate the effects of the reduction in the Government grant funding which is currently supporting homelessness prevention services and the provision of temporary accommodation. This included the mitigation of the effect of the decommissioning of eight units of

temporary accommodation with North Devon Homes at the end of August 2019.

- H2 (New 2019/20) Objective two – Provide safe sleep/severe weather provision for rough sleepers beyond 31st March 2019.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services advised of the following:

- There was not currently a 'policy vacuum' although there were numerous references throughout the plan of new policies being required. Procedures had constantly developed as funding had reduced or changed. The team required new delivery models and strategies. A constant state of change had been experienced due to new Government policies and financial cuts.
- The increased demand on the team's services were a concern. New ideas and solutions were being developed and new models for temporary accommodation provision were being considered. They were looking at various sources of additional funding
- A number of the actions remained on the plan from the previous year as further time was required to complete them.
- The situation regarding temporary accommodation had been alleviated by the Council's purchase of properties for this purpose.
- Changes in food safety laws were anticipated following Brexit although no specific details were yet known.
- The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant (FHSG) had been received for a number of years (reducing gradually) and the final grant payment would be received during 2019/20.
- The team was under pressure due to the increased demand for their services coupled with the loss of Government funding (the FHSG).
- Additional funding had been obtained for homelessness and rough sleeping. Further bids would be made for Government resources.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Housing Services Manager advised the following:

- Discussions had taken place with the Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Cross-Party working group.
- Two of the properties purchased by the Authority would be in operation by the end of June 2019, with a further ready by the end of Quarter two, and another at a date to be confirmed. The availability of these properties, and associated costs and savings, had been modelled into the budget.
- The team did engage with individuals presenting as homeless in rural areas outside of the main towns but asked that the Committee members forward any details of any new cases to her team to help ensure no one was missed.

In response to further questions from the Committee, the Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services advised of the following:

- L1 (new 2019/20) – Objective two: Increase the capability of the Licensing Service: there had been increased demands on the Licensing Staff and the

employment of an additional 0.5 full time staff member would be considered via the Senior Management Team as per the standard procedure.

- A number of the actions from 2018/19 were on the service plan, despite being completed. These had not been removed as he had wanted it acknowledged that these had been completed and note the hard work carried out by the team to do so.
- H1 (New 2019/20) Objective two – Mitigate the effects of the reduction in the Government grant funding which is currently supporting homelessness prevention services and the provision of temporary accommodation. With the projected loss of funding of £0.062m in 2019/20, which would increase to £0.300m in 2020/21 it was proposed to undertake a fundamental review of the commissioning of these services. The reorganisation of the services had been discussed with the Chief Executive. Any reorganisation, in relation to staff, would be completed well in advance of the action date of March 2021.

The Chief Executive confirmed that changes would be completed within the next three months in order to minimise any period of stress for the staff. He added that the key issue was how the Authority could spend the same or similar amount of money but turn it into more staff. Something else may need to be dropped at the expense of this as it was a huge priority. He, and the Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services were currently working on the issues.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Housing Services Manager advised the following:

- Eight new units had been rented from North Devon Homes however, discussions were ongoing with an alternative provider who may be able to provide units at a lower cost.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act commenced 1st April 2018. It had brought in new duties for Local Authorities which included earlier involvement in cases where risk of homelessness was identified within 56 days not 28 as previously, plus Relief duty; to provide temporary accommodation for 56 nights with limited exceptions.
- A major change was the nature of the cases being covered.
- An impact of the new act was the increase in cases. There had been six times as many applications taken this year compared to last year (202 in 2017/18, 1193 for the first 3 quarters of 2018/19). In 2017/18 86 house-holds were classed as duties against 748 in 2018/19.

The Chief Executive address the Committee and confirmed that he felt that the issue of homelessness was perhaps presented in an unsophisticated way to the general public as they would immediately focus on the rough sleepers and people they saw on the streets asking for money, whereas many of those presenting to the Authority would never be seen by the public. Many had different issues and problems which may not have necessarily been housing problems. Issues such as alcohol and drug dependency were problems which could have been the original cause of their homelessness and which may result in them being back on the streets despite accommodation being found. It was a very complex debate which the team were

working hard to solve. The problem would not necessarily be fixed with the building of new homes.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services advised of the following:

- RS 04 (new 2016/17) To implement the requirements of the Enterprise Bill 2015/16. This started in April 2017 and has a target date for completion of March 2019. NDC were the primary authority for five or six significant businesses which trade nationally. There was opportunity for the Council to develop this area of work. It was discretionary and it could be elected not to do it however, he saw this as complementary to the Authority's Corporate Plan. There was potential benefit to the Authority for new business start-ups etc and he was reluctant to remove it from the plan. The date would require an extension to the first quarter of 2019 (June 2019 as there were a number of changes to be done.

The Committee thanked the Head of Environmental Health and Housing for his attendance at the meeting.

(c) Planning / Place

The Committee welcomed the Head of Place to the meeting.

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2019/20 for Place (circulated previously).

The Head of Place addressed the Committee and confirmed that:

- The plan covered Economic Development, Town Centres, Strategic Planning and Development.
- There were many actions for Economic Development due to the nature of the work which tends to be project based
- There had been some delays in developing the corporate wide Growth Agenda programme due to the resources required to work on the Garden Town bid (ED4 2019/20) and other priorities. The outcome of the bid was expected in Spring 2019.
- It was difficult to capture next year's activity precisely due to the nature of the business and the likelihood of future funding opportunities coming forward in year. The example of the Garden Towns Initiative is one that was not planned for with information only becoming available in August of 2018. Likewise an opportunity to secure development funding for the town centre has come available just before Christmas through the Future Town Centres Fund. However, the North Devon Growth Agenda would be a priority in the coming months as it provided the key underlying principles by which the Council would work internally and with partners to achieve the corporate priority for growth
- Related areas of work include the One Public Estate initiative which could greatly impact the Growth Agenda through the better use of public sector

resources. The Economic Strategy was being refreshed, working with Torrington District Council (TDC) towards a 'Northern Devon' vision, as the Council did through joint working on the Joint Local Plan.

- A number of major schemes were included in the plan, including the Town Centre Vision, Ilfracombe, Westacott and Seven Brethren.
- Less major schemes included Coastal Communities, Ilfracombe Seafront Masterplan, South Molton Economic Plan and Innovation Strategy for North Devon and Torrington.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Place advised that:

- The Garden Town bid, if successful, would provide the opportunity for better planning of the town. The team would learn from limitations experienced in the existing approaches to developing towns take lessons learned into the mainstream of planning for growth.
- It had been noted previously that infrastructure had not always been in place early enough. He hoped to enable better-planned schemes for the Barnstaple district with infrastructure provided in advance of development. Structure and sustainability would need to be right and go beyond the timescale for the existing Local Plan (2031) this plan. Sites were being considered in and around Barnstaple.
- The idea of a new settlement, such as Cranbrook, Exeter, had not been dismissed. It had been discussed during the Cross Party Working Group meetings and Growth Workshops. However, it had become clear that the Council would have needed to be much further advanced in the development of the concept and plans for a possible new settlement area before serious consideration could be made. Officers felt, with the support of Homes England, the further development of Barnstaple and reinforcement of its role as the sub-regional centre was most likely to be successful at the current time.
- SPD 4 P 07d 15/16 – Objective one: Secure the adoption of a Community Infrastructure Levy Scheme (CIL): Nothing had yet been adopted as the Government review was still under way. Therefore the Section 106 scheme was still being used.
- ED 9 (2019/20) – Objective one: Coastal Communities Fund R5 Bids: The Environment Agency was working with the Ilfracombe Regeneration Board to consider the sea defence design. Any works done would include landscaping of the area. The Council's contribution to the scheme was small but was part of a larger initiative. Any spend would be authorised via the appropriate Committees.
- Although, historically, many planned projects in the Ilfracombe area may not have been successful, the Council was now looking to develop a wide range of projects in the area (Ilfracombe Water Sports Centre, Harbour development etc) which together would make the works more viable.

The Chief Executive advised that the Environment Agency (EA) had made presentations regarding the schemes to prevent Ilfracombe from flooding, such as the building of a breakwater, they (the EA) had not committed to building or financing

such a scheme. The funds required to build a breakwater would be a major amount not available to the Council or the EA without adoption at a national strategic level.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Place advised that:

- SPD 2 (2019/20) – Objective one: Provide new Gypsies and Travellers Transit Site. The Joint Local Plan had now been adopted and the Inspector had identified the need to identify suitable sites. The Authority would have to identify sites and make plans for this or it could be hard to refuse speculative applications in the future. Potential sites across both NDC and TDC areas had been visited but no sites had yet been found. The possibility of purchasing land in order to secure such sites was being considered. It was noted that any sites which had flood risks could not be used.
- The scheme costed by the chosen contractor for the Ilfracombe Water-Sports Centre had been over budget. The aim was to invite further tenders. An 'open day' event had been held recently giving the opportunity for possible contractors to come and view the plans prior to submitting a bid. There was pressure for the project to be progressed and the monies spent by a set deadline. Some additional funding from the Coastal Communities had been secured.
- The Environment Agency had identified various 'flood cells' across Ilfracombe and funds had been set aside for phase one of the flood defence works.
- A masterplan would be developed, with the Estates Team, in relation to the various sites across the district, such as the Civic Centre and Lace Factory sites. There was substantial opportunity in the area. It was believed that Devon County Council (DCC) were looking to market some of the Civic Centre site and that the Police were looking to rationalise their estate across Devon. DCC held the funds although this did not imply that the responsibility was solely theirs. There would be high costs involved in developing the site, and also implications in selling costs. The principle of One Public Estate was to identify areas for expansion. Where public bodies may wish to expand but have no land available could be considered with others who had land but no need to expand. It would enable organisations to work together and prevent public bodies from simply selling land to the highest bidder without regard to the need in the area.

The Committee thanked the Head of Place for his attendance at the meeting.

(d) OPERATIONAL SERVICES

The Committee welcomed the Head of Operational Services to the meeting.

The Committee considered the Service Plan for 2019-2020 for Operational Services (circulated previously).

The Head of Operational Services addressed the Committee and confirmed:

- The remodelling of the black waste and green rounds had been planned.

- The new Waste Plant on the neighbouring site to BEC was nearly finished and was expected to be operational on 11th February 2019. After this date the Authority would send the waste there, rather than Deepmoor.
- New waste/recycling infrastructure was being considered as the equipment/vehicles etc would require updating as they wore out.
- Funding bids towards such expenses had been submitted.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Head of Operational Services advised:

- The waste from the service did not go to China, but to UK firms for processing although the UK market was currently saturated. He was not aware whether any of these companies then dealt with China.
- The income generated did not cover the cost of the waste and recycling collections, although it did support it. The service would continue to be provided by the Authority. The costs of making the collections would need to be balanced.
- There were no legal requirements to meet recycling targets (i.e. the 50% target) although recent Government talks had suggested a target of 65% as a target for 2030. Government Strategy indicated that there could be set regulations on what must be collected by Local Authorities.
- OSW9 – Objective two – Recycling Hall: Investment in the region of £0.750m would be required to redesign the entire process hall. This would enable the handling of all the recycling if all residents were to recycle at maximum capacity. It would also enable greater versatility as at present there could be no additional stimulation of the recycling services as the existing hall could not process it.
- Approximately 40 minutes per round, plus mileage, would be saved on each round, each day. One round had already been removed, with the possibility of a further decrease in the black rounds.

The Chief Executive explained that any additional savings created by the opening of the new DCC waste site had already been factored into the budget for 2019/20. The costs of the new process hall would have to be borrowed. No decision had yet been made by Council and a specific plan would be required depending on the course of action decided by Members.

In response to further questions from the Committee, the Head of Operational Services advised:

- There had been a 45% 'take-up' rate of the Green Waste collection service. 35% had been expected.
- Approximately 1000 customers did not re-sign up for the service for a further year, however, over 1000 brand new customers signed up to the service.
- At Deepmoor, the waste goes to a composter where it is then made into a 'soil improver' (as it is not high enough quality to be a compost) owned by DCC. This is then sold to local farmers.

- TDC had been approached and the services of NDC offered. It was noted that they had declined the offer and had advised they were looking to provide their own facility.

The Chief Executive added that he had been advised that TDC would need to factor in the change of the location of the DCC plant away from Deepmoor. TDC advised that they themselves would require a new location for their own depot facility. An offer had been made of the fields near BEC but this was declined as the operational centre needed to be nearer Torridge.

The Committee thanked the Head of Operational Services for his information regarding the service plan.

(e) CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Head of Corporate and Community Services addressed the Committee and confirmed that:

- There were a number of service plans included in the agenda which were under his responsibility.
- Among those, the biggest projects/actions were part of the Parks, Leisure and Culture Service Plan where the Leisure Centre, Museum Extension and Theatres were detailed.
- The report regarding the Leisure Centre project would be presented to Executive at the end of February 2019. There had been a huge amount of work done on the project and it was hoped that the borrowing on the project would balance out the fees received to be 'cost neutral'.
- Saturday (12th January 2019) had been the day on which the management of the Theatres had been handed over from Parkwood to Selladoor Worldwide. There had been a few issues which would be resolved within the next week.
- New ICT systems had been introduced into Legal, Customer Services and Corporate and Community Services (Modern Gov).
- The new Modern Gov system, and the issuing of iPads to all Members and Senior Staff, would eliminate the need for paper agendas for the Committees.

The Committee thanked the Head of Corporate and Community Services for his information regarding the service plan.

RESOLVED that the Service Plans be noted.

Chairman

The meeting ended at 3.42 pm