

**NORTH DEVON COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of Strategy and Resources Committee held in the Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Monday, 7th October 2024 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Clayton (Chair)

Councillors Bell, Crabb, D Knight, R Knight, Lane, P Leaver, Maskell, Prowse and Wilkinson

Officers:

Chief Executive, Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Customer Focus, Head of Place, Property and Regeneration, Property Manager, Head of Environmental Enhancement, Lead Environmental Health Officer Environmental Protection and Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Also Present in person:

Councillors Norman, Patrinos and Walker

**55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hunt and C Leaver. Apologies were also received during the meeting from Councillor Milton.

**56. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 SEPTEMBER 2024 (ATTACHED) AND THAT MINUTE 42 OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 AUGUST 2024 BE AMENDED AS FOLLOWS:**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2024 (circulated previously) and that minute 42 of the meeting held on 5 August 2024 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

There were no items, which in the opinion of the Chair, to be considered as a matter of urgency.

**58. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS.**

There were no declarations of interest announced.

**59. MATERIAL RECOVERY INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT UPDATE**

The Committee received an update on the Material Recovery Infrastructure project and a summary of the summer rounds performance, from the Head of Environmental Enhancement.

The Head of Environmental Enhancement presented the following:

- The summer months, June, July and August, were a busy period for the collections crews with the added challenge of the infrastructure project works taking place this year.
- Over the summer of 2023, 133 complaints were logged, in comparison, over the summer period of 2024, 47 complaints were logged.
- Overall, the collection rate was high with the number of complaints, recorded due to missed collections, down on the previous year.
- The actual number of collections made per week stood at 79,000.
- The number of days with vehicles off road for the year of 2023 was 609 whereas in 2024 it was 402. This was because of better vehicle reliability, improved in-cab technology and 10 additional permanent staff (as opposed to agency Staff).
- The steels in the sorting hall were being repaired, cleaned and painted.
- The conveyor pit and drainage pits had been dug in preparation for phase 3 of the works to commence in the second week of October 2024.
- The existing 15 tonne baler had to be moved to allow the digging of the pit. A metal plate now covered the pit to allow the baler to be returned to service.
- Preparation for the installation of the fire suppression water tanks had been completed. Two concrete plinths had been created ready to hold two 45,000-litre water tanks.
- The Environment Agency requirement was for the site to hold 90,000 litres of water, which was enough to provide one hour of firefighting provision.
- The Helios system was used in over 50 material recovery facilities around the country with evidence showing that any fire in these depots had not lasted longer than three minutes.
- The five modular sections were now in place ready for fitting out internally. Staff should be able to move back into the new office space in mid-November 2024.
- The pit for the new weighbridge was ready for concreting. The new glass collection building was awaiting delivery of the steel framework and then extension work would begin.
- The works were currently on schedule to complete in December 2024.
- The new baler should be delivered in December with installation starting in January 2025.
- Once the new baler was up and running, expected to be March 2025, the old baler would be decommissioned and recycled.
- The total cost of the project was around £3.7M and currently totals were under budget.
- A 36 tonne E-Collect vehicle was trialled; it worked well for the local town rounds. The electric lorry had a 100-mile range but struggled to cope with a run to Witheridge.

- Cost savings on fuel was good; diesel fuel would have cost £994 but the electric charge only cost £26.
- The Council was working with Ecomotus to trial a Hydrogen Electrolyser.
- The electrolyser de-ionised water, which produced hydrogen and this run through a diesel engine helped reduce emissions.

The Head of Environmental Enhancement gave the following responses to questions asked:

- It took ½ a day to charge the vehicle and there was a mobile, three pin charger in the cab.
- The vehicles were leased and the upfront cost was the biggest outlay.
- A switch to electric would require some infrastructure changes to install charging points.
- The cost of this against fuel cost savings would need to be reported; as technology was improving costs were reducing.
- Alerts to inform the public of known missed rounds helped filter out complaints about missed collections.
- A formal complaint was noted once three collections were missed at a property over a 12-month period.
- If 15 properties all had three missed collections over a 12-month period then that would count as 15 complaints.
- Torridge District Council had been invited to share the facilities and remained open.

The Lead Member for Economic Development and Strategic Planning Policy had recently attended the Energy 361 event at the Barnstaple Pannier Market and the use of electric vehicles was mentioned in their presentation. An invite should be made requesting they attend a future meeting to present to Committee.

The Committee noted the update given.

## **60. PEST CONTROL SERVICE**

The Committee considered a report by the Lead Environmental Health Officer (circulated previously) regarding Pest Control Service.

The Lead Environmental Health Officer highlighted the following:

- North Devon Council was not providing a pest control service at present.
- There was sufficient evidence of the need for such a service due to the high volume of calls to the Council regarding complaints about rats.
- Research had shown, that offering the service would create a cost effective and commercial income to the Council as well as being an open and transparent service to the public.
- Four Local Authorities across Devon currently offered pest control services.
- To be able to run the service a suitably qualified pest control officer would be required, a secure storage unit for the poisons and to help with cutting costs a retro fit of a warden van to make it suitable to carry the poisons.

- Costings and estimates of possible income could be seen with in the report at paragraph 4.13.

The Lead Environmental Health Officer gave the following responses to questions:

- The Service could be offered in Torridge the figures provided within the report were just a starting point for North Devon.
- The totals in the columns of the report as seen at 4.13 don't add up correctly.
- The pricing structure illustrated was not meant as a way of undercutting any other businesses they were a way of making the market competitive.
- Adding the wording to the Constitution was just a 'power' we could easily decide not to provide the service.
- A customer base would need to be built up but certainly there was a public expectation that this was a service the Council should provide.

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that members had approved the Commercialisation Strategy which tasked the Council to find opportunities to create income streams.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Planning, Housing and Health to develop and implement a North Devon Council operated Pest Control Service;
- (b) To note the outcomes of the Equality Impact Assessment as summarised at paragraph 6 of the report; and

RECOMMENDED:

- (c) That Council amend Annexe 2 to Part 3 of the Constitution to insert a new paragraph; 5.15A "to provide a pest control service".

**61. FUTURE HIGH STREET PROJECT UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration (circulated previously) regarding Future High Street Project Update.

The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration highlighted the following:

- Members were aware of the interventions involved in the Future High Street Fund project.
- The Pannier Market and Guildhall interventions were now completed and had been finished on budget.
- The Butchers Row and Cross Street interventions were now being dealt with in a separate project.
- The contract for the reconfiguration of Queen Street and Bear Street carparks was awarded to Mac Plant Construction Ltd in February 2024 and the works began on 7 May 2024.
- The project had been split into three phases to ensure car parking was available across the sites at all times.
- A two week delay had been reported to the completion of the works and this was due to sub-base ground testing to ensure the grounds could

accommodate the structures being built. The results of this testing found that some areas of the site required a complete reconstruction.

- A meeting was held with the civil engineers in Exeter to test the robustness of the programme due to the unforeseen extension to the phase one completion date.
- The drainage was all in for phase one and the new completion date for phase one was 31 October, which the contractors were confident would be met.
- Nearby businesses had been informed of the two week delay.
- Phase two, would begin immediately after phase one and would see works to create the new access into the carpark from Alexandra Road.
- Phase three would commence once the compound was clear.
- Pearce construction were awarded the contract for the works on 36 and 37 Boutport Street and pre-construction works began immediately in February 2024.
- Works focussed on 36 Boutport Street, scaffolding was erected around the entire building and the roof works were all but completed. There were three roofs lower, middle and mansard.
- The contract with Pearce construction included a number of significant provisional sums and target savings. The contract had to be set up in this way because the building was Grade II listed and so the contractors were unable to 'open up' the building to understand the required works ahead of commencement.
- As works progressed, a number of challenges became known. The main façade of the building was in a considerably poorer condition than thought as well as discovering timbers in the mansard roof in a bad condition. Pragmatic solutions had been found to restore the listed building.
- Monthly progress meetings were held with the contractor to ensure requests for information from the contractor were being addressed. Those meetings were now being held fortnightly to ensure delivery of information was received and decisions made in a timely manner.
- As with the car park project, monthly cost reports were received from the quantity surveyor. The project manager, sponsor and 151 officer scrutinise the reports to ensure monitoring of provisional sums against actual spend and spend against the target savings list.
- At the last cost report, 38% of the contingency was reported as remaining. Whilst this will appear low, the main unknowns were always with 36 Boutport Street and where any utilisation of contingency would have been anticipated. 37 Boutport Street would be a new build and so the quantity surveyor was able to cost this much more concisely.
- The majority of these were now known and had been firmed up in the cost report i.e. the condition of the roofs, structure etc.
- Members had visited the site recently to see the progress being made and to see first-hand the care and attention the contractors were paying to the building and the complexities of the work.
- Further update reports will be brought to members in the future.

In response to a question about what the percentage of the budget the contingency was, the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration explained that it would be

difficult to give a percentage figure as alongside the contingency were the figures given for the provisional sums.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, added that the actual costs had come in lower than the provisional costings and so this had offset the overall spend.

The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration advised that she could provide the link to the 'unique sustainability tracker' as referenced in paragraph 7.1 of the report.

In response to a concern about the finished tarmac surface being damaged by heavy plant still on the site, the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration explained that for that very reason the final car park surface would not be completed until the end of phase two.

The Head of Place, Property and Regeneration advised that there was no planned road closures during the works on Alexandra Road to create the new access to the car park. There may be signal controls but only for a contained period.

RESOLVED that the update report be noted.

**62. LYNMOUTH SEA POOL**

The Committee considered a report by the Property Manager (circulated previously) regarding the Lynmouth Sea Pool.

The Property Manager highlighted the following:

- In 2022 officers were approached by members of the Town Council and the North Devon Council Ward Member about undertaking works to the sea pool to bring it back into public use.

The Ward Member for Lynton and Lynmouth was invited to address the Committee.

Councillor Patrinos advised the Committee that the potential risk to the Council had been taken away by allowing a Community Interest Group to take over the freehold.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Freehold of this asset be transferred to Lynmouth Sailing Club CIC and have no further dealings with the asset;
- (b) The asset be handed over in its current condition with no financial or other commitment from North Devon Council; and
- (c) That a contribution towards North Devon Council's legal fees be requested should the transfer proceed.

**63. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND 6**

The Committee received an update from the Head of Customer Focus in relation to the Household Support Fund 6.

The Head of Customer Focus presented the following:

- Central Government had announced a new household support fund for the period of October 2024 to March 2025.
- From the Devon County Council's allocation of just over £5 million, North Devon Council was to receive just under £350,000.
- This would be the sixth fund that we had administered since 2021.
- North Devon Council were working with Devon County Council to find the best way of administering the funds and as previously this would comprise of a mixture of applications and direct awards.
- Along with other Devon authorities North Devon Council were looking to make direct awards to pensionable age households in receipt of council tax reduction (a means tested reduction) but who do not receive pension credit (which would entitle them to the winter fuel payment).
- The tabled options outlined how the funds could be distributed:
  - Option one: to award either £100, £150, £175 or £200 to all pensionable age households on a low income (in receipt of council tax reduction which is a means tested reduction) but who were not in receipt of pension credit.
  - There were 988 households identified as being on a low income (but not in receipt of pension credit) and so the totals for the awards listed above would equal:
    - £100 = £98,000
    - £150 = £148,000
    - £175 = £172,000
    - £200 = £197,000
  - Option two: split the pensionable age households who were on a low income (receiving council tax reduction) but who were not in receipt of pension credit by income:
    - Households which were either below the pension credit threshold but not yet applied/had an application approved or were within £50 of the threshold per week,  $532 \times £200 = £106,400$ .
    - Households above £50 of the threshold per week,  $456 \times £100 = £45,600$
    - Combined total of this option, £152,000
    - This would leave between £150,000 and £250,000 for applications, this was most preferred based on previous rounds.
- A steer on how the funds were administered was being sought from members today or if members were happy to allow officers to make that decision.

In response to questions the Head of Customer Focus, gave the following responses:

- Working age claimants would still be able to apply to the fund via the usual referral routes. Previous funds had focussed on working age claimants. This round was being focussed on pension age claimants.
- It wouldn't be possible to cover both working age and pension age claimants as it would leave insufficient funds for the application part of the scheme.
- Ideally, the fund needed to open to applications shortly as we were heading into the colder months now.

RESOLVED that officers be delegated to make the decision on how to administer funding with deferment to the Lead Member for Resources and Commercialisation and future reports on how the fund was administered to return to Committee.

Chair

The meeting ended at 11.19 am

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