

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Policy Development Committee held at Barum Room - Brynsworthy on Monday, 13th January, 2025 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Patrinos – In the Chair.

Councillors Bishop, Bushell, Jones, P Leaver and Worden.

Officers:

Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Governance, Head of Organisational Development, Head of Programme Management and Performance and Car Parks Manager.

Also Present virtually:

Councillor Bulled.

55. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clayton, Spear, Turton, Williams and Wilson.

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

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th December 2024 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest announced.

58. SERVICE PLANS - ANNUAL REPORTING.

The Committee discussed the Service Plans (as previously circulated).

The Chair advised that the service plans were being presented to the Committee as part of their annual reporting process.

He explained that following the introduction of the 5 programmes to support the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan objectives, the service plans were now much more condensed and contained information only related to the day to day operation of each service.

There were five programmes established each with a Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) were as follows:

1. Customer Focus / Digital by Design – SRO Sarah Higgins.
2. Environmental Enhancement – SRO Mark Kentell.
3. Housing & Community Safety – SRO Nina Lake.
4. Regeneration & Economic Growth – SRO SarahJane Mackenzie-Shapland.
5. Organisational Development – SRO Nikki Gordon.

He added that the following Heads of Service had been invited to answer questions from the Committee:

- Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive.
- Head of Governance.
- Head of Organisational Development.
- Head of Programme Management and Performance.

He explained that with the uncertainty of devolution impacting upon the Council that it was important to ensure that the Council continued to operate as business as usual in the interim.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Heads of Service advised the following:

Governance

- With regards to a question related to the amount of engagement with Parish Councils in relation to the Community Governance Reviews under the Governance heading on page 5 of the report. The Committee was advised that consultation had been undertaken with Parish Councils via the Parish Forum, which was held on 27th November 2024 and also via email to all the Town and Parish Councils. However, so far the response rate had been quite low.

In response request was made for an email being sent to all North Devon Councillors asking them to mention the Parish Reviews when they next attended their respective parish council meetings. The Chair agreed and also suggested that a note be added to the next Members Bulletin.

- With regards to the potential to delay boundary changes in light of the devolution situation, the Head of Governance advised that this was not a full community governance review, rather looking to address any current issues raised by Parish and Town Councils. He advised that this concern would be discussed with the Chief Executive.

The deadlines were as follows:

- End of consultation process – End of February 2025.
- Terms of Reference – To be considered at Full Council in July 2025, which would allow sufficient time for feedback.

Organisational Development

- In response to a question regarding how the Council was managing the impact upon staff during the uncertainty surrounding the devolution white paper. The Head of Organisational Development advised the Senior Management Team were mindful of the impact of such unsettling times on staff; she added that it was vital that they were kept informed of the most up to date information and the purpose of them was to allay fears as much as possible.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive advised that a report had been presented to the Governance Committee a few months prior with regards to future proofing the Councils workforce, which had been received positively by the Committee.

He added that the Council was keen to invest in its workforce to continue to develop its skills base and to continue to work to attract potential employees to the North Devon area.

In response to a question regarding any potential restructure that would occur as a result of any new authority set up, he explained that the Council were not anticipating any changes with regards to offices based in North Devon, as any new authority would still require a base in the North Devon area.

He explained that the Chief Executive released regular blog updates to all employees with the latest one due for release later that week. He added that all Heads of Service and Organisational Development would keep staff fully informed of the latest updates as and when they were known.

The Committee discussed the potential delay of the Devon County Council elections in light of the uncertainty surrounding the current devolution proposals.

Councillor P. Leaver advised that he had been standing in for the Leader that morning at a meeting of Chief Executives and Leaders. He advised that Councils were expecting a letter from government at the beginning of February 2025, which would provide clarification with regards to the arrangements for the elections. He added that there was a general feeling amongst Councillors that Councils would not meet the criteria for delaying the elections for 2025.

The Committee discussed the potential merger of Council services into a new unitary authority and agreed that it was important to proceed with the Councils current workload to deliver the Local Plan and Housing Strategy. Both of which it agreed were good initiatives to tackle the affordable housing and homelessness.

In response to a question regarding the establishment of a list of long term aspirations for the Council, which might not come to fruition if the plans for devolution take place. The Head of Programme Management and Performance advised that Senior Management Team had agreed that Member workshop be arranged to discuss the current programmes and whether or not they were going to be deliverable.

She acknowledged that there would be some actions currently contained within the service plans, which would likely be taken out as a result of any evolving devolution plans.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive explained that it was important to establish a manageable balance of projects/schemes that may or may not happen and to ensure that the Council got the best out of those assets that it had already delivered. Such as the new leisure centre, which had a 20 year contract lease.

Councillor Bushell raised concerns regarding the Council's asset portfolio and any potential risk that these should be lost or sold off as part of an established unitary authority.

In response, the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive advised that any newly established unitary authority would need to have a sound financial base and the risk of loss of assets for financial benefit was unlikely.

RESOLVED, that the service plans be noted.

**59. NORTH DEVON COUNCIL (OFF STREET PARKING PLACES)
ORDER 2025. REPORT BY THE CAR PARKS MANAGER.**

The Committee considered a report by the Car Parks Manager (circulated separately) regarding the Review of the North Devon Council (Off Street Parking Places) Order 2025.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive advised that following the Strategy and Resources Committee held in July 2024, a Car Park Review Working Party, which included cross party members, had been established and three workshops were held in October, November and December to discuss and agree on a revised charging tariff for North Devon Car Parks.

He advised that the Cross Party Working Party had looked at a range of data around, permits, income levels per car park, payment methods – which varied from car park to car park, 30-minute usage compared to hourly and car park charges locally and in neighbouring authorities.

He highlighted the following points:

- The report detailed a summary of the requests made by Parish and Town Councils, which were detailed on pages 5 – 9 of the agenda.
- The proposed off street parking order and associated increase in charges was detailed in Appendix A of the report.
- A summary of proposed increases for North Devon Council owned carparks was detailed in Appendix B of the report.
- The increase in yearly permits was made by comparison with other authorities as follows:
 - In the Torridge District Council area, a yearly permit was £500 and in the Mid-Devon District Council area, a 12-month permit was in the region of £491.
- Charges for short stay and long stay car parks were reviewed together with coastal car parks. For consistency, it was decided by the working group to increase charges by 10 pence per hour across all car parks.
- Looking at long stay car parks, the working group agreed that as the Seven Brethren long stay car park was further away than other long stay car parks to retain the current all day charge of £2.50. However, the decision was made to increase all other long stay, all day car park charges by a £1 to £3.50.
- The working group agreed that the Green Lanes car park charges needed to be brought into line with other Council owned car parks, as this car park was within North Devon Council ownership.
- The Working Group discussed the car parks in South Molton. There were two car parks in South Molton the larger long stay central car park and the short stay car park across the road known as the Sheep Pen.
- The short stay car park had historically had an element of long stay to it and was next to a privately owned car park at the George Arcade, which charged 50p per hour.
- To ensure consistency across other areas, the working group were proposing to apply the short stay charges to the Sheep Pen car park.
- The proposals to increase charges by 10p per hour were still cheaper than those of neighbouring authorities.
- Torridge District Council currently charged £1.50 an hour in its towns and £1.70 an hour in coastal areas. The charges in North Devon for 2025/26 would be £1.40 per hour in towns and £1.60 per hour in coastal areas.
- Mid-Devon District Council currently charged £1.60 in their town centre car parks.
- The financial considerations tied in with the medium-term financial plan that had already been agreed by Members and the proposals to increase charges for the next financial year could potentially give an estimated revenue of around £350,000.

He drew the Committee's attention to the following typographical errors within the Off Street Parking Order, which had been identified by the Strategy and Resources Committee and were detailed in appendix A on page 11 of the report:

- Swimbridge did not have a car park as mentioned in Appendix A, on page 76 of the agenda.
- The proposal from the cross party member working group to make the Sheep Pen car park, South Molton, into a short stay following the decision by Strategy and Resources Committee, this would now remain a long stay. This to be reviewed alongside the lorry park potential additional spaces next year.
- Marine Drive, Woolacombe was now owned and managed by the National Trust was amended on the order, as mentioned in Appendix A, on page 88 of the agenda.
- Woolacombe Village Hall, Woolacombe, under Ancillary Matters as mentioned in appendix A, at the top of page 90 of the agenda, amended (N4), owned by Woolacombe Town Hall Trustees.
- Ropery Road, Ilfracombe under Ancillary Matters, (N10) – no sleeping, as mentioned in Appendix A, on page 73 of the report, needed to be removed. The covering report at section 4 of the agenda referred to the removal of N10 – No sleeping.
- Wilder Road, Ilfracombe charges as mentioned in Appendix A, on page 73 of the agenda should be £1.40 per hour. This was correct in Appendix B of the agenda.
- Town Hall Forecourt, Lynton as mentioned in Appendix A, on page 83 of the agenda, under Permits and Tickets, (P5), the words 'or Tourist Information Office' had been removed as there had not been a tourist information centre in the town for many years now.
- Town Hall Forecourt, Lynton under Ancillary Matters as mentioned in Appendix A, on page 83 of the agenda amend the (N5) to (N13) Owned and operated by Lynton Town Council – North Devon Council do not own the car park.

Councillor Worden addressed the Committee regarding concerns over the short stay car park in South Molton. He advised that if the charges had been increased to £1.50 per hour he was concerned that there would have been a loss of revenue to the Council, as the increase in charges would mean the car park would be under-utilised. He added that the Pannier Market, which was owned by the Town Council had been closed for parking may have been reopened if the proposed charge increase had been approved by the Strategy and Resources Committee as it was felt that the increase in cost was too significant.

In response to a question from Councillor Bushell regarding the potential to review of the quarter mile radius for residents parking permits within the development boundary.

The Car Parks Manager advised that this had been considered as part of the working group. However, it was felt that there was potential to oversubscribe spaces within the car park and that if the change was made for South Molton that all of the other towns etc would need to be brought in line and the risk of oversubscription in other areas could then present as an issue.

In response to a further question from Councillor Bushell regarding increasing the radius for a 12 month trial period for South Molton, the Director of Resources and

Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council should be mindful of data that would need to be fully analysed and understood and that the decision could not be taken at the meeting as other areas would also need to be taken into consideration. He added that the Strategy and Resources Committee could look at other areas to widen the quarter mile radius as part of a wider piece of work to also include the lorry park study for utilisation as a car park.

Councillor Bushell questioned whether there could be any increase made in the charges for Green Lanes as it was centrally located within the Barnstaple town centre and also undercover.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the same could be said for other car parks located in and around the town centre and that residents would park in a car park which was located to an area of the town that they wanted to visit or to shop. The charges for the Green Lanes car park was brought into line with other Council owned short stay car parks in 2023 to ensure consistency and that it was a case of finding the right balance.

In response to a question regarding having a reduced charge for Green Lanes once the hub was operational, he advised that the charges would not be reduced and were fully aligned with other Council owned short stay car parks.

Councillor Jones thanked the officers and teams who had been working on the details for the parking order and added that the issue faced in South Molton will be repeated across the district.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Working Group had looked at the charges across the whole district and added that it was only the second time since 2016 that an increase in charges had been made. He added that the group had reviewed the impact on footfall from the last time that the charges were increased and that from the six months between April and September 2023, footfall within Barnstaple had increased by 5% on the same period in 2022.

Councillor P. Leaver added that the debate at the meeting indicated what a difficult task the Working Group had and in his opinion they had found the right solution with raising the charges slightly. He added that having consistency between the individual towns was important and that resident permits existed for people who lived within the town but did not have access to parking with their property.

RESOLVED, that the Policy Development Committee supported and endorsed the proposals made by the Strategy and Resources Committee at its meeting held on 6th January, which were as follows:

- (a) That after consultation as requested by parishes and amendments for North Devon Council Car Parks be included as set out as follows, effective from 1 April 2025:
- (b) Delegated power be given to the Head of Place, Property and Regeneration in consultation with the Leader, Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer to make the Order following the consultation, subject to there being no material objections or amendments necessary;

- (c) **Braunton Parish Council** – Braunton Parish Council had not requested any amendments.
- (d) **Combe Martin Parish Council** - Combe Martin Parish Council had not requested any amendments.
- (e) **Instow Parish Council** – to accept changes to charges and regulations for Instow Marine car park and include the amendments into the Off Street Parking Order as seen at section 4 of the report and as shown in Appendix A of the report.
- (f) **Lynton and Lynmouth Town Council** - to accept changes to charges and regulations for Bottom Meadow, Cross Street, Esplanade, Lower Lyndale, Upper Lyndale, Upper Valley of the Rocks, Valley of the Rocks and Watersmeet car parks and include the amendments into the Off Street Parking Order as seen at section 4 of the report and as shown in Appendix A of the report.
- (g) **South Molton Town Council** – to accept changes to charges and regulations for South Molton Central Car Park, and South Molton Coach and Lorry Park and include the amendments into the Off Street Parking Order as seen at section 4 of the report and as shown in Appendix A of the report and subject to the Sheep Pen Car Park remaining a Long Stay Car Park; and

RECOMMENDED:

- (h) That Council vary the charges and regulations for all North Devon Council owned Car Parks as outlined in Appendix A of the report, subject to amending the designation of the Sheep Pen Car Park, South Molton from short stay to long stay and include the amendments into the Off Street Parking Order, subject to including changes as identified by Strategy and Resources Committee.

60. WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25.

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

The Chair advised that the Chief Executive Officer, Citizens Advice, Torridge, North, Mid and West Devon had been unable to attend the Committee meeting on 12th December 2024 due to unforeseen circumstances.

He added that she had expressed an interest in attending a future meeting of the Committee and sought the Committee's opinion on whether it would be appropriate to invite her to the meeting on Thursday 13th February 2025 given the number of items that were scheduled for consideration at that meeting.

The Committee agreed that the Chief Executive Officer, Citizens Advice, Torridge, North, Mid and West Devon be invited to attend the meeting to present as the first item on the agenda for no longer than 30 minutes, which would involve a 15 minute presentation followed by a 15 minute question and answer session with the Committee.

The Committee discussed the other items on the work programme and highlighted the special meeting to discuss transportation and infrastructure, which was scheduled to be held in March 2025 on a date to be confirmed.

The Chair acknowledged that it was a wide scope and that he was mindful that the Committee should focus on a specific area when the time came to make arrangements for the special meeting to ensure that they achieved the best outcome for North Devon.

The Committee also discussed the potential to offer its services as part of the ongoing devolution situation as it evolved.

RESOLVED that the work programme for 2024/25 be noted.

Chair

The meeting ended at 7.54 pm

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