

**NORTH DEVON COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of Building Control Joint Committee held at Woodlands Enterprise Centre, Pathfields Business Park, South Molton on Thursday, 14th February, 2019 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Members:

Councillor Brailey (Chairman)

Councillors Yabsley and Eginton.

Officers:

Chief Executive and Head of Resources.

**20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Chesterton.

**21. TO APPROVE AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1ST NOVEMBER 2018 (ATTACHED)**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018 (circulated previously) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest announced.

**23. POOLED BUDGET AND TRADING ACCOUNT AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2018.**

The Joint Committee received an update by the Head of Resources in relation to the Pooled Budget and Building Control Trading Account for the quarter three trading position as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018 (circulated previously).

The Head of Resources highlighted the following:

- Column one detailed the annual base budget for both Councils whilst column two detailed the net position as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018. The figures indicated that just under half of the annual budget had been spent at the three quarter year position, which was a positive story.

- The overall costs of the partnership were only marginally up on this time last year, with a total gross expenditure of £496K for quarter three position. Income was £16k higher than the previous year same position at £447k.
- Column three detailed the shared costs, which were split 61% to North Devon Council and 39% Mid Devon District Council.
- The forecast for the year end position was lower than the net budget set and the partnership was in a better financial position than the previous year.
- Columns four and five detailed the chargeable and non-chargeable element, which demonstrated a chargeable surplus for both Councils together with a positive position at quarter three.

RESOLVED, that the report be noted.

**24. 2019/20 TO 2021/22 POOLED BUDGET FORECAST.**

The Joint Committee received an update by the Head of Resources in relation to the 2019/20 to 2021/22 Pooled Budget Forecast (circulated previously).

The Head of Resources highlighted the following:

- Column one detailed the draft net budget for both Councils, which at £124K was slightly higher, which was a £22K increase on the 2018/19 net budget.
- The income forecast for 2019/20 was lower by £18K, due to reduction on Mid Devon District Council income budget in line with actual performance.
- Overall costs had only increased by £4K.
- The employee figures appeared to be slightly higher on the North Devon Council side, which was attributed to recent appointments made by North Devon Council. However, both Councils were assuming respective shares of employee costs with a 60:40 split.

**25. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS.**

The Joint Committee received an update by the Building Control Manager (circulated previously) regarding the Key Performance Indicators.

The Building Control Manager highlighted the following:

- Response times had slipped outside of target due to resource constraints, which had necessitated the plan checking being outsourced to Exeter City Council Building Control. From the beginning of 2019 that element had been brought back in house.
- The key performance indicator for Building Regulation applications examined within three weeks had slipped to 87% for quarter three.
- The average time to first response in days was 12 days for quarter three against a target of 10 days.
- The market share based on the number of applications received had increased for the third successive quarter and was holding at the correct level.

- The market share of new housing completions remained very strong at 47% for quarter three.

In response to a question, the Building Control Manager advised that there had been no complaints made about response times during the quarter. He added that the team had been in regular contact with its clients to keep them fully informed of the position in relation to their applications.

## **26. BUILDING CONTROL BUSINESS UPDATE.**

The Joint Committee received an update by the Building Control Manager (circulated previously) regarding the Building Control Business update.

The Building Control Manager highlighted the following:

- Following the previous report of staff vacancies, the following positions had been appointed:
  - Technical Support Officers – Two positions.
  - Principal Building Control Surveyor.
  - Trainee Building Control Surveyor.
- The Trainee position was appointed following interviews for a Surveyor position and in consultation with Human Resources. The quality of the candidates applying for the Surveyor post was inadequate and therefore the decision was made to appoint an applicant who impressed at interview but had insufficient experience and knowledge of the Building Regulations to undertake the role.
- A new structure had been implemented within the service, which allowed for increasing supervision and monitoring.
- As a result of the recruitment process, from January 2019, all plan checking was now being undertaken in-house.

## **27. FEE REVISIONS.**

The Joint Committee received an update from the Building Control Manager (circulated previously) regarding Fee Changes.

The Building Control Manager highlighted the following:

- The report set out the current financial position together with the case for increasing the fees.
- The service plan had been considered by the Joint Committee at its meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018, which indicated an increase in fees by 3% was being considered.

- The fees were increased in April 2018. However, the levels needed to be increased in line with inflation to maintain a balanced budget and ensure that the service continued to be self-funding.
- A comparison of fees with other Local Authorities and Partnerships in the South West had been carried out and the fees remained competitive.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) that the fees were increased by approximately 3%. The proposed charges had been rounded up to the nearest round figures to eliminate decimal points when both with and without VAT;
- (b) that the restructuring of fees to combine the plan fee and inspection fee into a single payment at the time of the deposit of the application, which was previously agreed by the Committee be approved. This change would reduce the administration of invoice payments together with the reduction of bad debts and remove customer confusion regarding the inspection invoice where they had not been informed of this by their agent; and
- (c) that the revised Fee Scheme together with the new fee calculator, which was used for preparing individual quotations be introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 following a months' notice on the website of the proposed change.

**28. MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL BUILDING CONTROL PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT FINDINGS.**

The Building Control Manager presented the Mid Devon District Council Building Control Partnership governance and audit findings.

He advised that Mid Devon District Council had commissioned the audit by Devon Partnership to assess the risks that the authority was exposed to through their partnership with North Devon Council.

He drew the Joint Committee's attention to the following points raised by the audit:

- There were no medium risks observed.
- There were suggestions made of a more formalised reporting process, which could be addressed via quarterly meetings with the Chief Executive of North Devon Council, the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration and the Building Control Manager.
- Other comments included that meetings should be held a month prior to the Joint Committee meeting together with a more corporate approach to the agenda.
- There was an overreliance on the Building Control Manager as the point of contact and the Joint Committee was informed that this had now been addressed.
- That the Joint Committee should take a more strategic approach.
- The requirement for a longer term strategic plan to support the service plan going forward.

- The risk register identified all significant risks and clarification and reassurance was sought from the Building Control Manager in relation to the risk scoring process.
- That Building Control be released from the archives and included in the Corporate Risk Register.
- That the Joint Committee meetings should be held every quarter.

The Chief Executive of North Devon Council advised that the main point raised was the requirement for a management board. He questioned the role of the Committee going forward with a requirement to look at how the future of the business could grow and whether there was a requirement to be more commercial in the strategic approach.

The Joint Committee discussed the direction of the Committee and felt that issues were quickly identified and brought to their attention to allow them to be addressed.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) that options to grow and develop the business be explored by the next meeting of the Committee following the District Council elections in May 2019; and
- (b) that a copy of the report be provided to the Head of Resources to ensure that was no duplication of work with the North Devon Council Internal Audit Plan.

The Joint Committee thanked Mid Devon District Council for sharing the findings of the report.

**29. REVIEW OF PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY.**

The Joint Committee considered a report by the Building Control Manager (circulated previously) regarding a review of partnership delivery.

- The partnership was reviewed on an annual basis and the original objectives were reviewed.
- The benefits of joint working together with the objectives were reviewed.
- The actual budget for 2019/20 had been provisionally set at £733,660.00 indicating that the partnership had increased its efficiency and minimised costs.
- There was now a fully implemented digital system, which had enabled the service to become completely paperless with no hard copy files now being used.
- The provision of accurate data to ensure that pricing policies were competitive and met costs incurred on projects was ongoing at the present time. There were still improvements to be made on the reporting side. However, report training was scheduled for April 2019.
- By combining best practice across the partners the partnership had gained greater commitment to national marketing initiatives with an increased number

of nominations for the LABC Building Excellence Awards and national recognition with the LABC Superstar of the year being won by the Technical Support Team Leader for outstanding commitment to the provision Local Authority Building Control. The partnership also the LABC Quality Assurance Scheme in response to the Hackitt enquiry into Building Control and was one of the first Authorities to gain accreditation to ISO9001 under the pilot scheme.

- Staff resources had been a significant issue since the formation of the partnership with the relocation of the office to South Molton a contributing factor. Reasons had been carefully considered and were not attributed to the formation of the partnership.
- The ICT systems, which included the Enterprise workflow management system and mobile inspection app had enabled a far greater level of flexibility by allowing staff to work remotely.

The Building Control Manager advised that the objectives of the partnership were being met and that a firm foundation had been laid for the development of the service in the future.

**30. DATES AND LOCATIONS OF FUTURE MEETINGS. TO AGREE  
DATES AND LOCATIONS OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE  
COMMITTEE FOR 2019/20.**

The Joint Committee agreed to leave the arrangement of the next meeting in conjunction with the Corporate and Community Services Team until after the elections in May 2019.

Chairman

The meeting ended at 10.45 am