

DORSET COUNCIL - PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2020

Present: Cllrs Shane Bartlett (Chairman), Andy Canning (Vice-Chairman), Rod Adkins, Brian Heatley, Mike Parkes, Mark Roberts, Maria Roe, David Shortell and David Tooke

Apologies: Cllrs Bill Trite

Also present: Cllr Andrew Parry, Cllr Jon Andrews, Cllr Cherry Brooks, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Graham Carr-Jones, Cllr Robin Cook, Cllr Toni Coombs, Cllr Tony Ferrari, Cllr Spencer Flower, Cllr Barry Goringe, Cllr David Gray, Cllr Matthew Hall, Cllr Nick Ireland, Cllr Stella Jones, Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cllr Laura Miller, Cllr Byron Quayle, Cllr Molly Rennie, Cllr Daryl Turner, Cllr Peter Wharf, Cllr Sarah Williams, Cllr John Worth and Cllr David Morgan

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

John Sellgren (Executive Director, Place), Jonathan Mair (Corporate Director - Legal & Democratic Service Monitoring Officer), Matthew Piles (Corporate Director - Economic Growth and Infrastructure), Karyn Punchard (Corporate Director for Place Services), Dave Thompson (Corporate Director for Property & Assets), Jack Wiltshire (Head of Highways), Dawn Adams (Service Manager for Commercial and Procurement), Max Bishop (Energy Officer), Marc Eyre (Service Manager for Assurance), James Potten (Communications Business Partner - Place) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

12. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

13. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Public Participation

A letter received from Peter Greenaway, President of the Dorchester Chamber for Business was read out, relating to the agenda item on 'Parking Services Phase 1 Project Report – review of report to Cabinet 8 December 2020'.

15. Parking Services Phase 1 Project Report - review of report to Cabinet 8 December 2020

The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee was invited to review the report 'Parking Services Phase 1 Project' which was to be considered by Cabinet on 8 December 2020. The comments of the committee would be provided to Cabinet for consideration.

The Chairman stated that comments to be made at the meeting should be related to the content of the report and not about the use of officer delegated powers or the communications which accompanied the notice.

The Executive Director of Place provided an overview of the report and noted that the phase 1 project and the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet were about ensuring consistency in charging arrangements for parking. A separate report for phase 2 of the project would be brought forward for consideration at the appropriate time.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment noted that the report covered two key areas – the harmonisation of parking charges and hours and the need to address a revenue shortfall in this area.

The Lead Member for Highways (supporting the Portfolio Holder in this area) noted that work had been undertaken with councillors on this issue. In addition, she noted that revenue from car parking was used for areas such as highways winter maintenance so it was important to secure revenue for areas such as this.

The Chairman invited any non-committee members to address the committee and points were raised as follows:

- It was felt that consultation comments received reflected a snapshot of comments made on this issue. It was understood that members of the Dorchester BID had submitted comments but these were not included in the appendix.
- There was recognition of the support that had been provided to local businesses by central and local government during the pandemic and also that there was a need for income from car parks but it was felt that this was not the right time to consult and make changes. Support should be provided to local businesses at this current time
- Comments were made with regard to the level of information provided in the report in order to support the reasons behind the recommendations proposed.

The Chairman opened up discussion to members of the committee and during discussion the following points were raised:

- There were representations about whether the parking scheme should be unified across the Dorset Council area as it was felt important to have the ability to support differing local needs. However, a counter point was noted that it may not be considered fair that some areas currently paid higher charges for car parking

- A concern was raised with regard to the potential impact on the night time economy and that the views of people relating to this had not been reflected in the comments received
- In response to a question on what proportion of the population would be representative in order to reflect the views of Dorset residents, the Executive Director of Place noted that a statistical method would consider 30 replies to constitute a representative sample. The council had sought to consult as widely as possible and this included through social media. The committee's views could also be taken on board as part of the report to Cabinet
- Councillors discussed the need for improvements to public transport infrastructure and the need to be able to offer viable public transport alternatives. In response, the Executive Director noted that transport policies were being reviewed and that the long term strategy was to investigate more sustainable options and investment in public transport. Links to the council's climate change work was highlighted
- The timing of the changes was raised as a concern and the potential impact on local businesses during the current pandemic. A view was expressed that this should be addressed once the pandemic had eased
- The shoppers permit would be considered as part of the phase 2 proposals
- The Portfolio Holder spoke of the budget issues and referred to the support provided by the council during the pandemic including the suspension of parking charges in car parks and pedestrian schemes in particular areas in order to support businesses. It was important to achieve revenue from car parking which would be used to maintain the road network and provide subsidy for public transport
- The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the council could not use car parking as a revenue raising mechanism but that income was ring fenced for the road network and public transport
- A point was noted that if charges were increased in this area, this could be used for highways improvements and that council tax funding could then be used in other areas
- In addition, a point was raised that it was felt that a small increase in charging would not have a negative impact on peoples' decision to travel to and use the council's car parks
- Reference was made to the strength of feeling amongst businesses for the proposed changes and an online poll which had been run outside of the council's consultation. A point was made that businesses felt that this was not the right time to make changes and that any changes should be considered holistically including both on and off street parking. The impact on car boot sales and the support they provided to voluntary organisations was also highlighted. The suggestion was made that a review of all issues should be undertaken by the Place and Resources Overview Committee
- A view was expressed that trying to achieve a unified approach across the council area was ideological, did not recognise different

requirements across the area and was not necessarily the best way to raise revenue

- A point was noted with regard to comparison data referred to in the report and whether this reflected accurate information in these council areas
- The Portfolio Holder emphasised that the work undertaken was to balance the revenue budget and was not about making money. He also noted that there were no changes proposed to car boot arrangements
- In response to concerns about the potential impact on local businesses, the Portfolio Holder asked councillors to keep the issues in focus, as the proposed changes reflected a small increase in charges when looked at in the context of peoples' wider expenditure and the support provided by the council during the pandemic.

The Chairman referred to the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet and noted a general acceptance of recommendations a, b and c. However, he expressed concern with regard to recommendation d with regard to extending evening charges and did not feel that he could support this. He noted a need to take circumstances in different areas into account and links to residents parking schemes when looking at this area. He also noted an acceptance that there was a need to provide a level of service in respect of highways, including winter maintenance.

The Executive Director thanked the committee for their comments and recommendations and noted that discussions would take place with the Portfolio Holder before the Cabinet meeting to pick up areas identified at this meeting.

The Portfolio Holder also thanked the committee for their input and noted that he had included the issue of car boot sales to discussions to be held.

The comments made at the meeting would be reported to Cabinet for their meeting on 8 December 2020.

16. Transforming Cities Fund - Review of Cabinet decision 5 November 2019

The committee received an update in respect of the 'Transforming Cities Fund', following reports to Cabinet on 5 November 2019 and 5 May 2020.

Councillors considered the update report and the following points were raised:

- Reference was made to local plan proposals for Alderholt including plans for improving transport infrastructure and whether this would be included in the proposals? In response, the Head of Highways confirmed that the report provided an update following the previous reports to Cabinet and set out the main schemes that it was hoped to deliver over the next four years. Further detailed work was

required. A discussion could be had following the meeting about Alderholt specifically

- Discussions were being held at a sub-national level with regard to further investment in infrastructure and this would include lobbying for funding for Dorset for improved infrastructure in towns. Ward members would be kept informed on this work
- The Chairman asked about representation on the Council Governance Board and this could be picked up with the board
- The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment noted that this was a positive start in this area and recognised that there were other areas to look at to ensure the council maximised grant funding opportunities when available
- A point was raised with regard to the importance of connectivity between the Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council areas and ensuring joining up to the wider network and how this could be further supported
- The Head of Highways confirmed that the council would continue to involve stakeholders in examining issues including the best ways to improve corridors between areas and welcomed input from councillors. Other work underway included work on a new local plan
- The Chairman requested regular updates on this work for the committee
- In response to a question, the Head of Highways provided an overview of funding in this area
- In response to a question, the Head of Highways noted that the project was low risk in terms of delivery but agreed that if the risk factor increased in an area, this could be raised with the committee

Following discussion, the committee noted the following recommendation:

That the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee support the following actions, in line with the decisions of Cabinet on 5 November 2019 and 5 May 2020:

- (a) The delivery of the proposed three-year delivery programme in line with the TCF Strategic Outline Business Case, already approved by Cabinet, and guidance set out by the DfT in the Assurance Framework.
- (b) The agreed Governance Framework and the delegation of the authority to the Head of Highways in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and the Environment through the TCF Council Governance Board (CGB), for approval of future TCF proposals, detailed programme delivery decisions and the detailed design of each element of the programme.
- (c) Regular TCF update reports going to the CGB and from there to DfT as stipulated within point 8 of the award letter, with consideration of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) associated with

the programme being considered in line with current Dorset Council approvals.

- (d) Continued joint working with BCP Council officers and councillors on TCF and other linked transport programmes.

17. Update- Energy procurement

The committee received an update in respect of energy procurement following a decision taken by Cabinet on 5 November 2019.

Councillors considered the contents of the report and during discussion the following points were raised:

- A discussion was held with regard to green energy supply and the Energy Officer provided an explanation of the green tariff including the use of power purchase agreements. Some initial work had been undertaken in this area to look at prices and the demand that the council might be able to commit to, which could differ over time. Discussions were being held with the council's sustainability team
- The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment highlighted that the council finding its own power source was part of the council's green agenda and was recognised as very important, although this would take time
- In response to a question, officers provided information on the council's spend on gas and electricity
- The Energy Officer noted that the approach taken by the council was risk managed, provided flexibility for going to the market and could be reviewed in three years time. There were no break periods, as a level of commitment was required, however there were opportunities to reduce consumption which could be absorbed by the contract.

Decision

That the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee note progress made in respect of the procurement of energy supply contracts. This is following the decision of Cabinet on 5 November 2019 and is assured that action taken is in line with the decision of Cabinet.

18. Property Strategy & Asset Management Plan

A copy of the Property Strategy and Asset Management Plan report considered by Cabinet on 3 November 2020 had been included on the agenda for this meeting for review by the committee.

The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee had previously considered a report on asset management methodology at the meeting on 29 September 2020. The report subsequently considered by Cabinet on 3 November 2020, included further detail on areas including time scales and process and

included points raised by this scrutiny committee. The report was therefore brought back to this committee for information and assurance.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Assets and Property provided an overview of the work undertaken and noted that the paper considered by Cabinet, set out the process and allowed decisions to be taken in order to maximise the use and value of the council's estate.

The committee considered the Cabinet report and during discussion, raised the following issues:

- A comment was made with regard to the need to keep a customer facing hub in the east of the Dorset Council area
- Although the council would need to work through the whole portfolio, priority was being given to larger leases and consideration of where there were natural break points in leases, some of which would be in 2021 and some in 2022
- In response to a question, an update was provided in respect of the marketing of the former council offices at Furzehill
- Reference was made to the Property and Asset Management Strategy Action Plan set out as an appendix to the report and the target dates that had been set. In response to a request, the Corporate Director for Property and Assets agreed to provide a quarterly monitoring report in respect of the action plan
- A review of agile working had been accelerated by the current pandemic and the need for council officers to work from home where possible and this would impact on the way space was used in future. Consultation was currently underway with managers as to how work would be managed moving forward and this would be factored in when planning for office space
- A point was raised in respect of how officers worked from home and a concern noted that not one solution would fit for all circumstances. In response, the Corporate Director noted that these elements were currently being addressed by Human Resources. Officers where possible, would continue to work remotely until the end of March 2021 and work being undertaken was factoring in staff returning to offices but on a different basis
- In response to a question, the Corporate Director confirmed that the council had 62 hotels and 53 farms or landholdings included within its assets
- The Chairman welcomed a regular report to the committee on progress with the action plan
- The Corporate Director confirmed that relevant decisions would need to go through the council's governance structure.

19. Annual Complaints Report 2019/20

The committee received the Annual Complaints Report for 2019/20. The Service Manager for Assurance provided an overview of the key messages in the report.

The committee discussed the contents of the report and commented that complaints were being effectively dealt with, with many issues being resolved by the team. The committee expressed their thanks to officers working in this area.

A point was noted with regard to the wellbeing of officers working in this area and detail was given of the support that they were being provided with, both with the nature of the work and in terms of the current situation with working from home.

The committee noted the report and that future reports in this area would be provided to the committee on a regular basis.

20. Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

Councillors reviewed the committee's forward plan and potential items for review at future meetings. Councillors would be meeting informally following the meeting to consider items to take forward for review.

21. Cabinet Forward Plan and decisions

The committee noted the Cabinet Forward Plan and decisions taken at recent meetings.

22. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

23. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 12.25 pm

Chairman

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