

DORSET COUNCIL - PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 29 SEPTEMBER 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 Cherry Brooks, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Graham Carr-Jones, Cllr Tony Ferrari, Cllr Spencer Flower, Cllr Les Fry, Cllr Nick Ireland, Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cllr Rebecca Knox, Cllr Laura Miller, Cllr Molly Rennie, Cllr Jane Somper, Cllr David Walsh and Cllr Peter Wharf

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

John Sellgren (Executive Director, Place), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Jonathan Mair (Corporate Director - Legal & Democratic Service Monitoring Officer), Dave Thompson (Corporate Director for Property & Assets), Bridget Downton (Head of Business Insight and Corporate Communications), Marc Eyre (Service Manager for Assurance), Matthew Piles (Corporate Director - Economic Growth and Infrastructure), Karyn Punchard (Corporate Director for Place Services), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Denise Hunt (Democratic Services Officer), Megan Rochester (Democratic Services Officer Apprentice) and George Dare (Democratic Services Officer Apprentice)

1. Minutes of former scrutiny committees - for information only

Councillors noted the minutes of the former Place Scrutiny Committee held on 23 July 2020 and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 19 August 2020, which had been included on the agenda for information only.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairman's Update

Councillors noted the terms of reference of the committee.

The Vice-chairman read out a statement relating to a report on Dinah's Hollow slope stabilisation, that was to be considered at Cabinet on 6 October 2020. The full text of the statement is included at appendix 1 to these minutes.

4. **Public Participation**

There were no submissions from town or parish councils or from members of the public.

5. **Property Strategy and Asset Management Methodology Report**

The committee received and considered a report of the Corporate Director of Property and Assets which set out the approach and methodology to be used as the basis for the review of the council's assets and the basis for determining the future shape and size of the estate. In addition to the report, the committee received a presentation in order to provide further detail on the key issues which included the impact of the current situation with Covid-19 in this area.

The Chairman highlighted to the committee that this report was in relation to the methodology around the council's asset management plan and did not go into detail of specific assets held by the council.

The committee considered the issues arising from the report and presentation and during discussion, the following points were raised:

- In response to a question, the Corporate Director noted that local access was an important element in the service strategy and that this needed to be reflected in the council's property portfolio. The example of Children's Services was provided where the service was looking for a more local presence
- A recent review of leisure services and subsequent report to Cabinet included work with the service to understand the best way to utilise assets in this area
- Reference was made to county farms which were a valuable, revenue generating asset for the council. All assets would be reviewed but as a general rule there would be a wish to continue where assets were generating revenue
- An example was provided of a third party lease where there would be a choice as to whether this was reviewed or exited and other elements which were driven by the ability to vacate a premise. There was a need to prioritise where the council could achieve the greatest value
- The council's office estate would be included in the review
- A point was made that there needed to be a clear timetable for this work with targets as to when reports would be made and decisions taken. The Corporate Director confirmed that there needed to be a timeframe to be agreed by the appropriate portfolio holder and Cabinet to move the work forward
- A discussion was held in respect of issues around school assets and academisation
- The link between the sale of assets and the council's role as a planning authority was considered. The Corporate Director

provided an overview of the number of ways that an asset could be disposed of ranging from no consideration of planning issues, some level of planning consideration through a pre-planning process through to a full planning process in respect of an asset

- In response to a concern raised with regard to governance issues in this area, the Corporate Director (Legal and Democratic Services) assured councillors that the council had arrangements in place that were legally compliant and which maintained a clear separation between the executive and planning functions
- A point was noted that reference to climate change/energy costs did not cover one off costs of things such as demolition and rebuilding or changes such as how people used accommodation, for example how far people travel to get to work. In response, the Corporate Director of Property and Assets noted that agile working would form part of the work at looking at buildings. Work would be undertaken to understand viability issues around how buildings were maintained
- A point was made that it was essential to have timescales in place so that progress could be monitored. In response it was noted that there was still work to do in order to have an overall plan and programme for the work
- Options around disposal of assets needed to be considered to take into account financial issues such as revenue to the council but also wider council objectives such as the provision of affordable housing
- The council needed to take a holistic approach when considering its estate and what it was able to achieve in terms of both social and economic aims
- A question was raised in respect of the market for selling property and balancing achieving the best value for the sale of an asset. In response, the Corporate Director noted that the market could determine the value of an asset. The potential of each asset needed to be considered as to whether it should be sold in order to achieve a one off capital receipt or whether it should be repurposed in order to create greater value and ongoing revenue
- A comment was made about the potential impact of the proposed planning white paper in this area
- Reference was made to page 8 of the agenda and a comment that the council should be zero carbon by no earlier than 2035 and the point made that the wording should clarify that the council did not have to wait until this date in order to achieve this
- It was noted that consideration of heritage assets would be subject to consultation and that there would be a sensitive approach to dealing with these assets.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Assets and Property thanked the committee for their interesting comments on this subject. He reflected on the position in bringing together a large estate into Dorset Council from the former councils and the work undertaken in order to restructure the officer resources in order to ensure that there was capacity to drive this work forward.

The Chairman summed up the discussion held by the committee which included the key points made in respect of county farms and the revenue generated by these, concerns expressed over the need for clear timescales for this work, issues around academy leases, associated planning issues, provision of affordable housing on sites and disposal of assets and market values. Comments made by the committee would be reported to Cabinet when they considered the report on asset management at their meeting on 3 November 2020.

Decision

That the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee support the approach and methodology to be used as the basis for the review of assets and the basis for determining the future shape and size of the estate.

6. Review of Cabinet report - Approach to Value for Money

The committee considered the report, 'Approach to Value for Money', which was to be discussed by Cabinet at their meeting on 6 October 2020. Cabinet would be considering the development of a value for money framework and timeline, which would set out how it would implement value for money benchmarking of all services to feed into a prioritisation exercise for conducting fundamental value for money reviews of all the council's services. The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to review the report and provide comments to Cabinet. It was noted that the report had also been considered by the Audit and Governance Committee.

In presenting the report, the Head of Business Insight and Corporate Communications noted that the former council's had a range of approaches and this work would provide the opportunity to agree the approach for Dorset Council moving forward. Benchmarking and customer consultation would take place and the work would review what support the Local Government Association (LGA) and the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) might be able to provide.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Change welcomed comments from the committee on the approach proposed and suggestions for how the work was progressed. He noted the difference between this area of work and performance management. He thanked officers for their work in this important area.

Councillors considered the issues arising from the report and during discussion the following points were raised:

- There was a need to ensure value for money at all levels of government
- The work proposed represented a starting point and there were questions that needed to be answered and links to be made to corporate priorities
- In response to a question, the role of allocated business partners within the corporate services department was outlined. The role of

business partners, who were members of staff, was to work with front line services to provide specialist support in areas such as human resources, finance and procurement. Information on business partners was available to councillors on the council's Intranet site. It was noted that business partners would be key to taking this piece of work forward

- The council did not currently have all the information it needed in respect of performance monitoring and the impact of the situation with Covid-19 was recognised. Although the approach to value for money was distinct, there was still a relationship with work being progressed on performance monitoring. Work on performance management had recently been restarted
- A request was made for detail of timescales associated with this work. The Head of Business Insight and Corporate Communications noted that a timeline would be put in place once the approach had been approved by Cabinet and some initial benchmarking had been undertaken
- Reference was made to paragraph 9.2 of the report and the notion of 'Equity: the extent to which services are available to and reach all people that they are intended to – spending fairly', and whether equality impact assessments were undertaken? In response it was noted that sometimes the council may choose not to spend fairly for a good reason, such as a requirement to assist a particular part of the community who may require a greater level of support than others. This could depend on the service under consideration and there was a need to link into equality impact assessments
- A comment was made in respect of links to procurement and consideration around ensuring best value for money versus supporting the local economy by buying local
- The Executive Director for Corporate Development provided an overview of the current financial position of the council, which was set out in a report to Cabinet on 6 October 2020. He noted that the proposed approach to value for money, provided a systematic approach to reviewing services and needed to tie in with consideration of affordability. Value for money implications had been taken into account in the restructure of the corporate services area of the council and also in Children's Services through the Blueprint for Change. The importance of benchmarking was recognised, which helped to pose questions and provide new areas to look at. Cabinet had recently approved a new Procurement Strategy for Dorset Council and this had included an emphasis on social value as well as low cost
- In response to a question with regard to business partners supporting Children's and Adults services, the Executive Director noted that these corporate staff members were embedded into services to provide a critical friend role and work alongside specialists working in the service area. This was a recognised way of working and business partners had been through a recruitment process
- The report noted that customers, both internal and external would be consulted to find out what they wanted from the service.

Consultation methods would vary depending on the service area but would seek to canvass the views of residents and colleagues as appropriate.

The Chairman noted that the comments of the committee would be provided to Cabinet when they considered the report at their meeting on 6 October. This would include the wish of the committee for a timeframe to be put in place for this piece of work. The committee supported the recommendation to be made to Cabinet as set out below.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

Cabinet develop a value for money framework and timeline setting out how it will implement value for money benchmarking of all services to feed into a prioritisation exercise for conducting fundamental value for money reviews of the all the council's services.

7. Corporate Complaints

The committee received a report from the Service Manager for Assurance, which noted the complaints performance during 2019/20 and quarter one of 2020/21 and invited councillors to consider how the committee could use complaint data to assist in its scrutiny role. The appendices to the report included the current complaints key performance indicators for the Place Directorate. It was noted that complaint numbers in respect of Corporate Services were low and not currently reported separately, however this would be addressed moving forward. Other key points to note included work done to manage complaints before they escalated in the process where possible, fostering a culture of learning from complaints and a recent rise in the number of compliments being received by the council.

Councillors considered the points arising from the report and the following points were made:

- Reference was made to page 33 of the agenda which set out that 6 learning points and actions had been identified from complaints. Details of these had not been included in the report on this occasion but could be included in future reports
- In response to a question, the Service Manager for Assurance confirmed that the complaints team would get involved if there was an issue with how a child had been classified under SEND provision
- It was noted that further work could be undertaken to see how the council compared with other councils in this area
- Reference was made to page 33 of the agenda and the number of complaints associated with neighbour disagreements and whether this data could be broken down into geographical regions? It was agreed that this would be investigated
- The number of compliments received by the council during quarter 1 2020/21 was noted. Work on capturing compliments had only

recently started and more work was required in order to capture this information.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report and their work in this area.

Decision

That the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee note the complaints performance during 2019/20 and quarter one of 2020/21 and how the committee can use complaint data to assist in its scrutiny role.

8. Draft Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

The committee noted the draft forward plan which incorporated items brought forward from the former Place Scrutiny Committee and Resources Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman noted that the committee needed to review the draft forward plan and prioritise items for consideration.

A discussion was held in respect of the list of Executive Advisory Panels (EAPs) included at the end of the draft forward plan. The Executive Director of Place noted that some EAPs would continue to conclusion, however other work identified would be transitioned over to the overview committees. The overview committees would be taking a lead on the development of policy moving forward although some areas may also require involvement from the scrutiny committees.

In respect of the current list of EAPs, the Leader noted that he had asked all Cabinet members to look at current EAPs in their area and to speak to the chairmen of the overview committees in order to pass on work as appropriate. The exception to this was the Local Plan EAP which would continue to conclusion.

If the overview committees set up working groups to look at issues in this area, they could choose to include non-committee members on these groups, where particular knowledge or expertise could be brought in.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment provided an update in respect of the work of the Climate Change EAP which was soon to conclude.

9. Cabinet Forward Plan and decisions

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

The committee considered how Cabinet decisions could be reviewed by the committee in order to provide assurance that action had been taken following decisions being made and whether further action was required.

10. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

11. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

APPENDIX 1 - CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

Dinah's Hollow Slope Stabilisation – Statement made by the Chairman of the committee

The forward plan and the agenda for the Cabinet meeting on 6 October include an item about proposals for a Major Highway Improvement Scheme on the C13 road at Dinah's Hollow, Melbury Abbas.

The item is an important one because the C13 provides the only suitable alternative north-south link to the A350 through Dorset and at Dinah's Hollow there is a longstanding identified risk of landslip throughout the hollow.

Schemes have been designed to stabilise the slopes on both the east and west sides of the Hollow and the Cabinet are being asked to consider two recommendations:

1. That a scheme to stabilise the slope on the east side of the Hollow should be progressed immediately using an existing budget at a total cost of £130,000 and.
2. To consider alongside other priorities as part of the 2021.22 budget setting process the affordability of a £3.98M scheme to stabilise slopes throughout the hollow.

If the Cabinet were being asked to make a definite decision about a £3.98 scheme in advance of considering the other budget pressures we face next year then I would have wanted the report to come to our meeting today for scrutiny. However, the Cabinet are not being asked to make a commitment on 6 October and instead we and the other committees will have an opportunity to look together at the proposals for Dinah's Hollow alongside all of the other budget pressures before any decisions are made. On that basis I am satisfied that the Dinah's Hollow report need not come to us today.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 11.57 am

Chairman

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