

PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

NOTES OF INFORMAL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2021

Present: Cllrs Shane Bartlett (Chairman), Andy Canning (Vice-Chairman), Jon Andrews, Brian Heatley, Mark Roberts, David Shortell and David Tooke

Apologies: Cllrs Bill Trite

Also present: Cllr Tony Alford, Cllr Cherry Brooks, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Simon Christopher, Cllr Robin Cook, Cllr Jean Dunseith, Cllr Beryl Ezzard, Cllr Spencer Flower, Cllr Les Fry, Cllr Simon Gibson, Cllr Barry Goringe, Cllr David Gray, Cllr Matthew Hall, Cllr Jill Haynes, Cllr Rob Hughes, Cllr Nick Ireland, Cllr Carole Jones, Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cllr Laura Miller, Cllr Molly Rennie, Cllr Maria Roe, Cllr Jane Somper, Cllr Roland Tarr, Cllr David Taylor, Cllr Gill Taylor and Cllr David Walsh

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

John Sellgren (Executive Director, Place), Matthew Piles (Corporate Director - Economic Growth and Infrastructure), Jennifer Lewis (Service Manager for Communications and Engagement), Vik Verma (Interim Director of Education and Learning), David Bonner (Service Manager for Business Intelligence and Performance), Peter Jackson (Principal Research Officer), Bridget Downton (Head of Chief Executive's Office), Jon Bird (European Policy and Funding Officer), Diane Evans (Project & Policy Officer), Robert M Firth (Enterprise Co-ordinator), Antony Littlechild (Sustainability Team Manager), Matt Reeks (Service Manager for Coast and Greenspace), James Potten (Communications Business Partner - Place) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

40. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

41. Chairman's Update

Following recent changes to committee memberships, the Chairman thanked Councillors Adkins and Parkes for their contributions as former members of the committee and welcomed Councillors Brown and Turner to the committee.

The Chairman provided statements in relation to the Land Charges Service and Information Compliance items as set out at appendix 1.

The Chairman provided the following statement:

'In the light of the situation with Covid-19 case rates, Dorset Council's Chief Executive - Matt Prosser has exercised his delegated powers to continue to hold virtual informal committee meetings.

Where a decision is required, committee members will express a 'minded to' decision in respect of recommendations set out in officer reports, with decisions being taken under officer delegated authority in the light of 'minded to' decisions expressed by members in the virtual meetings. Any decisions or recommendations required will be confirmed by the appropriate officer at the conclusion of the committee's debate on an agenda item.'

42. **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements from members of the public or local organisations.

43. **Questions from Members**

There were no questions from councillors.

44. **Dorset Council External Communications**

The committee received a report of the Service Manager – Communications and Engagement, which provided an overview of aspects of Dorset Council's external communications work. This included the protocol for notifying ward councillors of communications relevant to their ward, an overview of how the council used social media and work to reach younger people.

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

- The importance of notifying and consulting with ward councillors where possible, before media releases were put out in their area
- A comment was made with regard to the reference in the council's Media Protocol to councillors acting as spokespeople for Dorset Council and that some councillors may have differing views on what the council was doing. The Service Manager agreed that the wording would be looked at
- Consideration of training for councillors in dealing with the media
- Detail provided of the work undertaken with town and parish councils in partnership with the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils
- The importance of the role of town and parish councils in this area should be strengthened in the council's documents. This would be reviewed
- Communications provided with regard to highways issues and an understanding that sometimes these had to be sent out quickly. The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment noted that information was included on the Travel Dorset part of the council's website. He would also speak to the Service Manager as to whether notifications in this area could be improved, in particular for planned works

- Information provided on the 5-stage process for issuing media releases
- Information on work undertaken to engage with younger people. The Service Manager noted she was happy to look into further ways to promote this area
- The council continued to look for ways to improve engagement with residents
- Detail provided of how activity across the Communications and Engagement Team was monitored.

45. **Social Mobility in Dorset**

The committee received a report which set out the council's approach to tackling inequalities and the improvement of social mobility. A wide-ranging discussion was held in response to the issues set out in the report and which would inform further work to be undertaken in this area. Points were raised in the following areas:

- Discussion around issues of deprivation in Weymouth and Portland including education, employment and housing. Recognition that there was a need to improve education and employment opportunities and raise aspirations
- A conversation was taking place with MPs to try and tackle these issues and also how the Government measured prosperity – Dorset was seen as a prosperous area but it was recognised that there were areas of significant deprivation in Weymouth and Portland and lobbying continued for the Government to recognise this
- Examples were provided of work being undertaken by the council and in conjunction with partners to address the issues covered in the report
- Issues raised around academies would be raised with Children's Services
- There was a need to support and grow existing employment opportunities and also bring new employers into the area
- Employment issues in Weymouth and Portland were discussed and the need for further investment in employment infrastructure and facilitation of job creation
- An overview of the Stronger Neighbourhoods Strategy was provided, which had an initial focus on Weymouth and Portland. Councillors were encouraged to contribute to this
- It would take some time to develop measures of success and this would involve communities and stakeholders
- A point was noted that particular areas for focus for the council were education and training and job creation and the links between these, particularly in Weymouth and Portland
- Issues around the real living wage were raised and this would be raised with the S151 Officer following the meeting
- The council would review lessons learnt in the wider social mobility area from experience in Weymouth and Portland and also from other councils
- Housing was included as a theme in the Stronger Neighbourhoods Strategy and examples of programmes underway were provided

- Documents needed to be clear and accessible to the public.

46. **Former St Mary's School in Shaftesbury Acquisition**

The committee received and considered a report of the Corporate Director for Education and Learning, which provided an overview of the acquisition of the former St Mary's School site near Shaftesbury, to become the Dorset Centre of Excellence incorporating a special educational needs and disability (SEND) school.

Councillors discussed the issues set out in the report and the following points were raised:

- There was regular monitoring of progress with the project and confidence that it would come in on budget
- There was a clear timeline for delivery to get the school into operation
- A request made for progress reporting on major projects and how this could be linked to the council's performance reporting framework
- The creation of a centre of excellence would bring together colleagues to work on research and good practice and could also include support to other local authorities
- The People and Health Scrutiny Committee would be receiving a report during 2022 with regard to the operation of the school on the site
- Education provision on the site was key but work was to be undertaken on provision of services to transition from Children's to Adults services
- Any other use of the site would need to be complimentary to education provision.

47. **Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy Progress Report**

The committee received a report to provide a review of progress made in delivering the Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Action Plan. This was the first of a bi-annual progress report to be provided to the committee.

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

- Work to establish a scoring mechanism for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to evaluate progress
- Funding opportunities for green tourism
- The availability of electric charging points across Dorset and private sector and Government investment to continue the roll out
- Councillors were encouraged to read a document produced by the Local Enterprise Partnership which set out future requirements for energy and the need to enhance capacity
- Work was being undertaken with partners to develop plans for solar farms throughout the council area

- Some indicators were already included in the council's performance system and further work was required to set out a methodology for future extended reporting.

In accordance with the Constitution, at this point in the meeting it was proposed by M Roberts seconded by D Tooke that the meeting continue beyond 3 hours. This was supported by the committee.

Discussion continued with points raised as follows:

- Issues around sustainable energy production were raised
- Officer resourcing for this area was discussed and it was noted that a new corporate director post had been established. In addition, it was noted that resources were drawn in from officers working in a wide range of services across the council for particular areas or projects
- The transport vision for Dorset was highlighted including discussions around the council's own transport fleet
- Examples of the council working in partnership with other organisations and business were provided
- Reference was made to flood management issues.

5-MINUTE ADJOURNMENT

The Chairman announced that there would be a 5-minute adjournment at this point in the meeting and that the committee would recommence at 1.45pm.

48. Performance Scrutiny

The Service Manager for Business Intelligence and Performance provided an overview of the Performance Dashboard that had been set up for the monitoring of performance for areas covered by the remit of the committee. This included an overview of the key features of the dashboard and the information that was available. A link to the performance dashboard is provided below for information:

[Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Performance Dashboard](#)

The following points were noted:

- Consideration to be given to how monitoring of progress with major projects could be enhanced in the performance monitoring system
- Follow up reports on Information Compliance and the Local Land Charges Service would be provided at the meeting on 25 January 2022
- The committee to undertake further investigation in relation to the level of sickness absence in Children's Services
- Further commentary was to be provided in respect of data breaches within the council and was also to be discussed with the Audit and Governance Committee
- The addition of wider trend graphs to cover information related to the previous financial year

- PL22 major applications overturned at appeal – no data had been provided in the performance dashboard and this would be checked following the meeting.

49. Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

Councillors reviewed the committee's forward plan. The next meeting of the committee would be held on 10 December 2021 and would be to consider the council's budget proposals for 2022/23. In addition, councillors noted items to be considered at the meeting of the committee on 25 January 2022.

The Chairman reminded councillors that they could submit an item for potential review by the committee.

50. Cabinet Forward Plan and Decisions

The committee noted the Cabinet Forward Plan and decisions taken at recent meetings, which the committee could use in order to identify potential areas for post decision review.

The Chairman asked that the committee undertaken a post-decision review of the item 'Phase 2 Parking Charges Project', at an appropriate meeting six months after implementation of the decision.

51. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

52. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

APPENDIX 1 - CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

Agenda item 3 – Chairman's Update

Land Charges Service Update for the Chair of Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee – from Grace Evans – Head of Legal Services

We received a report about the Land Charges Service, at our September meeting. The report explained the work of the service, the delayed response times, the reason for those delays, action being taken to address them and details of future transformation work. Our Committee asked for a progress report for today's Committee with a further report to a future Committee about the scope of a project converge the land charges registers.

Due to the timing of our Committee meeting, which would have required a report to be written before October performance data is reported, I have received the following progress update and a formal report on progress will be presented to our January 2022 meeting:

- The number of search requests during September and October have continued at an increased level compared with comparative months in 2019. There has not been a significant reduction following the end of the stamp duty holiday at the end of September.
- The 6 new members of staff who joined our team in mid-September have received core training and have been working on searches and gaining experience since mid-October.
- East area land charges services migrated into the new whole Dorset system during early October. All land charges areas are now within the new system.
- We have a new single team email address for enquiries to replace the five existing email addresses and this is available on our website page.
- The current average response time, for the whole Dorset area at the end of October, is 61 working days from the date of receipt. We continue to publish response times on our website, updated fortnightly and also provide this information on an automated email response to search enquiries.
- We have a larger team, new ICT system, and targets in place to reduce waiting times. The first reduction is planned for the end of November.

Update on Information Compliance items – from Marc Eyre, Service Manager for Assurance

The information compliance key performance indicators for Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests were discussed at the September committee meeting. It was noted that there were improvements in the Freedom of Information response rates but that Subject Access Request response compliance remained low. As reported, discussions were underway with Children's Services to identify how improvements could be made. These discussions are ongoing and there is positive progress, but timings have been delayed due to the recent demands on resources for the Ofsted inspection. An update will therefore be provided at the January meeting. The Committee will be pleased to know that Freedom of Information compliance continues to show improvement. In the meantime, the team are looking at how the KPI can be improved to provide a clearer measurement of significant non-compliance, as requested by members.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 2.14 pm

Chairman

