

PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

NOTES OF INFORMAL MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 7 JANUARY 2022

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

Apologies: Cllrs Brian Heatley, David Shortell and Daryl Turner

Also present: Cllr Tony Alford, Cllr Pete Barrow, Cllr Richard Biggs, Cllr Dave Bolwell, Cllr Alex Brenton, Cllr Cherry Brooks, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Graham Carr-Jones, Cllr Robin Cook, Cllr Jean Dunseith, Cllr Beryl Ezzard, Cllr Tony Ferrari, 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 Sherry Jespersen, Cllr Rebecca Knox, Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cllr Laura Miller, Cllr Louie O'Leary, Cllr Molly Rennie, Cllr Maria Roe, Cllr Jane Somper, Cllr Andrew Starr, Cllr David Taylor, Cllr Gill Taylor and Cllr David Walsh

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), Theresa Leavy (Executive Director of People - Children), Jim McManus (Corporate Director - Finance and Commercial), Heather Lappin (Head of Strategic Finance), Paul Ackrill (Service Manager (Finance)), Neil Gorman (Service Manager (Finance) Corp Policy & Comp), Matthew Piles (Corporate Director - Economic Growth and Infrastructure), Karyn Punchard (Corporate Director for Place Services), Lisa Cotton (Head of Customer Services, Libraries & Archives), Dawn Adams (Service Manager for Commercial and Procurement), Ken Buchan (Head of Environment and Wellbeing), 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)

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

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.'

53. Declarations of interest

M Roberts declared an interest as a Director of a company which provided adult care services to Dorset Council. He indicated that if there was any debate in this area then he would step back from the discussion.

S Bartlett declared an interest as his wife worked in a local school and was on the Dorset Council payroll. He indicated that he would stay in the meeting.

54. Chairman's Update

The Chairman noted that a supplement to the Budget report had been produced and published before Christmas. This provided an update following the Council's receipt of the provisional local government finance settlement for 2022/23.

The Chairman provided an update in respect of the position with the Land Charges Services, which had been provided by the Head of Legal Services. The update is provided at Appendix 1 to the minutes.

55. Public Participation

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

56. Questions from Members

There were no questions from councillors.

57. Budget Scrutiny

The committee was invited to consider the budget proposals for 2022/23 prior to consideration at Cabinet on 18 January 2022 and Full Council on 15 February 2022. The report gave a summary of progress to date on the budget strategy and process and provided the opportunity for the scrutiny committees to review further, budget assumptions and actions being proposed to deliver a balanced and sustainable budget for 2022/23. In addition, following the receipt by the council of the provisional local government finance settlement for 2022/23 on 16 December 2021, a supplement to the report had been published, which provided an update on various issues.

The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to consider the implications of the proposals on behalf of residents of Dorset and to provide constructive challenge to decision makers before a final decision was made. It was noted that the comments made by the committee would be reported to Cabinet on 18 January 2022 and taken into consideration as part of the budget setting process.

The Executive Director of Place and Executive Director of Corporate Development and relevant portfolio holders provided a short introduction to their budget areas and in addition, the Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial provided an overview of Central Finance and Capital issues. Following this, councillors discussed the issues arising.

Further to the discussion held, the Senior Democratic Services Officer and the Chairman provided a summary of the key points raised during the discussion in relation to each area covered by the committee and noted that the points below would be submitted to Cabinet as part of the budget setting process:

Place

- Fees and Charges – a regular financial report should be presented to the appropriate committee with regard to the monitoring of Dorset Council fees and charges
- Fees and Charges – the Council should further explore and take into account inflation and market rates when setting increases to fees and charges for Council services
- There may be a need for additional resource to progress work around the Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and Action Plan. This is linked to the point noted above related to opportunities for securing additional budget from raising fees and charges
- Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Transport Savings – potential risk for the budget is identified in this area. It is noted that further work is to be undertaken and future reporting to councillors will be undertaken through the Council's transformation project
- Car Parking – the committee wish to flag to Cabinet the potential risk that the new car parking regime (phases 1 and 2) may not generate sufficient income for the Council's highways management requirements. This needs to be kept under review.

At this point in the meeting, the committee had a five-minute adjournment and returned at 12.51pm. The Chairman held a roll-call of committee members – those present: Councillors S Bartlett, A Canning, J Andrews, M Roberts, D Tooke and B Trite.

It was proposed by J Andrews seconded by M Roberts that the meeting continue beyond the 3-hour limit as set out in the Constitution.

Corporate

- Revenues and Benefits Service for Dorset Council – a potential risk is identified as the exit clause/fee for the existing arrangements with BCP Council is a negotiated amount and is yet to be factored into the budget.

Central Finance and Capital

- Cost of Covid-19 to Dorset Council – this is flagged up as a significant risk and there is a need for a better understanding of what the Covid-19 Pandemic has cost the Council to date
- Future finance settlements – there is currently uncertainty around future settlements to the Council and a report on the implications of this is requested to be presented to the Scrutiny Committee at an appropriate time
- Provision of rural services – the Council needs to continue to lobby the Government for a better/fairer deal and understanding of the financial impact on the Council of providing rural services
- There is a concern that the Government has not yet completed the detail of the social care reforms, therefore councillors are not in a position to be able to scrutinise the complete picture
- Capital Programme – there is a need to continue to keep the Council's capital programme under review in terms of its affordability and alignment with the Council's priorities.

The Chairman thanked officers and portfolio holders for their work on the budget and the committee and other councillors present for their contribution to the meeting.

58. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

59. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

APPENDIX 1 - UPDATE ON LAND CHARGES SERVICE

Land Charges Service Update provided by the Chairman of Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee

We received a report about the Land Charges Service, at our September meeting, explaining service delays and action being taken to address them. I provided you with a progress update at our last Committee.

We were due to receive a report at our January 2022 meeting, but in the meantime I have received a further and very positive progress update, as follows:

- In November, we reported that, with a larger team, new ICT system, and targets in place to reduce waiting times we had planned to reduce the search response times by the end of November.
- The team have achieved the planned reduction for November. The average search response time for the whole Dorset Council area

during November was 51 working days. This is a significant reduction from an average of 62 working days during October.

- The response time published on the Dorset Council website on 6th December is 50 average working days and this will be updated fortnightly.
- The number of search requests received during November continued at an increased level compared with the same months in 2019. There has not been a significant reduction following the end of the stamp duty holiday at the end of September.
- Our data is showing that the response time is continuing to improve during December with an average response time of around 44 working days at 17th December. With continued effort of the team and target setting the rate of improvement experienced in November is expected and planned to continue in the coming months.

Given this positive progress report, and further data for December will not be available until after the report deadline for our January meeting, a formal report on progress will be presented to our March 2022 meeting.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 2.24 pm

Chairman

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