

PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 17 OCTOBER 2022

Present: Cllrs Shane Bartlett (Chairman), Andy Canning (Vice-Chairman), Rod Adkins, Piers Brown, Mark Roberts, David Shortell and David Tooke

Apologies: Cllrs Jon Andrews, Barry Goringe and Bill Trite

Also present: Cllr Tony Alford, Cllr Cherry Brooks 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 (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Terry Sneller (Local Plan Team Leader), David Trotter (Risk and Resilience Officer), Marc Eyre (Service Manager for Assurance), Peter Hopkins (Corporate Director - Assets and Property), James Potten (Communications Business Partner - Place) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

24. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

26. Chairman's Update

The Chairman gave an update on the Land Charges Service, as set out below, which had been provided by the Head of Legal Services:

We received an update about Land Charges Service response times at our July meeting.

I have received a further and progress update, as follows:

- During August the response times reduced to an average of 12 working days. This has increased slightly to an average of 13 working days in September, but is still down from 16 working days in May. The reduced response times have been achieved despite the impact of staff absences due to annual leave and managed vacancies in the team.
- The response time published on the Dorset Council website is 15 average working days and this will continue to be updated.

- The number of search requests received since April 2022 have increased from search numbers earlier in the year. They continue to be much higher than pre-pandemic and are very similar to and sometimes more than the search numbers for the same months in 2021 when the stamp duty holiday was in place. For example, search numbers in April 2022 were 865 compared with 803 in 2021, May 2022 was 1019 compared with 1163 in 2021, August was 919 compared with approx. 900 in August 2021.

With continued effort of the team and target setting the rate of improvement experienced to date is expected and planned to continue in the coming months.

27. Public Participation

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

28. Questions from Members

There were no questions from councillors.

29. Housing delivery against targets

The committee received a report of the Strategic Planning Manager, which provided information on the rate of delivery of new homes against targets in adopted local plans. This item was brought to committee following a review of the performance dashboard and in particular a performance indicator relating to 'Overall – Number of homes built in Dorset Council area'. The committee wished to understand the reasons for targets not being met and explore if there were actions that the council could take to encourage more homes to be built.

The committee considered the issues arising from the report and during discussion, the following areas were covered:

- Opportunities to increase engagement with developers
- Whether there were opportunities for the council to build houses including social and key worker homes, including the potential to create an 'arm's length' company, the potential resource issues around this, talking to developers and the public to build houses that were needed for Dorset and looking at information from other councils where this had been done
- Opportunities for the council to enable others to build houses and particular reference to community land trusts and the role of registered providers
- The need to consider capacity and costs within the construction industry and commercial aspects
- Issues around the delay of development on sites with planning permission

- Links to the government standard methodology and the potential changes which may be brought about through the awaited Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill
- The impact of the constraints of designations in Dorset and how the council compared with other councils
- Mechanisms to make Dorset an attractive place to build and the need to ensure good quality homes
- Viability issues and the link to delivering social and affordable housing
- Constraints on house building from people not wanting development in their area and the need for engagement with town and parish councils and the public around the need to build housing and engagement in the planning process
- Ensuring policies enabled the right development
- The value of neighbourhood plans and the need for guidance on how to keep them up to date.

The Chairman provided a summary of the key points raised and further action to be taken:

- Further work to be undertaken to explore opportunities for the council in the delivery of housing (particular reference to social and affordable housing and housing for key workers) to include the possibility of using the council's land supply working with developers or the development of an arms' length company
- Support for the continued dialogue between the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Government, on issues in this area
- Continued engagement (communications/roadshows) with town and parish councils to bring forward local development to enable housing delivery
- The need to gain an understanding of the number of social and affordable housing that has not been delivered since 2016 and how this has impacted on housing numbers provided.

It was agreed that Councillors Shortell, Tooke and Bartlett would meet to scope a potential review to cover the issues raised.

The Executive Director of Place noted a number of national reports that could be referred to as part of the scoping exercise in addition to information from other councils.

30. Risk Management - Place and Resources

The committee received a report which provided information on the council's risk register and set out detail of the risks and proposed responses, to provide assurance that key risks were being managed. The information could also be used by the committee to identify future areas of focus for the committee's forward plan.

Councillors discussed the data provided in the risk report and noted the importance of keeping the information updated.

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The Chairman noted that the committee would hold an informal session with officers to review the information in the risk dashboard in detail.

31. Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

Councillors reviewed the committee's forward plan and noted items to be considered at forthcoming meetings.

32. Cabinet Forward Plan and Decisions

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

33. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

34. Exempt Business

It was proposed by D Shortell seconded by M Roberts.

Decision

That the press and the public be excluded for the following item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph 3 of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

The Chairman closed the public part of the meeting and the live stream of the meeting ended.

35. Coombe House Review of Phase 1 Business Case - Exempt

The Chairman read out a statement provided by the Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer, with regard to the confidentiality of the item.

The committee received and considered a report of the Corporate Director for Assets and Property and councillors asked questions with regard to the phase 1 business case.

The Chairman requested a further review in respect of phase 2.

Duration of meeting: 2.00 - 5.08 pm

Chairman

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