

PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER 2024

Present: Cllrs Nocturin Lacey-Clarke (Chair), Ray Bryan (Vice-Chair), Alex Brenton, Neil Eysenck, Scott Florek, Rory Major and David Tooke

Present remotely: Cllrs Emma Parker

Apologies: Cllrs Andy Skeats and Sarah Williams

Also present: Cllr Jon Andrews, Cllr Shane Bartlett, Cllr Simon Gibson, Cllr Ryan Hope, Cllr Craig Monks, Cllr Louie O'Leary and Cllr Andrew Parry

Also present remotely: Cllr Jane Somper

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

Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), James Fisher (Data Protection Officer), Anna Lee (Service Manager for Development Management and Enforcement), Laura Cornette (Business Partner - Communities and Partnerships), Jennifer Lewis (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Matthew Piles (Corporate Director - Economic Growth and Infrastructure), Darren Hobson (Enforcement Manager) and Antony Nash (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

13. Minutes

The Chair noted an outstanding action identified in the last meeting of the committee where the need for a correction to be sent out to media outlets in relation to the figures relating to the trial reduction in car parking charges was requested. This would be followed up after the meeting.

Subject to the point raised above the minutes of the meeting held on 30th July 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

14. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

15. Public Participation

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

16. Questions from Councillors

There were no questions from Councillors.

17. **Public (Freedom of Information) and Environmental Information Requests**

The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee considered a performance update at the meeting on 30 July 2024 which highlighted a number of red indicators relating to Council performance in responding to Freedom of Information requests in line with statutory deadlines.

The discussion covered several key areas including diving into existing barriers and issues that contributed to the non-compliance. These included:

- the size and structure of the Compliance Team and it was indicated that recruitment was underway to help meet the demands on the service. Noting the workload to reach compliance, consideration was raised to ensure the well-being of the team.
- the use of automation and the potential to explore further opportunities to use it more to save time and create efficiencies in relation to cost versus benefit.
- the need for further understanding of the issues and challenges across the directorates in terms of their compliance with Freedom of Information requests with focus on areas with a single point of contact
- there was a discussion on the completion rates of mandatory training and the impact on officers practices.
- a discussion around the source of the 80-day late benchmark used in the report and a request to consider the reporting metrics and how performance compared with other councils.

The discussions acknowledged the complexity of the situation and the difficulties that led to those cases where the council was non-compliant.

The Chair noted that the issues were understood and that there was a plan in place moving forward. Further information was to be gathered in relation to cross organisational barriers and consideration given to the ways that metrics were reported. The Chair requested that a briefing note be provided to committee members ahead of each meeting to provide an update to show the trend over time towards compliance.

18. **Planning Enforcement: Review of previous Local Enforcement Plan**

The report aimed to provide a review of the effectiveness of the Local Enforcement Plan which had been in place up to October 2024, and to review performance in relation to that plan. The report included a summary of the outcomes of a recent internal audit of the planning enforcement service and included updates on key performance statistics for planning enforcement. It also summarised the current budget available for planning enforcement. The Chair noted that the purpose of the discussion was to review the current position, which could then be used as a baseline for any future review of the new Local Enforcement Plan, agreed by Cabinet on 15 October 2024.

The discussion between councillors and officers covered several important issues from the current Local Enforcement plan and the service performance in the delivery of that plan, the key topics included:

- Recognition of the value of the planning service and the importance of rectifying any breach of planning and to address the public perception of planning enforcement by ensuring effective action.
- Budget and capacity issues and how that related to the current backlog of cases which would need to be brought down over time. The new Local Enforcement Plan would provide greater clarity around prioritisation of workload and additional resource had been requested to assist in clearing the backlog
- Detailed discussion of the processes followed when plans were breached with an emphasis on non-material amendments. Concerns were raised around items being missed and the impact of that on public perception
- Information was provided on the process of case allocation and management. A request was made for ward members to be notified of new enforcement cases, in a manner that was sensitive to data privacy.
- The value of sharing progress and communication to improve service visibility within the public domain
- The delivery of the online enforcement register which is on schedule for delivery at the end of 2024
- Issues around lone working practices and officers' safety were considered.

Following the discussion, the Chair provided a summary of the key points raised as follows:

- A review of the effectiveness of the new Local Enforcement Plan would be added to the committee work programme at an appropriate time
- A need for review of communications around enforcement activity to ensure that there was understanding of the council's role in this area
- In respect of non-material amendments, consideration to be given to its definition and a request for notifications to be sent to ward councillors when applications were received for non-material amendments.

19. **Review of the 'A Big Conversation' public engagement**

The report was introduced by the Cabinet member for Customer, Culture and Community Engagement who gave his thanks to the officers involved in the large piece of engagement and welcomed the scrutiny of the committee.

The presentation set out how the arrangements for the big conversation were made, the rationale behind the places visited, the expected level of attendance and engagement and how that compared to the numbers achieved and what were the factors that were considered to show an events success.

This led to a discussion on the impact of the engagement, the decisions made and lessons that could be taken forward with points raised in the following areas:

- The representation of areas and events chosen across the county and how that decision had been informed by officers and in consultation with the cabinet member for Customer, Culture and Community Engagement.
- There was a lengthy discourse around the impact of areas not being included in in-person events and the feeling of disregard felt by certain areas in the North and east of the county

- The limitations and constraints in terms of capacity and time were shared in relation to the scale of activities undertaken and it was reinforced that this was a starting point for continuous engagement not a one and done exercise
- The selection of free entry high footfall events for the face to face sessions was used to create a buzz and reach as many people as possible given the time constraints.
- It was reinforced that this was informal engagement and not an official consultation and should be considered in conjunction with the manifesto.
- The parish events had varied success and lessons should be learned and taken forward into future engagement events.
- Although it was recognised that higher engagement would have been desirable it was the quality of the conversations had and the insights gathered that provided the value from the engagement

The Business Partner for Communities and Partnerships took away an ask in terms of costs to run the engagement for the committee to consider the outputs in terms of value for money and advised the setting of clear and predetermined success parameters for future engagement events.

20. **Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

Councillors reviewed the Committee's work programme. The Chair noted that a report on the parking charges reduction trial would be brought to the committee at the November meeting.

21. **Executive Arrangements Forward Plans**

Councillors considered the Cabinet Forward Plan, which the committee could use to identify potential areas for post decision review.

In addition, the committee noted the forward plan for the Shareholder Committee for Care Dorset Ltd and the Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence.

22. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

23. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 6.30 - 9.01 pm

Chairman

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