

DORSET COUNCIL - PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 25 JANUARY 2021

Present: Cllrs Shane Bartlett (Chairman), Andy Canning (Vice-Chairman), Rod Adkins, Brian Heatley, Mike Parkes, Mark Roberts, Maria Roe, David Shortell, David Tooke and Bill Trite

Apologies:

Also present: Cllr Tony Alford, Cllr Richard Biggs, Cllr Cherry Brooks, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Graham Carr-Jones, Cllr Matthew Hall, Cllr Sherry Jespersen, Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cllr Laura Miller, Cllr Andrew Parry, Cllr Byron Quayle, Cllr Molly Rennie, Cllr Jane Somper, Cllr Gill Taylor, Cllr Daryl Turner and Cllr David Walsh

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

John Sellgren (Executive Director, Place), Jonathan Mair (Corporate Director - Legal & Democratic Service Monitoring Officer), Mike Garrity (Head of Planning), Mark Hitchcott (Senior Planning Enforcement Officer), David Bonner (Service Manager for Business Intelligence and Performance), Bridget Downton (Head of Business Insight and Corporate Communications), Rebecca Forrester (Business Intelligence & Performance), James Potten (Communications Business Partner - Place) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

28. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 1 and 11 December 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

29. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

30. Chairman's Update

There were no updates from the Chairman at this time.

31. Public Participation

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

32. Planning Enforcement

The Committee received a report of the Head of Planning which provided an overview of planning enforcement with the aim of illustrating the scope and

role of the service. The area of planning enforcement had been raised as an area for review during the recent Budget scrutiny process.

The report aimed to provide the committee with an understanding of the Council's Planning Enforcement function and the current pressures on resource, and outlined how this was to be addressed in the interests of staff wellbeing, service delivery, and continued implementation of the planning transformation project.

Councillors considered the issues arising from the report and areas covered included linking in with and providing information to ward councillors and parish and town councils, out of hours case work, resource pressures within the team, the link with legal services and a specific point around caravan sites.

Decision

That the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee:

1. Supports the strategy for managing enforcement work and resources as set out in section 8 of the report;
2. Recognises that the review of the enforcement policy and procedures (to be led by the planning portfolio holder) will provide a clearer understanding of future resource needs, and that there may be a subsequent requirement to secure permanent additional staff resources; and
3. Highlights the following issues to the planning portfolio holder to consider in reviewing Dorset Council's enforcement plan:
 - It is noted that an out of hours service is run on an ad-hoc basis and that the difficulties with this are understood. It is noted that further work is to be undertaken in respect of this
 - The need to maintain confidentiality in respect of cases is understood
 - There needs to be an understanding of the service level to be provided and how this compares to other councils
 - There is an aspiration to deliver the best service possible and that service level needs to be determined
 - Communications are important so that it is clear that the council will taken action to enforce any infringement of planning law or regulations
 - Need to improve understanding of different services e.g. building control and enforcement
 - Additional resource is required in this area
 - There is a need for a list of officer contacts showing responsibility for each geographical area
 - The impact of cases on the budget needs to be considered

- Use of agency staff should be short term
- It is noted that it is difficult to recover financial costs in most cases
- There is a risk to officer wellbeing due to high workloads with one-fifth of the officer resource currently unavailable
- It is important to have a single point of contact in this area where multiple teams and agencies are involved
- It would be useful to develop a record of action plan for cases
- Training for both Dorset Council councillors and parish and town councillors should be undertaken
- The Enforcement Team should consider evidence provided from outside of the council where appropriate
- Need to recognise the use of the council's legal team in this area.

33. **Service Performance**

The committee received a report which provided an overview of the council's emerging performance framework, including illustrative data. The information would be available in future for the scrutiny committees in order to identify areas for the forward plans that may require further review or investigation. It was noted that officers were in the process of building new performance dashboards for both scrutiny committees which would allow for the most recent performance information to be scrutinised at future meetings.

The committee discussed the issues arising from the report and particular reference was made to the need to review direction of travel, trends over time and benchmarking information. It was noted that the tool would continue to be developed.

The Chairman thanked officers for all their work in this area and noted that there would be a webinar open to all councillors with regard to the new performance framework and that reports would be received by the committee on a regular basis moving forward.

Decision

That the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee:

1. Note the council's emerging performance framework to support the scrutiny function in future;
2. Note performance measures rated as red or amber either at the end of October 2020 or at the last time they were reported in 2020/21.

34. Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

Councillors reviewed the committee's forward plan and noted items to be considered at future meetings. It was noted that the timescale for the item on the Household Recycling Centre Policy Review was to be clarified.

The Head of Business Insight and Corporate Communications provided a statement to the committee in respect of a proposed future review of the council's external Communications Policy. The statement is attached at appendix 1 to these minutes.

35. Cabinet Forward Plan and Decisions

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

36. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

37. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

APPENDIX 1 - STATEMENT FROM THE HEAD OF BUSINESS INSIGHT AND CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

This statement is in response to a request to review the council's comms strategy at the January meeting of Place and Resources scrutiny committee. The council's chief executive and head of paid service, Matt Prosser has asked me to make this statement on his behalf.

A considerable amount of work was done to develop a new external communications strategy for Dorset Council over the summer with excellent input from a member working group on this. This strategy has not yet been formally signed off – this will be done by the council's corporate leadership team later this year once we are out the other side of the current significant demands on the comms team because of the pandemic.

The working group, chaired by Sherry Jespersen, agreed it would not be appropriate or necessary for the strategy to go through public committee meetings for approval. It is an operational plan. In any event, if it were to require democratic sign off, under the new arrangements this would be an overview, not a scrutiny, role.

Matt does not feel that this is a good use of the committee's or officers' time at the moment. He has asked that rather than review the communications strategy now, that the Place and Resources scrutiny committee review the strategy 6 months after it has been in place – likely to be around September.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 11.58 am

Chairman

.....