

## **PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 26 JANUARY 2023**

**Present:** Cllrs Shane Bartlett (Chairman), Jon Andrews, Piers Brown, Barry Goringe, Mark Roberts, David Shortell and David Tooke

**Present remotely:**

**Apologies:** Cllrs Andy Canning, Rod Adkins and Bill Trite

**Also present:** Cllr Richard Biggs, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Spencer Flower, Cllr Les Fry and Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke

**Also present remotely:** Cllr Belinda Bawden, Cllr Laura Beddow, Cllr Cherry Brooks, Cllr Graham Carr-Jones, Cllr Simon Gibson, Cllr Jill Haynes and Cllr Jane Somper

**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), Elizabeth Murray (Strategic Parking Project Manager), Michael Westwood (Service Manager for Parking Services), Graham Duggan (Head of Community & Public Protection), Emma Harris-Cormack (HR Business Partner), Chris Matthews (Interim Head of HR), Tony Bygrave (Senior Assurance Officer - Complaints) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

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

### **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING**

The Chairman noted that the Vice-chairman had sent his apologies for the meeting and therefore the committee would need to elect a Vice-chairman for the meeting.

It was proposed by M Roberts seconded by B Goringe

#### **Decision**

That J Andrews be elected Vice-chairman for the meeting.

#### **56. Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 10 November 2022 and 12 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

57. **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

58. **Chairman's Update**

The Chairman gave an update on the position with Subject Access Requests, as set out below, which had been provided by the Service Manager for Assurance:

The Committee will be aware from previous reporting that the majority of Subject Access Requests (SARs) relate to Children's Services and that there have been challenges in meeting the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) timelines due to increasing numbers and complexity of requests, particularly in respect of care leavers. Due to the sensitive nature of the content, requests require substantial redaction. A significant amount of work has been undertaken to improve compliance, with the SARs team transferring across from Children's Services to Assurance under the management of the Assistant Data Protection Officer.

Internal staffing is being supplemented with an outsource arrangement with a redaction company, with the cost of this a budget pressure for Children's Services.

Since the transfer of the team, great progress has been made in reducing the length of response time and improving the number of requests that are responded to within Information Commissioners Office timescales. This is due to staff now having been recruited and trained, improved efficiency and reviews of process. As of November, this has improved from 53% at the beginning of April 2022 to 82% (just short of the 90% target).

Focussing on Children's Services, SARs are broken down into three categories: (i) standard requests (96% responded to within timescale), (ii) complex requests (100% responded to within timescale); and (iii) very complex requests (53% compliance).

Further work continues to improve compliance. We are working with the Rees Foundation to support care leavers that submit SARs. This is to help focus in on the information that the care leaver is actually seeking rather than full document disclosure, and also support them in understanding what is disclosed. A project has been established to explore the potential purchase of redaction software, to further improve efficiency.

59. **Public Participation**

Questions had been submitted from a member of the public. A copy of the questions submitted and the responses to questions provided, are set out at Appendix 1.

60. **Questions from Councillors**

There were no questions from councillors.

61. **Post implementation review of the Phase 2 Parking Charges Transformation Project**

At the request of the committee, councillors considered a report of the Strategic Parking Project Manager, which provided a review of the impact of the changes to parking charges agreed by Cabinet in November 2021 and provided detail of further work undertaken in Parking Services.

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

- Discussion around the length and width of parking bays and the ability of vehicles to fit inside the lines of parking bays
- Provision for motorhome parking
- New pay and display machines to be installed in stages and completed by early 2024. It was noted that the new machines would have flexible payment options and would provide data on usage of car parks
- Discussion on ways to make paying for parking as easy as possible including opportunities to use Automatic number-plate recognition (ANPR) in council owned car parks
- On-street parking was to be covered in a forthcoming review
- Signage in car parks
- Issues around maintenance of car parks
- Costs of residents parking permits.

The Chairman noted further action required:

- Consideration to be given to the size of parking bays and whether size of bays was sufficient
- Review of 'on-street' parking – clarification of reporting for the review
- Investigation of opportunities for car park maintenance to be undertaken by town councils with grounds staff (to include reimbursement for works)
- Future report to be provided to the committee on the use of car parks, using data from the new machines to be installed. Have the new charges had an impact on the use of car parks?
- Support the lobbying of Government to change the terms to allow councils to use ANPR in council owned car parks.

The Chairman noted that he would discuss issues around the cost of residents parking permits separately with the portfolio holder.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report and discussion at the meeting.

62. **Summer Operations in Dorset**

The committee received and considered a report of the Head of Community and Public Protection, which provided a review of Summer 2022 operations in Dorset, put in place to assist the Council and its partners to manage the implications of high visitor numbers. The Head of Community and Public Protection provided an

overview of the key issues in the report and plans for 2023 Easter and summer operations.

During discussion, the following areas were covered:

- There was no separate funding available for 2023 operations and activities would be incorporated into 'business as usual' arrangements, including the use of 'Dorset Direct'
- Issues around wild camping and enforcement and other action required
- Pollution into water courses, water monitoring and beach cleaning
- Continued campaign to restrict sale of disposable bbqs.

The Chairman provided a summary of the points raised and further action required:

- Committee support for anti-social behaviour patrols especially in coastal areas
- Committee support for continued communications messaging following on from the Promise to Love Dorset campaign
- Issues around wild camping (reference made to Chesil beach) and potential level of visitors from particular areas in the West Midlands – request for targeted communication with councils in these areas to raise awareness of the impact on the area
- A request that the S151 officer maintain an overview on funding and resource requirements for summer operations
- An item on water courses and pollution issues to be brought to a future meeting of the committee
- A briefing note to be provided to the committee in the autumn, on the Easter and summer 2023 operations.

The Chairman thanked all involved for their work in the area.

### 63. **HR matters relating to Place**

Further to a review of the performance dashboard, the committee had asked for a report on data and interventions taking place regarding HR matters in the Place Directorate.

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

- Issues around recruitment in particular areas
- Use of return-to-work interviews as part of the council's management attendance policy
- Issues around succession planning and the council's aspiration to be an employer of choice
- Detail of the council's apprenticeship scheme and the value of apprenticeships and discussion around how the council could continue to improve links with schools and colleges to encourage and signpost children into careers in local government

- Acknowledgement of the considerable work undertaken by officers in the Place Directorate, many of who were in front line roles and thanks for all they did
- Issues around DBS checks
- Detail of the HR interventions in respect of sickness absence and particular reference to wellbeing support offered
- Request for clarification on support available to councillors.

At this point in the meeting, it was proposed by D Tooke seconded by D Shortell and agreed by the committee, that the meeting continue beyond the 3-hour limit as set out in the Constitution.

The Chairman provided a summary of the discussion held and noted further action required:

- The committee expressed thanks and appreciation to officers working in the Place Directorate for their work and for the services they provided
- The committee flagged up the potential risks around driver recruitment for the council
- The committee also noted issues around the age structure within the directorate and the potential risks around future staff planning
- Request for a councillor webinar on the council's apprenticeship scheme
- Request for information to be provided on support available to councillors including equipment available and wellbeing support
- The committee were supportive of continued work to improve links with schools and colleges to signpost children into careers in local government – with a report back to the committee at an appropriate time
- The committee to maintain an overview of sickness figures for the Place directorate as part of the committee's regular review of the performance dashboard
- That the council continue to monitor the impact on staff of working from home.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report and discussion at the meeting.

## **ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING**

At this point in the meeting, the committee adjourned and returned at 1.20pm.

### **64. Corporate Complaints Team Annual Report 2021-22**

Councillors received a report of the Senior Assurance Officer Complaints, which provided the committee with the opportunity to scrutinise the Annual Complaints report for 2021/22.

Councillors discussed the issues arising from the report and discussion covered the following areas:

- Level of code of conduct complaints against councillors and the costs involved in dealing with these

- How the council dealt with vexatious complaints
- Historic issues and financial remedies relating to SEN delays or children out of education
- Benchmarking undertaken with similar councils
- Useful learning undertaken from complaints.

The Chairman noted the following outcomes from the discussion:

- A request for information on the cost to the council of councillor code of conduct complaints. Councillors also wanted to understand why the council was receiving higher levels of complaints
- The Complaints Team to consider if there was a more robust way of dealing with vexatious complaints.

On behalf of the committee, the Chairman thanked all officers in the Complaints Team for their work.

**65. Risk Management update**

The Chairman reported that this item had been deferred from this meeting.

**66. Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

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

**67. 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.

**68. Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

**69. Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

**APPENDIX 1 - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

**Questions from Mrs Ogden**

1. Having read the report from your recent meeting, why has the financial crisis or the parking permit price hike not be discussed or mentioned in the report.
2. Following the survey carried out by Dorset Council of Leigh Road car park please can you verify the purpose of this survey. Following discussions with the worker undertaking the survey it has been brought to residents attention that Dorset Council may be intending on trying to change the status of our car park to

short stay again or even remove our car park altogether. If the latter be the case this will be catastrophic for us residents in Leigh Rd who's only parking for their home is Leigh Road. Totally disgraceful charge £256 for a permit but then remove the car park the permit us for. Whilst the council worker said she wasn't able to say what the purpose of the survey was, please verify what the Councils intentions are.

**Responses from the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment**

1. We appreciate that this financial year has seen some cost increases for residents that could not have been predicted. This is not just for Dorset Council residents but can be seen across the country. When the charging strategy was in the proposal stage, covid recovery was a considering fact in the decisions made, as that was the financial concern at the time. The cost-of-living crisis is not something that we have received feedback about since the changes have been implemented hence is not included in the report.

With regards to the permits, several options were discussed during the decision-making period, but it was decided that the fairest option was to give all residents the same long stay permit that enables them to use Dorset Council car parks for work, medical appointments, shopping and other activities. In the long run this would be cheaper than paying on an hourly rate. We understood that some people would see an increase in their permit price, conversely others would see a decrease in their permit price. The alternative was to keep everything as it is, with some people paying over four times more than others depending on where they live in Dorset. This option did not fulfil our pledge to have a fair and equitable scheme across our car parks.

1. Although this question does not relate to the work completed for the phase 2 transformation, we thought it best to give some clarity to this. Within the parking team we are not aware of any officer undertaking a survey in Leigh Road car park. There are no plans at present to change Leigh Road to a short stay car park and no plans to change its usage from a car park to something else. Just to confirm, the cost of the permit is £260.

**Duration of meeting:** 10.00 am - 2.03 pm

**Chairman**

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