

PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Cllrs Shane Bartlett (Chairman), Andy Canning (Vice-Chairman), Jon Andrews, Piers Brown, Barry Goringe, Brian Heatley and Bill Trite

Apologies: Cllrs Rod Adkins, David Shortell and David Tooke

Also present: Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Simon Gibson, Cllr Jill Haynes, Cllr Molly Rennie, Cllr Jane Somper and Cllr David Taylor

Also present remotely: Cllr Laura Beddow

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

John Sellgren (Executive Director of Place), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), John Newcombe (Service Manager for Licensing & Community Safety), Nick Webster (Head of Growth and Economic Regeneration), Jon Bird (Service Manager for Growth and Economic Regeneration), Amanda Park (Tourism Team Manager), Antony Littlechild (Sustainability Team Manager), Wendy Carmichael (Corporate Sustainability Officer), Bridget Betts (Environmental Advice Manager), Owen Clark (Strategic and Policy Team Manager), Gemma Clinton (Head of Commercial Waste and Strategy), Roderick Mainstone (Street Lighting Team Leader), Darren Orchard (Transport Projects Officer), Gordon Sneddon (Service Manager for Travel Operations), Neil Turner (Service Manager for Network Operations), David Bonner (Service Manager for Business Intelligence and Performance), Tony Bygrave (Senior Assurance Officer - Complaints), Marc Eyre (Service Manager for Assurance), Chris Matthews (Head of Human Resources), James Potten (Communications Business Partner - Place), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and John Miles (Democratic Services Officer)

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

Carl Warom (Climate and Ecological Policy and Project Manager), Michael Hansford (Highways Assets Manager), Michael Moon (Head of Waste Operations), Timothy Woolford (Service Manager for Fleet Maintenance), Anna Eastgate (Corporate Director - Place Services), Matthew Piles (Corporate Director - Economic Growth and Infrastructure) and Steven Ford (Corporate Director for Transformation, Innovation, Digital, and Environment)

32. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33. **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

34. **Chairman's Update**

The Chairman reported that there was one update for the meeting.

An update relating to 'Summer Demand 2023', which had been provided by the Head of Community Protection, was read out by the Service Manager Licensing and Community Safety. The text of the update provided is included at Appendix 1.

The Chairman thanked officers for the work that had been undertaken and noted that the experience during the Covid-19 Pandemic had provided different working methods and learning for the council and partners, which would assist with improved performance moving forward. The Chairman noted that the updates received by the committee had provided assurance in this area and that this issue could be signed off by the committee.

35. **Public Participation**

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

36. **Questions from Councillors**

There were no questions from councillors.

37. **Review of Dorset Council's Tourism Service**

At the request of the committee, councillors received and considered a report of the Service Manager, Growth and Economic Development, which provided an overview of how Dorset Council was driving and supporting its visitor economy through the work undertaken by the tourism team, Visit Dorset. The report provided information on the infrastructure in place to support the work and outlined the importance of tourism to Dorset's economy.

The supporting presentation provided at the meeting provided an overview of the key points covered in the report.

Councillors considered the issues raised within the report and during discussion, points were covered in the following areas:

- Detail of the membership model and promotion undertaken
- Work to promote attractions and towns in inland areas including work with Portland Port connected to visiting cruise ships
- The need to consider opportunities for income generation including through use of the council's assets
- Detail of support provided to particular town councils and business improvement districts (BIDs) to promote their own towns was reported and positive feedback that had been received

- The role of the Dorset Tourism Association (DTA) was noted and how it provided a link between the councils and businesses involved in delivering tourism services
- The issues and benefits related to Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP) were discussed
- An assurance was sought that Dorset would receive a fair share of any funding secured by being part of a potential LVEP. This was acknowledged by the Portfolio Holder
- Labour and skills challenges within the visitor economy were recognised and work was being undertaken with local colleges and universities to ensure that relevant courses were available to link in with areas of skills shortages. A Dorset Local Skills Improvement Plan had been developed and the subject of skills was a regular matter for discussion at the South West Tourism Partnership
- A suggestion was made that focus groups could be held to try and understand the reasons for people not visiting Dorset. In addition, it was noted that funding had been received to look at barriers to people visiting Dorset
- Various highways matters were raised including issues around car parking, the impact of changes to the Department for Transport criteria for traffic sensitive routes and issues around highways maintenance and utility works during peak holiday periods
- Points regarding the council's former provision of tourist information centres were raised and the current position with how information was being provided by town councils / business improvement districts (BIDs) noted, with differing views expressed as to the provision of the service.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chairman outlined his thoughts for how a review in this area could be progressed. He suggested that himself, the Vice-chairman and four members of the committee meet with officers to scope a potential review to consider opportunities for income generation and to draw in the views and experience of the wider Council membership. This would be a longer-term review for the next Council term.

A discussion was held as to the potential areas to be included within a review and the possible challenges.

The Monitoring Officer noted that there was a need to consider the council's commerciality across wider themes and that this should include considering the most appropriate way for services to be provided.

The Executive Director of Place recognised the valuable piece of work. Officers and the Portfolio Holder could provide input on the scope for the review and there could be consideration of best practice elsewhere and the extent to which tourism support should be funded through local taxes.

The Executive Director of Corporate Development noted the council's current financial position and supported a broader review of income generation across the council linked to the Our Future Council transformation programme.

Following the discussion, it was agreed by the committee that a task and finish group of six committee members (to include the Chairman and Vice-chairman) be formed to explore opportunities for income generation in tourism through a future review.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chairman announced that there would be a short adjournment at this point in the meeting. The committee adjourned at 11:43am.

Councillor W Trite left the meeting at this point.

The committee returned at 11:56am.

38. Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Progress Report, Autumn/Winter 2023

The committee received a report of the Sustainability Team Manager which provided quantitative reporting on the consequent changes to the council and county emissions trajectory.

Councillors considered the issues arising from the report and during discussion, points were raised in the following areas:

- The presentation of information, including use of graphs, in the report provided improved clarity of data and trends
- The figures showed the council was being an exemplar in this area although it was noted that there was scope for further improvements in relation to both council and county figures
- Information on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy was provided
- Further work needed to be undertaken on the analysis of lifetime carbon emissions and be considered as part of decisions taken
- Issues around the council's fleet were considered, including types of vehicles used and how emissions were recorded and could be reduced. The council had to plan ahead in this area, but it was noted that technology was developing
- Issues around agriculture and methane emissions were noted
- Points were raised on the condition of Dorset's ecological network and work underway to improve habitats. Mapping work was being undertaken.

At this point in the meeting, it was proposed by J Andrews seconded by B Heatley and agreed by the committee, that the meeting continue beyond the 3-hour limit as set out in the Constitution.

Discussion continued with points raised in the following areas:

- Business mileage and the positioning of vehicles and electric charging points across the council area were noted
- Projects to plant trees on council owned land and for sea grass protection were being considered

- The importance of Dorset Council working with town and parish councils in this area was recognised and detail of work being undertaken with the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils was provided
- Information on the carbon strategy in the highways team was provided.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report and for the attendance of contributing officers from across teams in the council.

A short adjournment was held at the conclusion of the item.

Councillors J Andrews and B Goringe left the meeting at this point.

The meeting returned at 1.26pm.

39. **Performance Scrutiny**

The committee considered the performance dashboard and highlighted some areas of interest. These included:

- Short- and long-term sickness levels and turnover across the council – a discussion would take place during the exempt part of the agenda
- Number of staff non-reportable accidents and number of near misses reported in the Place directorate – The Executive Director of Place noted that work had been undertaken to encourage staff to report near misses and issues before they became a problem, which was reflected in higher numbers being reported in the performance dashboard
- % of Council Tax and Business Rates collected – an update had been provided by the Corporate Director Financial and Commercial which noted that during the financial years 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23, a significant amount of grants and reliefs had been awarded due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and as a result the net collectable business rates were significantly reduced. This years figures would be better compared with pre-pandemic figures from 2019-20 and which showed that the position this year was slightly ahead in comparison.

40. **Corporate Complaints Team Annual Report 2022-23**

Councillors received a report of the Senior Assurance Officer Complaints, which provided the committee with an update on the numbers, types and outcomes of complaints made against services in Dorset Council during 2022/23.

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

- A point was raised about the targets set in this area and whether the format of the data needed to be reviewed
- Information provided an opportunity to show how the council was addressing complaints and provided a focus on learning and the implementation of change where required

Councillor P Brown left the meeting at this point.

- The referral of some complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman, provided an independent assessment of the action being taken by the council
- There had been an increase in the number of complaints being dealt with by the team
- Levels of councillor code of conduct complaints received were considered and information provided on work being undertaken with the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils to identify issues and potential areas for training
- Support provided to officers in the Complaints Team was discussed.

The Chairman thanked the Senior Assurance Officer Complaints and asked that the thanks of the committee also be passed to all team members.

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

Councillors reviewed the committee's work programme and noted items to be considered at forthcoming meetings. The next meeting of the committee would be held on 17 January 2024 and would be the committee's Budget meeting.

42. **Cabinet Forward Plan and Decisions**

Councillors considered the Cabinet Forward Plan and decisions of the meetings held on 5 September and 3 October 2023, 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 the Dorset Centre of Excellence.

43. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

44. **Exempt Business**

It was proposed by A Canning seconded by B Heatley

Decision

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the business specified in item No 15 because it is likely that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of schedule 12A to the Act and the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information to the public. The public and the press will be asked to leave the meeting whilst the item of business is considered.

Reason for taking the item in private Paragraph 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

The live streaming of the meeting was concluded at this point.

45. Employee turnover in Dorset Council - Exempt

The committee received an exempt report of the Head of Human Resources with regard to workforce turnover rates.

Councillors considered the issues arising from the report and following discussion

Decision

That the committee supports the action being taken as set out in the report.

APPENDIX 1 - CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

SUMMER DEMAND 2023

1. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, your committee has overseen the Council's response to additional demand placed on services and those of its partners from increased visitor numbers to Dorset. This has been valuable engagement and has highlighted areas of good practice which have been incorporated into 'business as usual'. It has also highlighted areas where the Council could work better and these areas have been addressed.
2. At your meeting on 26 January 2023, a report was presented which reviewed summer 2022 and outlined plans for managing visitor numbers this summer. Your committee asked to receive a briefing note to feedback on this year's summer before stepping back from the issue.
3. With no Covid-19 foreign travel restrictions and mixed summer weather in the UK, visitor numbers were more akin to pre-Covid 19 summers. That said, it is the case that holiday destinations such as Dorset were to an extent rediscovered due to the travel restrictions and this is hoped will bring continued benefit to the local economy.
4. This summer, the Council again operated the multi-agency Summer Demand Group (SDG) through the peak months. The Group provided effective coordination of services and through its links with the Council's Safety Advisory Group, anticipated the implications of upcoming events so that appropriate resources were deployed. It is intended to continue with this approach in future summer seasons.
5. During the pandemic, the Council provided a multi-agency command centre via a contractor to ensure swift and effective communications at times of peak demand. This was funded by Government grant (Covid Outbreak Management Fund or COMF). This summer, call handling was managed by the Council's

Customer Contact Centre which performed very well and reported into the SDG. Again, this approach will be utilised going forward.

6. There was a final allocation of funding from the COMF of £160,000. This has been allocated to the following;

Coastal town council visitor management	£25,000
Additional toilet attendants and cleaning	£15,000
Extended operation of the gypsy & traveller transit site	£10,000
Additional community safety patrols	£37,000
Extended daytime CCTV monitoring	£10,000
Extended Safe Space provision in Weymouth	£35,000
Traffic Management	£6,000
Additional Waste Management	£15,000
Miscellaneous	£7,000
Total	£160,000

All of the above activities have been well received and contributed to a successful summer. There will be no funding from COMF next year so it is important to focus on what we can continue to achieve at low or no cost (such as the SDG and Customer Contact Centre).

7. Visitor numbers this summer were thought to be around a pre-Covid season and as mentioned above, the season passed off well from SDG partners perspectives. Whilst there was no Great Dorset Steam Fair, other events including The Kings Coronation, Camp Bestival and the Dorset Show all went well with one or two events falling foul of wet and stormy weather. Dorset attracted some new events such as the We Out Here Festival at Wimborne St. Giles and it is testament to Dorset's offer that the Safety Advisory Group engaged with over 300 events this summer (not including the numerous coronation celebrations in the spring). Forty-two of this year's main events had attendances of over a thousand people. Looking ahead to next year the SAG is already engaging with three new events, all with proposed attendances of up to five thousand people.
8. The additional funding permitted an expansion of the Community Safety Patrol Scheme and allowed for mobile patrols to be deployed outside of the Weymouth and Portland area for the first time. Officers attended locations as far afield as Shaftesbury and West Bexington. The Community Safety Patrol Team averaged around 400 hours of patrolling per month, attended an average of 28 ASB related incidents per month and dealt with an average of 68 rough sleepers each month also. During the peak months of August and September alcohol was seized from a total of 8 individuals causing anti-social behaviour within areas covered by Public Space Protection Orders.
9. The CCTV Control Room also benefitted from additional funding which facilitated an extension of operating hours beyond the 16:00hrs to 04:00hrs

standard operating times. This benefitted those areas covered by CCTV (Weymouth & Portland, Bridport & Dorchester as well as the County Hospital and Highways cameras). This meant our controllers were able to liaise with the police on a number of high profile incidents and provide coverage to the police control room to help enable effective responses.

10. The Safe Space Project in Weymouth Town Centre also benefitted from additional funding helping provide a safe haven for those in need during the night-time economy. It was well attended and working with our security and medical partners, as well as St Mary's Church and the Weymouth Street Pastors, promotes the Council's efforts to keep women and girls safe in Weymouth in particular.

11. Planning for next spring and summer is already underway with the Safety Advisory Group encouraging timely submission of event management plans and supporting new events to Dorset. The Summer Demand Group will convene ahead of the season to ensure that the good practice that has resulted will be carried forward into future years. Officers are appreciative of your Committee's involvement in helping Dorset to be an attractive and safe place for residents and visitors.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 2.34 pm

Chairman

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