

PLACE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 17 JANUARY 2024

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

Apologies: Cllrs Rod Adkins and Bill Trite

Also present: Cllr Laura Beddow, Cllr Ray Bryan, Cllr Spencer Flower, Cllr Simon Gibson, Cllr David Gray, Cllr Nick Ireland, Cllr Andrew Parry, Cllr Byron Quayle, Cllr Jane Somper, Cllr Andrew Starr and Cllr David Walsh

Also present remotely: Cllr Alex Brenton, Cllr Jill Haynes, Cllr Ryan Holloway, Cllr Nocturin Lacey-Clarke, Cllr Molly Rennie and Cllr Gill Taylor

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

Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), Jan Britton (Executive Lead for the Place Directorate), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Jonathan Mair (Director of Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer), Paul Ackrill (Service Manager (Finance)), James Ailward (Head of ICT Operations), Gemma Clinton (Head of Commercial Waste and Strategy), Lisa Cotton (Corporate Director for Customer and Cultural Services), Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial), Tim Hulme (Head of Assets and Property), Heather Lappin (Head of Strategic Finance), Chris Matthews (Head of Human Resources), Matthew Piles (Corporate Director - Economic Growth and Infrastructure), Matthew Turnbull (Democratic and Electoral Services Apprentice) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

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

Dawn Adams (Service Manager for Commercial and Procurement), Steven Ford (Corporate Director for Transformation, Innovation, Digital, and Environment) and Jennifer Lewis (Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement)

46. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

47. Minutes

The Chairman noted that in respect of the minute relating to 'Review of Dorset Council's Tourism Service', the wording of the final paragraph should be amended to read as follows:

'Following the discussion, it was agreed by the committee that the Chairman and Vice-chairman would meet with officers to discuss the setting up of task and finish

groups to explore opportunities for income generation in tourism through a future review’.

The committee agreed with the amendment to the wording and the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 (as amended) were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

48. Public Participation

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

49. Questions from Councillors

There were no questions from councillors.

50. Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan Strategy report

The committee was invited to consider the budget proposals for 2024/25 prior to consideration at Cabinet on 30 January 2024 and Full Council on 13 February 2024. The report gave a summary of progress to date on the budget strategy and process and provided the opportunity for the scrutiny committees to review further, budget assumptions and actions being proposed to deliver a balanced budget for 2024/25.

The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to consider the implications of the proposals on behalf of residents of Dorset and to provide constructive challenge to decision makers before a final decision was made. It was noted that the comments made by the committee would be reported to Cabinet on 30 January 2024 and taken into consideration as part of the budget setting process.

A short introduction and overview of the budget proposals was provided by the Executive Director of Corporate Development followed by an exploration of the budget proposals in a number of key theme areas.

Further to the discussion held, the Chairman provided a summary of the key points raised during the discussion in relation to each area covered by the committee and noted that the points below would be submitted to Cabinet as part of the budget setting process:

Workforce Issues

- The committee note that Dorset Council has spent around £14m a year over the last couple of years on the employment of agency staff, which is a more expensive option. It is flagged up that driving forward the transformation process is imperative to reduce costs in this area
- It is important that Legal Services staffing is kept to full strength in order to mitigate the risk to the council

- There needs to be sufficient funding and focus on communications and engagement to ensure that the council's recruitment programme is successful
- The committee recognise that the recruitment and retention of staff continues to be a challenge particularly with the wage economy, competition with other local authorities and with a national shortage of local government officers in some service areas.

Transformation

- Clarification is sought on the position with Public Works Loans as this may affect Dorset Council's working with town and parish councils
- The committee is confident with the Invest to Save strategy and transformation project
- It is noted that the sponsorship and income stream through the use of council assets could be developed further to become more commercial and bring in a bigger income for the council
- The committee note the role of the Our Future Council programme to find efficiencies and transformation in services, with an initial focus on Place and Corporate areas. Assurance will be sought on progress with the programme in September/October 2024 with regular monitoring opportunities for councillors provided.

Home to School Transport

- There is a need for additional placements at the Dorset Centre of Excellence to be progressed at pace to assist with relieving SEN budget pressures
- The committee highlight the importance of Dorset Council working with maintained schools and academies to progress the necessary SEND infrastructure to mitigate against SEND travel costs and to enable education at a more local level.

Waste Services

- The committee is content with the budget proposals in this area.

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

Planning

- The committee recognise the need to ensure adequate capacity of staffing in planning as a large statutory planning authority and the risk that not

having adequate capacity could pose to the budget

- The Council should lobby the Government to be more flexible within the planning approach, although it is noted that guidance on new legislation is awaited and further discussion can take place at this time.

At this point in the meeting, the committee had a twenty-minute adjournment and returned at 1.45pm.

Property and Assets

- Councillors are generally content with the strategy in this area but note that the council should be mindful of when assets are costing significant money to maintain.

Car Parking

- It is noted that this area will be subject to scrutiny later in 2024 and debate will be held at this time.

Funding for Dorset

- The committee ask the Leader and portfolio holders to continue to lobby Government to demand a better funding deal for Dorset.

Commercial Strategy

- The committee request that a task and finish group be established post May 2024 to consider the council's commercial strategy.

Partnership Working

- The committee note the theme of the Our Future Council programme around the working relationship between Dorset Council and town and parish councils and note that it would be helpful for Dorset Council to produce a list of items that could be discussed for potential sharing or devolution.

The Chairman thanked officers and portfolio holders for their work on the budget and input at the meeting.

51. Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Councillors reviewed the committee's work programme and noted items to be considered at the next meeting on 26 February 2024.

52. Executive Forward Plans

Councillors considered the Cabinet Forward Plan and decisions of the meetings held on 7 November and 5 December 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 Care Dorset Holdings Ltd and the Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence.

53. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

54. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 am - 3.42 pm

Chairman

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