

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

INTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Town Hall, Bideford

Tuesday, 5 November 2019 - 2.00 pm

- PRESENT Councillor P Watson (Chair)
- Councillor P Hames (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors R Boughton, C Cottle-Hunkin, J Gubb, S Langford,
 J Manley and S Newton
- Mr S Dengate and Mr I Harper
- ALSO PRESENT S Hearse - Strategic Manager (Resources)
 D Heyes - Finance Manager
 M Richards - Democratic Services Officer
 H Roper - Service Improvement Officer
- Councillor Hodson
 Councillor Pennington

32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

33. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Gubb, seconded by Councillor Newton and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September be agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote: For 9, Abstentions 1)

34. ACTION LIST

The Action List was reviewed and updated as follows:

Minute 69a – Local Housing Allowance

The Strategic Manager (Resources) had pointed out at the meeting on 17 September that it was extremely unlikely that the Government would make any changes as it would involve significant costs across the country.

It was agreed that this action be closed.

Minute 69 – Local Authority Settlements

The Strategic Manager (Resources) advised that, due to the forthcoming General Election, the Fair Funding Review papers are not likely to be released for consultation until the new year, possibly in the spring.

Minute 23 – Estuary Strategy

Mr Harper registered his disappointment at the response from the Planning & Economy Manager. He wondered how much the strategy might cost. The Strategic Manager (Resources) replied that he did not have that information. However, he had been informed by the Planning & Economy Manager that the Strategy was 5 years out of date and, as there was no statutory requirement to have an Estuary Strategy, it was not progressing. If it comes through as a key strategy when considering the Strategic Plan, it will be addressed at that time.

Action to be closed.

Minute 28 QBR1 - Heritage Action Zone Bid

Councillor Cottle-Hunkin reported that it had been anticipated a bid would be made but Councillor Bright had received £15,000 from the Architectural Heritage Fund for The Globe in Great Torrington which was being used to carry out a feasibility study.

Action to be closed.

Minute 28 - Affordable Housing/Social Housing/CLTs

Although there was no further update, the topic was discussed. It was agreed that CLTs should be promoted and people be made aware that there are funds available.

Actions:

- The Service Improvement Officer to prepare some publicity for the public.
- Parish Councils to be notified of scheme.
- Service Improvement Officer to liaise with officer responsible for affordable housing about companies/individuals who might be prepared to deliver a presentation on the subject.

Minute 28 Homelessness - Safe & Healthy Communities: Empty Homes and Affordable Housing

In view of the public contribution at Full Council on 28 October, it was felt this should be a priority.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) advised the Committee that there had been a working group which had looked specifically at council tax on empty properties. He will evaluate the findings and impact that had had. A grant of £6.2m had been awarded from the Disabled Facilities Grant fund and a dedicated resource had been committed to delivering this programme.

Consideration had been given to employing a dedicated officer to look at empty homes and homelessness but it had not proved viable. Councillor Hodson put forward the idea that there may be potential for a job share.

It was proposed by Councillor Hames, seconded by Councillor Manley and –

Resolved:

The Community & Resources Committee prioritise resources for homelessness.

(Vote: For – unanimous)

35. PUBLIC CONTRIBUTIONS

There were no public contributions.

36. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded that declarations of interest should be made as and when the specific agenda item to which they related was under discussion.

37. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

The Chair proposed that there be some training on the QBR at the next meeting in preparation for the budget meeting on 11 February 2019.

It was agreed that the meeting on 17 December commence at 3.00pm to incorporate QBR training and any other agenda items.

38. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

39. QBR2

The Service Improvement Officer advised that quite a few supplementary questions had been received although these had been raised by only 3 Committee Members and he urged all Committee Members to submit questions.

Members' attention was drawn to the changes in planning service measures with regard to the recording of application processing times. Historically, the figures had recorded averages and had been skewed by only one or 2 applications. They were

now presented as percentage values and were broken down to reflect where extensions had been agreed. A further 10/10 survey of the planning service over a 6 month period had been planned. This will probably now take place in the new year.

The Questions and Answers document was reviewed and the Chair sought feedback to the responses. Actions were raised and comments made as follows:

Page 16 – Capital & Reserves – schedule for when capital and reserves would be spent.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) explained that expenditure used to be profiled as it was useful for treasury management purposes. However, this was a very time consuming exercise as consideration had to be given to slippage and extended timings required by particular capital projects.

The Finance Manager clarified the accounting format. It was noted that the shortfall would only be made up from money from the overall scheme, not taken from individual projects.

Page 22 - End to End time for processing Disabled Facility grants

The Service Improvement Officer explained that TDC had shared responsibility and this was reflected in the figures. One or 2 long term projects would also skew the results. Councillor Cottle-Hunkin asked for a breakdown which showed TDC's performance.

Page 13 – Highlights: Leisure centre stats

Councillor Pennington told the Committee that 1610 Leisure Services will be attending External Overview & Scrutiny on 27 November. The contract had a further 18 months to run.

Page 17 – Earmarked reserves: Section 106

Mr Dengate asked where the £100,000 expected by the Atlantic Racquet Centre would come from. The Strategic Manager (Resources) replied that this would come from the Daddon Hill development at a future date.

Reference was made to a spreadsheet, giving fuller details of S106 monies, which used to be circulated in addition to the summary presented to Committee. The Service Improvement Officer to follow up.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) reiterated that S106 monies cannot be forward allocated. He also said S106 obligations are tracked and recorded but sometimes things change and may be subject to change or renegotiation.

Councillor Cottle-Hunkin asked whether Ward Members could use unallocated monies. The Strategic Manager (Resources) will check with the Planning & Economy Manager.

It was noted that a lot of money had been set aside for recreational projects, which presumably would only be allocated once the Play Strategy had been finalised. Councillor Pennington informed the Committee that the Play Strategy will be going to the next External O&S meeting although it may not be fully completed by then.

The Service Improvement Officer will check with the Strategic Enabling Officer whether there is any detail behind the money set aside for recreational projects.

Pages 18 – 20 Local Industrial Strategies

Concerns were expressed regarding the joint strategy in as much as it appeared that North Devon Council were to benefit more than Torridge. It was hoped the action plan and strategy could be used to develop tourism in Torridge.

It was proposed by Councillor Manley, seconded by Councillor Newton and –

Resolved:

That the £424,474 underspend in the revenue budget be transferred to the capital budget to bridge the £1m gap in the capital budget.

(Vote: For – unanimous)

40. ITEMS BROUGHT FORWARD FROM QBR1

Items had been addressed when discussing the QBR.

41. EXTERNAL GRANTS TASK & FINISH GROUP

The Strategic Manager (Resources) reported that there had been a further meeting since the meeting on 10 October, however the notes were not yet available. The working group had been looking at the areas where the council provided grants to external bodies, with consideration being given, in light of the current financial position, to whether the grant funding scheme should continue or whether a different scheme should be set up.

The external grant breakdown for 2019/20 showed the grant amounts awarded. £95,680 had been awarded to organisations where services had been purchased which were of direct benefit to the Authority's strategic delivery plans, were subject to Service Level Agreements or were out of scope (Members grants etc) and as such should continue to receive funding.

The general consensus had been that it would not be pertinent to set up a different scheme as the remaining figure of around £20k was not significant. However, the current scheme should be wound down by reducing grants initially by 50% and further reduced to £0 over a limited period. Officers would then offer support to these organisations to seek alternative funding, including through the Community Grants process.

42. GDPR

It was reported that the Devon Audit Partnership had now completed the internal audit of the GDPR process and deemed it to be good. The Senior Solicitor was addressing a couple of comments. One element which had been picked up was that not all Members had undertaken the relevant GDPR training.

This standing item to be removed from the Forward Plan.

43. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was reviewed and duly updated.

- S106 - A background paper to be prepared. To include a summary of the previous review of S106.
- Details of publicity of grants for CLTs
- Disabled Facility Grant analysis

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and closed at 3.46 pm.

Chair:

Date: