

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

INTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Caddsdwn Business Support Centre, Bideford, EX39 3BE

Tuesday, 17 August 2021 - 10.00 am

- PRESENT Councillor P Watson (Chair)
 Councillors C Cottle-Hunkin, J Gubb, P Hames, S Harding,
 S Langford and S Newton
- Mr S Dengate and Mr I Harper
- ALSO PRESENT S Hearse - Chief Executive
 D Heyes - Finance Manager (Section 151 Officer)
 J Walter - Strategy, Performance & ICT Manager
 C Dobbs - Service Improvement Officer
 S Cawsey - Democratic Services Officer
- Councillors: C Hodson and N Laws

102. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Inch and R Boughton.

103. MINUTES

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

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2021 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote: For - Unanimous)

104. ACTION LIST

The action list was reviewed and updated.

105. PUBLIC CONTRIBUTIONS

There were no public contributions.

106. 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.

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

There were no urgent matters brought forward.

108. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

109. QBR 1

The purpose of the report was to update members on the financial position as at the end of June 2021. Slide presentations were received from the Service Improvement Officer and the Finance Manager & 151 Officer.

The Service Improvement Officer introduced the QBR in its new format, highlighting the objectives of the Task and Finish Group, the key features of the new format and the next steps. He presented the Performance Highlights, summarising the positives and negatives on each of the following four Themes:

- Theme 1 – Local Economy
- Theme 2 – Communities, Health & Housing
- Theme 3 – Our Environment, Our Future
- Theme 4 – Our Council

Councillor Hames raised concerns regarding the rise in house prices and the effect the reduction of universal credit would have on many families. The Chief Executive responded as follows:

- Member Housing Workshops have been held.
- The housing market has changed – properties are being converted into holiday lets and being sold to cash buyers.
- There has been a high uptake on Universal Credit, but also there is a high number of vacant jobs on the market - employers are struggling to recruit.
- Discussions are being held with relevant Devon Groups, including Devon County Council, to determine what is happening in the different sectors and to establish what the links between them are.

The Chief Executive confirmed the situation would be kept under review.

The Committee endorsed that the Public Health & Housing Manager be invited to the next meeting, 28 September 2021, to update the Committee on the current position and level of provision now and forward plans for Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation and to discuss options going forward.

Councillor Hodson referred to the work of the CAB in dealing with money and debt management and emphasised the need for this Council to actively market money and debt management advice. Although in agreement with the proposal, the Committee said it is a matter for External Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Finance Manager & S151 Officer presented the financial elements of the QBR 1 – all income was essentially above budget with a forecast underspend of £685,000.

Councillor Laws referred to the £157,000 for Burrows Estuary work and asked what this was for. The Finance Manager & S151 Officer to look at the capital PID and report back to the Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Newton, seconded by Mr S Dengate and –

Resolved:

1. That the QBR be noted.
2. That a decision on the utilisation of the projected surplus is deferred until after the spending review be agreed.

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

Questions regarding the QBR are asked for in writing prior to the meeting to allow Officers time to formulate a response.

The Chair presented the Q&A supplement during which the following additional comments/questions were raised:

Question – How many units are empty?

Mr Harper referred to bullet point 'f' and asked if the units are going to be left empty. The Chief Executive said it is a project plan to look at using for potential development – this work had been identified.

There was confusion over the response to the questions re Theme 1 – Local Economy (page 3 of the supplement). The Strategy, Performance and IT Manager explained that the Service Improvement Officer had gone back to the Head of Communities & Place and the Economic Development Officer to ascertain where the figure of 18 had come from. This is being looked at in order to ascertain a more accurate figure. Ongoing.

Page 3 of the supplement – Attracting Inward Investment –

Mr Harper referred to Sean Kearney's comments and suggested looking at other inducements. He suggested perhaps looking to do something with the Council's empty offices. It is a competitive market, attracting new businesses into the area and unless the jobs are out there people cannot afford rents etc.

The Chief Executive stated that we are all acutely aware businesses are not developing because of the increased house prices, they cannot attract staff to resource additional growth. This is a problem that needs to be resolved. It is a matter being discussed across Devon in the Recovery Coordination Groups who are looking at options to see what can be done. There is Government funding available, and the Head of Communities and Place and the Economic Development Officer are looking at projects that will encourage people into the area in the hope of attracting regular jobs.

110. GROUNDNS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT VERBAL UPDATE

The Chief Executive gave the following update:

Working is progressing on the in-house transfer. The Operational Services Manager is looking at detailed specifications for the sites etc. and staff resources are needed to deliver the service. HR Team are dealing with the staff transfer.

111. ESTUARY STRATEGY UPDATE FROM T&F GROUP

The Chair, Councillor Watson gave the following update:

A Task and Finish Group has been set up and they are currently looking through the Strategy page by page. At the next meeting this process should be completed and the Group will then look to see what, if any, changes are to be made.

112. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was discussed and updated as follows:

Jan Williams and Helen Paige to be invited to the September meeting to explain the current position re housing and to discuss options going forward.

QBR format Review – to be moved to November meeting

The meeting commenced at 10 am and closed at 11.02 am

Chair:

Date: