

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

INTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Caddsdow Business Support Centre, Bideford, EX39 3BE

Tuesday, 22 March 2022 - 10.00 am

PRESENT In the absence of the Chair, Councillor T Inch, Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

Councillors J Gubb, P Hames, S Harding, S Langford and S Newton and C Leather substituting.

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
 P Hudson - Senior Capital Accountant
 C Dobbs - Service Improvement Officer
 K Brown - Democratic Services Officer

Councillors C Hodson and N Laws

158. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Boughton, C Cottle-Hunkin and P Watson. Councillor Leather substituted for Councillor Watson.

159. MINUTES

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

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th February 2022 be agreed.

(Vote: For 7, Against 0, Abstention 2)

160. ACTION LIST

The action list was discussed and updated.

161. PUBLIC CONTRIBUTIONS

There were no public contributions.

162. 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.

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

No urgent matters were brought forward.

164. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

165. QBR 3

The purpose of the report was for Members to receive the quarterly business report for the period ending 31st December 2021. Slide presentations were received from the Service Improvement Officer and the Finance Manager & 151 Officer.

The Service Improvement Officer introduced the QBR. 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

The Finance Manager (S151 Officer) concluded the presentation by providing a detailed explanation on the following:

- Income & Salaries
- Budget Monitoring
- Budget Narrative
- Investments
- Capital & Reserves

A discussion followed with comments, questions and queries addressed.

Following a query from Councillor Hames, the Chief Executive confirmed that a Homelessness Strategy would be presented at the next Internal Overview & Scrutiny meeting. In response to further questioning the Chief Executive advised briefly of discussions that had taken place at Community & Resources regarding an acquisition of further accommodation and that homelessness is a nationwide problem.

Councillor Harding was advised to contact the Housing Team direct concerning an individual in his ward.

The Chief Executive explained the difficulties and pressures surrounding staff vacancies and resources and provided information on the New Burden Grant, following queries from Councillor Langford and Councillor Newton.

The Finance Manager (S151) Officer provided further reasoning regarding staff resources, restrictions the authority has regarding pay and clarified how the New Burden Grant operates.

Councillor Hodson asked for clarification on the date that the new Council Tax Support scheme would be implemented? It was confirmed that there was an error on page 16 of the QBR and the Council Tax Support scheme would be implemented by 1st April 2023.

It was confirmed that staff were not used from the Revenues & Benefits Team to administer grants, this was done by staff within the NNDR Team with support from Finance colleagues and North Devon Plus.

Following queries from Councillor Leather, it was confirmed that some staff are still working from home whilst some are back in the office and the number of staff within the Benefits Team was at the correct level. Local Authorities had been instructed by Central Government to administer the new £150 grant via the Council Tax system, but it was not linked to Council Tax. New staff had recently been recruited for the Council Tax Team and are currently being trained.

The Finance Manager (S151 Officer) advised that delays in administering Housing Benefit could result in TDC losing money and had not heard of any cases where customers had been made homeless as a result.

As the discussion progressed the Chair suggested a more detailed report be brought back to committee. The Chief Executive agreed and advised for the next meeting a report could be presented on how the backlog within the Benefits Team had progressed and the implications.

The report was noted.

(a) QBR Questions and Answers

Questions regarding the QBR were 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:

- the cost of the Burrows Centre included absolutely everything however the Head of Communities & Place would be consulted to confirm if the issue with the door was a design issue or not;
- the Head of Communities & Place would be asked for any developments on the Seaweed Farm;
- The Economic Development Officer would be asked for

- timings for the Economic Strategy;
- Councillor Langford appreciated the answer on her Play Strategy question, however wished for her frustration to be noted that Victoria Park Phase 1 had not been delivered;
- enforcement caseload issues would be added to the action list;

166. LEISURE SERVICES UPDATE

The Chief Executive provided a verbal update to the Committee on the progress of the new Leisure Services.

The transfer date was fast approaching and the new Head of Leisure Operations was dealing with the finer details of the handover from 1610 to Active Torridge. Everything was on schedule for 1st April transfer date.

Communications would be issued shortly to members and customers regarding the handover process.

Torrington Pool remains closed with works being delayed due to Covid. Boiler work was to commence the following week.

The whole recruitment process had been good with only a couple of vacancies that needed to be re-advertised. There would be sufficient staff across all three sites to operate.

1610 had carried out a significant amount of repairs and maintenance to get schedules completed.

There would be a short period where sites would be closed for cleaning purposes and installation of equipment, this would be communicated in the press release.

167. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE UPDATE

The Strategy, Performance and ICT Manager provided a verbal update on behalf of the Operational Services Manager on the Grounds Maintenance Service.

Four members of staff including a supervisor would be transferring from Tivoli. It should have been five but one member of staff decided not to transfer therefore an advert for the vacancy had been published.

All machinery had been ordered which was being delivered on 29th March and stored at Victoria Park.

New trailers and transit vans had been ordered however the vans are delayed so as a backup, vehicles are being hired to transport machines to rural areas on a short-term basis. A further vehicle was to be borrowed from Parking Services while demand was being ascertained.

The depot would be within buildings in Victoria Park and works would take place to make the buildings secure and more suitable.

New software had been installed for the team to operate and training for staff was booked in.

A local QPRA inspector had been contractor to deal with Trees, which was the same company that North Devon District Council use.

The Operational Services Manager would be willing to answer any questions the Committee had.

Councillor Leather commented on how well the Operational Services Manager had progressed this project.

Following a query from Councillor Gubb on whether the flowers and plants would be maintained to a higher standard, particularly in Victoria Park, the Strategy, Performance and ICT Manager advised he would speak to the Operational Services Manager and ask him to circulate an email with an answer.

It was confirmed that the new IT software was more efficient than anything that had been available before which would enhance the new service.

Play equipment had been inspected but was not in the remit of the new Grounds Maintenance Service and queries regarding this should be directed to Adrian Avery, TDC's Community Projects Officer.

168. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Hames asked if the Estuary Strategy would be on the forward plan soon? The Strategy, Performance & ICT Manager confirmed it would be included within the Economic & Development Business Plan but work had yet to commence and it would be some time before it was added to the Forward Plan.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and closed at 11.25 am

Chair:

Date: