

173. 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.

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

No matters were brought forward.

175. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

176. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The Public Health & Housing Manager presented this item providing a verbal update on the current homelessness situation and explained why the Homelessness Strategy had not been finalised.

Information was provided on potential temporary accommodation however a site location needed to be sought. Once a site had been identified this could be incorporated into the Homelessness Strategy.

The Public Health & Housing Manager advised of the pressures the Housing Options Team continue to confront.

A discussion then took place.

In response to queries, it was confirmed that potential sites for temporary accommodation had been identified through the asset plan with Bideford being a more beneficial location and reasons explained.

Following a query from Councillor Langford, the Public Health & Housing Manager advised she would circulate a breakdown of the people currently in temporary accommodation. The demand for accommodation was the same, however, ongoing problems surround housing individuals and finding suitable and affordable housing.

There would be challenges wherever temporary accommodation was placed.

Following a suggestion to use mobile homes for temporary accommodation, the Public Health & Housing Manager advised this would be investigated.

In response to a query regarding TDC becoming a direct housing provider, the Strategy, Performance & ICT Manager advised this would be discussed and options explored at the Housing Workshop on 17th May and the project was progressing well.

Both the Leader, Councillor James and the Chief Executive provided clarification on Empty Homes Notice of Motion from the last Full Council meeting and how this would move forward.

Reference was made to potential properties for temporary accommodation to which the Public Health & Housing Manager advised inspections were scheduled to take place on these properties and viability assessments carried out.

177. BACKLOG WITHIN THE HOUSING BENEFIT TEAM - PROGRESSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) presented this item giving a detailed explanation and context on the present situation within the Revenues & Benefits Department.

Statistics of increased processing days were shared along with information surrounding the administration of grants and schemes by the Team, during the pandemic, whilst also having to manage their day-to-day workload. An additional strain was the ever-changing Government guidance or guidance not being available.

Due to the uncertainty of the grant schemes, it was difficult to recruit additional staff, however additional staff have now been recruited and a further post had been advertised. The temporary accommodation situation also adds to the pressures of processing claims.

The Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) advised that the DWP were attending TDC on 9th May to carry out an audit.

A discussion then took place.

In response to a query, the Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) was not aware of any specific hardship caused by the backlog. It was also advised that enforcement on the recovery of Council Tax had been stopped.

Following a query from Mr Harper, the Finance Manager (S151 Officer) advised of the funding available to TDC for the administration of the Energy Rebate scheme.

The Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) expressed her concern towards the moral of staff and the difficulties in recruitment. The Chief Executive provided more details regarding the difficulties the entire Public Sector face with recruitment.

It was advised that all Local Authorities face the same problems and pressures especially with a lot of officer time being spent on the phone with the public chasing claims.

Details of how the Audit would be conducted was explained and the effect it would have on TDC.

Following a query from Councillor Hodson, the Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) advised she would circulate more detailed information on the claimants affected by the back log and investigate extending the time the phone lines are closed.

178. LEISURE SERVICES UPDATE

The Chief Executive gave a verbal update on the Leisure Services provision since the 1st of April.

Two out of the three sites were fully operational however Torrington Pool was still closed due to ongoing difficulties with a leak.

Details of the work carried out to improve the visual aspect of the buildings were given. It was advised that the recruitment process had been successful, however, there were some slight back-office problems to resolve.

The Chair commented that he had received positive feedback from residents regarding the Holsworthy centre.

Following a query from Councillor Hames, the Chief Executive advised he would ascertain a date for when the exterior of the Torridge Pool would be updated/re-decorated.

179. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE UPDATE

The Operational Services Manager provided a verbal update after the Grounds Maintenance Service had been back in house for one month.

The following information was provided:

- Staff
 - to date one supervisor and three staff had been TUPE'd across;
 - three seasonal staff were joining the team with existing TDC staff also supporting the service;
- Machinery
 - all equipment had been purchased however there were some delays on delivery which is a worldwide problem;
 - a triple mower had been purchased but not delivered yet therefore second-hand machinery being purchased from Tivoli;
 - unable to source batteries for electrical equipment therefore alternatives had been purchased. Big companies cannot supply the batteries however this would be progressed moving forward;
- Depot
 - this is situated in Victoria Park and has been cleared out and cleaned;

- CCTV had been fitted and security increased;
- off cuts/shoots were being planted for future use;
- Software System
 - the new bespoke system was now operational;
 - an explanation on how it works was given and the new system would ensure a high standard;
 - slight problems in rural areas regarding signal, however work was ongoing with suppliers to improve this;
 - play areas would also be added to the system;
 - all services areas are now collated in one place which would help improve the service.
- Trees
 - the same company that supplies North Devon District Council was being used;
 - fortunately Tivoli had sent across all information regarding this before the contract ended;
- Cutting
 - the first cut of the season had been completed in Holsworthy & Torrington;
 - the first cut should have been carried out by Tivoli before leaving but they did not therefore TDC's schedule was behind by one week. Once Bideford was complete the team would be back on target;
 - the aim was to assess the estate this year to ensure the schedules work efficiently. With the service now in house there would be more flexibility and ability to tailor the service to meet specific requirements;
 - overall, the focus would be on higher standard, equality and attention to detail.

A brief discussion took place.

The Operational Services Manager confirmed that once the first cut had been completed in Bideford work would progress on Victoria Park and flower beds. He also provided further explanations to the shortage of batteries and the plan for the service in the first year.

180. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Chair advised the forward plan would be discussed in detail at the next meeting.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and closed at 11.06 am

Chair:

Date: