

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

EXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Caddsdawn Business Support Centre, Bideford, EX39 3BE

Thursday, 25 November 2021 - 2.00 pm

- PRESENT Councillor J Manley (Chair)
- Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors C Hawkins, S Langford, C Leather and P Pennington
- Councillors C Hodson, N Laws
- Non Elected Members L Bach, K Baker
- ALSO PRESENT S Dorey - Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer)
- A Avery - Community Engagement Officer
- T Vanstone - Senior Electoral & Democratic Services Officer
- K Hewlett - Electoral and Democratic Services Officer

102. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Newton, Councillor Harding and Janet Williams (Public Health & Housing Manager).

103. MINUTES

Chair ran through the minutes with members page by page.

It was proposed by Councillor Langford, seconded by Councillor Pennington and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 01 September 2021 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote: For - 7, Abstentions - 1)

104. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public contributions.

105. ACTION LIST

Chair ran through the action list and provided members with an update on progress.

The action list was duly noted.

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. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

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

Chair raised the public consultation launched by Devon & Somerset Fire Brigade in relation to their draft Community Risk Management Plan 2022-2027 - [Community Risk Management Plan 2022-2027 \(draft\) | Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service \(dsfire.gov.uk\)](#).

It was explained the consultation will be via an online survey and members were urged to complete this individually once they had the opportunity to review the draft risk management plan.

<https://wh.snapsurveys.com/s.asp?k=163481748317>

Members noted that the document referred to the closure of some stations and though Appledore was not mentioned in the document, there was a reference to efficiencies and effectiveness of locations. It was agreed that a letter would be drafted from the Committee asking whether the future of Appledore Fire Station was being safeguarded and there are no future plans to close the station.

Councillor Cottle-Hunkin addressed the committee and asked for clarity regarding the process for registering assets of community value, she queried if this was an issue for Internal Overview & Scrutiny or External Overview & Scrutiny.

The Head of Legal and Governance & Lead Monitoring Officer clarified that the committees were not involved in the process. She explained that if someone wanted to make a registration this would need to go to Tom Phillips in the Property Team and the team would then make an assessment. It was confirmed that the process is currently being updated by Legal Services and the Property Team.

It was questioned if members were involved in the decision-making process. The Head of Legal and Governance & Lead Monitoring Officer confirmed that

the process was set out in legislation and this legislation had to be used to make any decisions. It was clarified that Lead Members and Ward Members would be informed of any relevant decision.

It was queried why there is no right of appeal and the Head of Legal and Governance & Lead Monitoring Officer confirmed that this was also set out within the legislation.

109. PLAY STRATEGY UPDATE

Adrian Avery, Community Engagement Officer, attended the meeting to provide members with an update on the Play Strategy. He explained his role and members introduced themselves.

The Community Engagement Officer highlighted the Play Strategy report written by the Head of Communities & Place and provided an update for members. It was confirmed that since the play strategy was approved in the summer a working group had been established. Members include the Contract Manager and members of the Estate Team, who complete regular site visits and work with the Maintenance Team. The group will be meeting every two months to discuss the play areas, look at their condition and plan future work.

It was confirmed that the Operational Services Manager would be attending the next working group and that the group would therefore be linking in closely with them. Currently the working groups are looking at the conditions survey from 2019, which will be updated by the team before 1st April when maintenance and grounds services return in house.

The Community Engagement Officer confirmed that since May improvements have been made to some of the play areas to bring them up to a higher standard - meaning that progress is being made on the aspiration to have all rated a good standard by 2023.

As part of this work it was stated that a review of play spaces added by housing developers would take place, this will consider if any of these smaller spaces should be social spaces.

The Community Engagement Officer recognised there is public interest in play areas and confirmed that information will be made available on the website shortly.

Members were asked if they had any questions.

There was a query in relation to the rating of good for the Village Green at Westward Ho! Concerns were raised regarding the flooring of the play area, as well as rusty and sharp surfaces. It was stated that these concerns have been reported but were yet to be addressed. The Community Engagement Officer confirmed that any reports regarding play areas should be passed onto the working group to consider, and the next meeting was due in December and agreed to update members on the concerns raised regarding Village Green.

During discussions it was identified that the Village Green park should be listed as Westward Ho! As well Hanson Park and Benson Drive, which are both in Northam. The Community Engagement Officer agreed to amend the report.

Members queried whether there was still a plan to pass on play areas to Parish Councils. The Community Engagement Officer provided members with an update and confirmed that discussions had already taken place with some Parish Councils, but explained that in some cases there work was needed to bring these play areas up to a better standard first.

There was a query in relation to Geneva Court handover and the need for improvement. The Community Engagement Officer confirmed that this wasn't a definitive decision and the aim was to complete the improvement work first.

The discussion then moved to Pathfields and Calvesford Close. The Community Engagement Officer explained the issues in relation to Pathfields and the legal issues at Calvesford were explained to members.

The Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring Officer explained Benson Drive had been picked up in an audit that is taking place as part of work to bring Grounds Maintenance in house. It appears this area is still under the Developers ownership and investigations are ongoing.

Members asked whether the money to complete repairs have been easily accessible. Following the decision of Full Council to not have a specific pot for play areas. The Community Engagement Officer stated that the working group hadn't experienced any delay in accessing funds for maintenance.

The Community Engagement Officer was asked for an update on the Cliveden Road area. It was confirmed that the equipment was removed due to being in poor condition and the area was considered an open recreational space for the time being.

Maintenance of Old Town Park was mentioned with specific mention of a broken gate. The Community Engagement Officer provided members with an update on some of the work that's already started at the park and the 2 gated areas. It was requested that residents be advised of the works.

An update on Victoria Park was requested and the Community Engagement Lead confirmed that a Community Group has been set up. The group have started to apply for funding and a community page has been set up, with aspirations of a spring deadline.

It was confirmed that a ROSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) inspection will be taking place at Victoria Park play areas next Monday.

Members queried whether there was a price for what needs to be maintained and what needs to be replaced as part of this work to improve standards. The Community Engagement Lead confirmed he was working with the Estate Team

and the detail regarding items that are required would be part of a conditions survey, which will be costed by 1st April. He explained the main issue, alongside equipment, currently is safety surfacing, as this was an expense across most of the play areas.

Members queried what the assessment process was for rating the play areas; who makes the assessment and how this can be challenged. The Community Engagement Lead confirmed he completed assessments with the Estate Team using information received from Tivoli as a base line, and the Maintenance Team complete work – the team are ROSPA Health & Safety trained.

It was confirmed that a meeting is planned with ROSPA on Monday where they were hoping for further guidance, but the team were also considering asking ROSPA to complete annual checks on all sites.

The Community Engagement Lead agreed to share the report from ROSPA on Victoria Park with members.

Councillor Pennington proposed a recommendation that a member or independent person be involved in this assessment process. There was no seconder and following further discussion and clarification regarding the assessment process at TDC and the proposed role of ROSPA Councillor Pennington withdrew his motion.

The Head of Legal & Governance & Monitoring Officer suggested to members that the Operational Services Manager attend a Committee meeting to highlight the work taking place in advance of the Grounds Maintenance contract returning in house. It was explained that Tivoli are currently responsible for the play area maintenance alongside other specialist work and the Operational Services Manager is completing an assessment prior to handover.

Members referred to the decision of Community & Resources to allocate a surplus from 2019-20 to a Leisure Fund and the subsequent decision at Full Council regarding the allocation of a maintenance budget. Members wished to know if they were able to access the leisure fund for play areas under 'leisure facilities' and they also asked if the current spend on maintenance was matching the figures provided by Tivoli report for a 6 year period.

The Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring Officer confirmed that there is a maintenance budget, but she explained that previous discussions at Full Council were around ring-fencing part of this for play areas and explained why the Finance Manager had advised against this. The aim of the play strategy was to use this budget in the most effective way possible.

The Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring Officer confirmed that a report would be going to Full Council on 13th December regarding Leisure. She highlighted that the budget setting process for 2022-23 is starting and there is a Capital PID day on 7th December, which would be opportunity for members to feed into discussions.

Following a further discussion on maintenance budget spends the Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring Officer explained how the day-to-day repairs and fixing of broken / dangerous equipment would be paid for through the maintenance budget, but there was an acceptance that not all equipment could be replaced. This was why a Play Strategy had been developed, so that work could be prioritised, discussions arranged regarding future plans and aspirations for the parks that TDC keep.

Members asked for clarity on what a Social Space was and the Community Engagement Lead confirmed it was generally a low maintenance area with benches or seating available for the public.

There was positive feedback regarding the tables with games in Bideford Park organised by Bideford Town Council and supported by Torridge District Council. There was a request for this to be replicated.

Members queried if any support could be offered to the Community Groups applying for funding for Victoria Park. It was agreed that if the Community Group require a letter of support then the Committee could do this, or contact the Ward Member to request their support. Chair offered her support to the community Engagement Lead in relation to funding application processes also.

Members asked, if the ROSPA report on Bidefort came back with potential work, could this be taken to the Capital PID day as a request for funding. The Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring Officer confirmed this would be the date to feed in any requests for any possible priorities for the next financial year.

Members requested more detail regarding the replacement or removal of equipment within the play areas, alongside their rating. The Community Engagement Lead explained that this information would be within the condition survey, which they aim to provide by the 1st April. It was requested that the condition survey be shared in time for budget setting process.

Members sought clarity regarding the process for repairing play equipment and whether, if equipment was too broken to fix, this would be replaced.

The Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring Officer reiterated the aim of the play strategy was to look at the areas TDC are responsible for and complete assessments regarding work that is needed and what can be done within the budget.

110. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Chair explained to members that Citizen's Advice were unavailable for today's meeting. This item will be moved to the January meeting as Citizen's Advice are available. This will move the Joint Meeting on Health to the 9th March.

Members raised concerns regarding the lack of dental availability in the area. It was requested that External invite a person who can provide an overview of the situation in the area. Chair suggested this may be covered at the Joint Meeting

with Health in March. Member's asked that when setting up the meeting it is requested that one of the speaker is able to answer questions on dentistry / dental provision.

It was suggested that the meeting is April is also a joint meeting with North Devon and South West Water and the Environment Agency are invited to discuss drainage and raw sewage.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and closed at 3.13 pm

Chair:

Date: