

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

INTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Town Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HS

Tuesday, 20 June 2023 - 10.00 am

PRESENT Councillor S Newton (Chair)
 Councillor J Craigie (Vice-Chair)
 Councillors C Bright, C Hodson, W Lo-Vel and D Smith

Mr I Harper – Independent Member

ALSO PRESENT S Hearse - Chief Executive
 D Heyes - Finance Manager (Section 151 Officer)
 J Walter - Strategy, Performance & ICT Manager
 K Brown - Democratic Services Officer
 S Cawsey - Democratic Services Officer

Councillors P Hames, K James and P Pennington

235. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: C Cottle-Hunkin (substituting D Smith), D Bushby, T Elliot, S Inch and Non-Elected Member - Mr S Dengate

236. MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2023 be noted, subject to the following amendment:

Minute No. 232 – QBR3 – the figure approved by Members and ring fenced for the Rural Prosperity Fund should read £500,000 and not £50,000.

Matters Arising:

Minute No. 232 – QBR 3 – Theme 2 Communities, Health and Housing

Mr Harper noted the Homeless Strategy is still not available.

Homeless Strategy - The Chief Executive addressed the concern regarding the delay in the availability of the Strategy. Members were informed of the restructure within the Team who are now reporting direct to the Head of Legal. Clarification was given on the work being undertaken to deal with the homelessness crisis. The Chair stated this item to be included on the Forward Plan.

Mr Harper referred to the comments of the Head of Communities & Place regarding the use of the ring-fenced funding for the Rural Prosperity Fund and enquired as to whether it had been received from the Government. The Chief Executive confirmed approval of the Councils' use of the fund had been received.

237. ACTION LIST

There were no outstanding actions.

238. PUBLIC CONTRIBUTIONS

There were no public contributions.

239. 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.

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

There were no urgent matters brought forward.

241. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

242. INTRODUCTION TO INTERNAL SCRUTINY AT TORRIDGE

The Strategy, Performance and ICT Manager gave a slide presentation entitled "Introduction to Internal Scrutiny". The slides to be circulated to Members.

A summary of the presentation included:

The Committee is a legislative Committee, has an important role in Local Government and has legal powers.

Principles of effective Overview & Scrutiny – understanding the scrutiny role, creating an enabling environment and supporting public scrutiny.

Reference was made to the Constitution which defined the role of the Committee and included:

- Terms of Reference
- Specific Functions and responsibilities
- Proceedings
- Membership
- Statement of Purpose
- Call-In procedure - the Committee is entitled to "call-in" decisions made by the Community & Resources Committee which are not yet implemented, can

also recommend that the Community & Resources committee reconsider such a decision. Issues that remain unresolved will be referred to Full Council for determination.

- Substitution Scheme – O&S Members may not sit or sub on Community & Resources Committee or Audit & Governance Committee and vice versa.

There are two Overview & Scrutiny Committees –

- External - outward facing, working with partners and those organisations who receive funding.
- Internal – performance management, budgetary, development of policies etc.

Quarterly Business Report (QBR) – it is the main function of Internal O&S and monitors the Council's Financial and Performance data. A Task and Finish Group was set up by this Committee in 2021 to review the existing QBR to align to the new Strategic Plan. The Chair explained the existing QBR has been re-written in a different format to ensure the document is understood by Councillors and the public who have an interest in the performance and workings of the Council. The document, although not perfect, will be kept under review and amendments will be made if required.

The QBR is sent out in advance of the Agenda to Councillors asking for any questions in advance of the meeting. This will allow for questions and answers to be provided prior to the meeting.

The Strategy Performance and ICT Manager advised that it had been agreed the QBR to be sent out to all Councillors and not just the Committee. This will allow all Members to have input into the document.

A brief overview of the layout and details within the QBR were conveyed to Members.

Following the presentation, the Chair summarised as follows:

The Committee function is backed by legal positions and its requirement is to be impartial and independent. This is not the forum for Members to bring a personal matter from their Ward. Members are strategic and overarching on the business and performance of the Council, if it has relevance district wise, that is different.

Call-In – Members were urged to use this sparingly; it is an exception rather than a rule. Call-in is on principle and not on personal view.

The work of the Committee is a mix of periodic review programmed like the QBR and various other matters that will be looked at on a regular basis.

Emphasis was made on the need for the Committee to be fully acquainted with the QBR and for Members to submit questions.

243. QBR 4 AND END OF YEAR TREND SUMMARY

The Committee received a slide presentation from the Finance Manager (S151 Officer) on the Quarterly Business Report 4 for the period ending March 2023 and end of year trend summary. He explained the presentation would cover financial aspects of the report only.

Salient points of the report were highlighted to Members with emphasis on the headline figure for surplus of £833k. The Finance Manager explained:

- The surplus is after utilising £927k from reserves (£374k from the Transition in Government Funding Reserve and £553k from other reserves).
- Without the use of the reserves the Council would have a deficit of £94k.
- Surplus is provisional, still awaiting final figures from Active Torridge, but they are not expected to make a material difference to the outturn.
- Surplus contains some non-recurrent favourable movements

Council Tax Annex Grant Income	£396k
Settlement of outstanding leisure (1610)	£ 59k
Land Charges grant income	£ 57k

Following the presentation, the Finance Manager addressed questions asked.

The QBR was noted.

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:

There has been expenditure on Sully House this year, is that shown?

Response – the revenue cost will be part of the capital programme for the conversion. The expenditure will be shown on the capital page of the QBR.

Theme 1 –

Mr Harper commented that a significant number of programmes and projects are carried out, it would be good to see if they achieve anything. Is it measurable and what are the measurements? We are not achieving anything. Looking at the statistics and the consensus for Torridge it is poor.

Petroc had said that young people who have the education move to outside of the area – need to look at how we can retain those people. These are matters for Torridge to look at. The Chief Executive referred to comments from Chris Fuller in relation to ND Futures and gave an update on the function/role and future achievements of the organisation.

Councillor Hodson asked that for future QBR's, numbers are included rather than percentages.

Following comments from Councillor Hames, the Chief Executive updated Members on the current position with temporary accommodation and the works being undertaken to address this issue.

Recycling – Councillor Craigie asked if the volume of waste could also be included together with the tonnage because a large proportion of the green waste is moisture in it. With high temperatures there could be a substantial reduction in the amount of weight but not in the amount of volume.

The Chair repeated his comments and emphasised the need for Members to submit questions prior to the meeting.

244. SOCIAL VALUE

The Strategy, Performance and ICT Manager gave brief background information on this item for new Members on the Committee.

A Task and Finish Group had been set up during the last Committee period to look at Social Value and to see if there was a need to have a Social Value Policy. Two Task and Finish meetings were held – one included a Training Session with the Procurement Manager at Exeter City Council and the second was a scoping and ideas meeting of how things should progress.

An issue as to why this had not progressed was because the Government are producing a Public Sector Procurement Bill which is going to put emphasis on social value, and it was agreed to delay drafting something until the Bill is in place to ensure we align with the legislative requirements coming out of it. The proposals, background on progress of the Bill were outlined to the Committee.

Very recently the Bill had its report stage and third reading in the House of Commons. It is now going back to the House of Lords for Peers to consider the Commons amendments. One of the amendments is around the creation of a National Security Unit for procurement which will proactively investigate suppliers for National Security threats. They will publish within six months of the passing of the Bill a timeline for the removal of all surveillance equipment provided by suppliers subject to National Intelligence Law from China of sensitive Government sites.

There will be a requirement for Social Value.

The Strategy, Performance & ICT Manager recommended that a new Task and Finish Group of Councillors is set up to start to look at a Social Value Policy for the Council. The Policy to be presented to the Committee, and then taken to Community & Resources Committee or Full Council.

The Chair agreed to discuss further the recommendation with absent Members of the Committee.

245. ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair presented the Annual Report of the Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee which he said is a factual summary of the work conducted over the previous year.

The Strategy, Performance and ICT Manager explained that the Constitution states an Annual Report be produced each year and presented to Full Council. It was recommended that the Committee vote to accept the Report.

It was proposed by Mr Harper, seconded by Councillor Newton that the Committee accept the Report and for the Report to be presented to Full Council.

(Vote: For – Unanimous)

246. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Chair presented the Forward Plan and asked that Members consider items they think the Committee should be looking into.

Areas put forward by the Chair for consideration by the Committee are:

Relief for people who live in the area – there are various pots of money available such as Pension Credit which is outside of the Council and HSF but there is very little take up. Matter to be discussed by the Committee and to endeavour to get a better understanding of why there is not a greater take up and to also discuss ways of promoting funding.

Councillor Hodson recommended that an Officer give a briefing on the criteria for making applications for funding and to ensure evidence base for figures is known and whether figures are speculative or factual. Emphasis was given on the need to access all benefits and not just those in the Council.

Active Torridge – to have a better understanding of the future Estates Plan. The concern to Members is the long term viability of the estate ie buildings. The Chair requested sight of a detailed business plan that includes estate and the predicted cost of that estate for 10/20 years. The Chief Executive advised Active Torridge report to External Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the work they undertake in terms of the funding they receive. Members discussed the functions of both Internal and External Overview & Scrutiny Committees and how certain items would sit in both Committees.

The Chief Executive referred to suggestions made previously of holding just one Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Constitution Working Group at the time did not agree to this.

Councillor Hodson suggested holding Joint Committees on certain key items and for consideration to be given to just having one Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair reiterated his comments for Members to look at what had previously been looked at by the last Committee and to bring forward fresh thoughts and ideas. At the next meeting to populate the Forward Plan with topics for the following months.

For the next meeting a Social Value Task and Finish Group to be set up and the Strategy, Performance and IT Manager to prepare a report - Census and to show benchmarking against others.

The Chair to email those Members who were not present at the meeting asking for new ideas to be included on the Forward Plan.

The meeting commenced at 10am and closed at 12.30pm