

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

EXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Town Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HS

Wednesday, 16 October 2024 - 6.00 pm

- PRESENT Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin (Chair)
- Councillor A Brenton (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors L Bach, S Harding, T Johns, D Smith and C Hodson
- ALSO PRESENT S Dorey - Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer)
- V Rowe - Torridge, North, Mid & West Devon Citizens Advice
- B Sharples - Taw and Torridge Voluntary Services (TTVS)
- K Brown - Democratic Services Officer
- K Hewlett - Electoral and Democratic Services Officer
- Councillors K James

265. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Thomas and Councillor Shepherd. Councillor Hodson was present as a substitute for Councillor Shepherd.

266. MINUTES

Wednesday 24 April 2024

It was proposed by Councillor Hodson, seconded by Councillor Harding and - Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 24 April 2024 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote: For 5, Abstentions 2)

Thursday 18 July 2024

It was proposed by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Brenton and - Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18 July 2024 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote For 4, Abstentions 3)

Wednesday 4th September 2024

This Committee was inquorate, Members therefore noted the minutes. It was confirmed that information from the presenters – One Northern Devon – had been shared with Members following the meeting.

267. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

268. ACTION LIST

Members reviewed the action list, and the following updates were provided.

212 – Link Centres. It was confirmed that following the decision of Devon County Council (DCC) to close the Link Centre provision in northern Devon Councillor Hodson (District representative at the DCC Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee) had requested an update on progress, however she had been advised this wasn't possible as the decision was now subject to Judicial Review.

220 – Contact Bideford Children's Centre. Members discussed the planned change to a Family Hub model and the move of provision back to DCC. Members agreed to keep this action ongoing to review the proposed changed.

230 – Bitesize training – Members were advised that these invites were now being shared via the Members' Bulletin.

237 Pathfields – Chair updated the committee and advised of current situation.

Democratic Services agreed to forward on the response from the MP for Torridge and Tavistock in relation to Clearsprings and lead piping.

269. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members with interests were reminded they should refer to the agenda item and describe the nature of their interest when the item was being considered.

270. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

No Part II items.

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

No items.

272. CITIZEN'S ADVICE

The Chief Executive for Citizen's Advice, Vicki Rowe, provided members with a detailed presentation covering the work of the organisation in Torridge and highlighting the support available, challenges of provision and how funding was spent.

The fiscal value of the service and the challenges of recruiting volunteers was highlighted before Members were asked for their questions.

Members noted the backlog highlighted within the presentation and discussed how this could be met through an increase in volunteers and staff. The Chief Executive of Citizen's Advice explained the recruitment of volunteers, as well as the work taking place to fund paid resources within the organisation and how this looks in terms of the provision for the people locally.

Whilst discussing changes to Winter Fuel Allowance members were advised the service was unable to be proactive in their support due to resource issues, but would pick up and support cases through the welfare check that is completed when people access their service.

Members noted that Citizen's Advice cover an area wider than just Torridge and asked whether statistics provided in the presentation reflected the impact of provision for the area. The Chief Executive advised that all the data in the presentation, aside from the fiscal data, was specifically for people living in Torridge.

Additionally, members asked about the cost increases noted in the presentation and asked whether there had been salary increases had to be accounted for too. Members were advised that pay increases was one of the increases for Citizen's Advice, alongside energy and volunteer costs. Further detail on the guidance followed in terms of pay awards was also provided.

Members noted their disappointment that 60% of calls go unanswered. The Chief Executive recognised the challenges of meeting demand and provided some context from the point of view of the service, especially noting the impact of the closure of other provision locally.

During discussion on the working relationship with Torridge District Council (TDC) teams the Chief Executive of Citizen's Advice reflected on the close work with the benefits and housing teams at TDC, it was suggested that a back-office email may help improve communication between the two and it was agreed this could be explored further following the meeting.

Following a discussion on the research work of Citizen's Advice the Chief Executive provided further detail on this area of work and the areas covered.

There was a detailed discussion on access to provision for those in rural areas. The Chief Executive confirmed the locations of their face-to-face work, and advised there was no resource currently to deliver face to face appointments in Holsworthy. Members were advised that 26% of access to their provision was in person and the remaining was online. Further discussion noted the challenges of delivering this type of provision across the District, especially in more rural areas.

Members asked how TDC could support the reach of Citizen's Advice, and this developed into a detailed discussion on provision, access, and funding. Members and the Chief Executive reflected on the need for detailed mapping of all provision, which included the outlying areas and looked at how to fund smarter, as well as engage with strategic work like the Local Plan.

The Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) explained some of the complex issues presenting to services and noted the need for a review of access and provision - the need for face-to-face support was highlighted for the more complex cases that are increasingly accessing services.

Chair requested a Breakdown of funding from Citizen's Advice and what would be required to provide a face-to-face service in Holsworthy.

Members reflected again on the need to make comparisons and look at provision overall. The Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) advised that decisions in relation to funding would need to link in with the budget setting timetable and would be a decision for Full Council.

Members thanked the Chief Executive for attending.

273. TAW AND TORRIDGE VOLUNTARY SERVICES (TTVS)

The Chief Executive for TTVS provided members with a detailed presentation on TTVS, which highlighted their projects and the types of support they provide. Members were advised of how TDC funding was used and shown the outcomes of the service, alongside the number of staff delivering the work and the financial payback into the community.

Finally, the challenges for 2024-35 were highlighted for members and explained in detail.

Members were then asked for their questions.

There was a query in relation to transport assistance for the community and it was confirmed that this is not currently provided by TTVS. The need was recognised, and members were advised the challenges of poor transport links

were highlighted by the Community Developers in their role, and the Financial Inclusion worker also helped to identify if people were entitled to taxi provision for appointments.

This led to members reflecting on the huge cost benefit of the Financial Inclusion work and it was asked how many people had been supported in Torridge. The Chief Executive provided figures for the last 3 months (July-Sept) – there had been 100 referrals, which was an increase of 22% on last year. There were 832 interventions, and the benefit awarded in the period totalled £285000.

Members discussed the Help at Home Service, which had been highlighted in the presentation and it was confirmed work was taking place to extend the service to Holsworthy, but it did not reach across Torridge district.

Chair declared an interest as Board Member of Active Torridge and asked about opportunities for TTVS to reach people who would benefit from Active Torridge provision.

The Chief Executive for TTVS advised they were working with North Devon Voluntary Services on a project led by Encompass called the North Devon Inclusivity Framework. It was explained that this work aimed to make different recreational activities more accessible for hard-to-reach groups by providing training to providers on specific issues. It was explained that provision of the training would mean TTVS could recommend specific providers who had completed the training and would be a mark of quality.

During discussion members raised the challenges that had been highlighted around the continuation of the Help at Home Service and funding. It was suggested that the Committee could reiterate these concerns with counterparts at County level.

It was proposed by the Councillor Cottle-Hunkin, seconded by Councillor Brenton and -

Resolved:

That Committee would contact Devon County Council about the concerns raised regarding the Help at Home Service.

(Vote: For Unanimous)

Members asked if there was one wish to present to Committee. The Chief Executive raised the need for a Community Hub and noted a feasibility study was looking at the provision of a Community Hub for Torridge.

Examples of similar provision in the Country and locally were shared with members and it was highlighted how the model provided services with an opportunity to share resources, work more closely and cohesively together. For the public it was explained as one place to access support and advice from voluntary and statutory services.

This led to a detailed conversation about the potential for this type of project and the work already taking place to explore viable options and locations. Work taking place with TDC to explore resources locally and to complete the feasibility work were explained and Members were keen to remain informed of progress.

The Chief Executive of Citizen's Advice also welcomed the concept of community hubs – work on confidentiality and consent was highlighted as an important consideration.

Following discussion members reflected on the importance of pulling together all the work, how it could help with funding. As well as how this type of model would help to support the local community, especially those with complex needs.

Councillor Cottle-Hunkin arranged to raise the issue of a community hub at the next Community Safety Partnership.

Members thanked the Chief Executive for TTVS for attending Committee.

274. DRAFT ANNUAL UPDATE 2023-24

Chair reviewed the Draft Annual Update with Members, following a brief discussion the following updates were agreed

- Fix typos on the front page and on page 29 of the agenda pack.
- To add a summary at the end of the report pulling together the outcome from the year.

It was proposed by Councillor Harding, seconded by Councillor Hodson and Resolved:

That the Annual Update be approved and taken to Full Council, with the agreed amendments.

(Vote: For 6, Abstentions 1)

275. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Members reviewed the Forward Plan and made the following suggestions for items:

- Request that South West Water return to Committee to update on their work at Bucks Mills. During discussion details of the South West Water Let's Talk Water webinar on 13 November were shared with members. It was agreed that a Members' Bulletin with all the details would be sent to Councillors following the meeting.

- External Overview & Scrutiny, November 27th – Councillor Cottle-Hunkin declared an interest as Lead Member for Culture and requested an Arts focus for the meeting, inviting The Burton, The Plough, and Art Matters.
- The Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) suggested inviting an officer from Housing to highlight recent work on domestic abuse – specifically the increase in presentations from men.

The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 8.13 pm

Chair:

Date: