

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

INTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Town Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HS

Tuesday, 12 March 2019 - 4.00 pm

PRESENT	Councillor P Watson (Chair)	
	Councillors K James, R Boughton, C Cottle-Hunkin, J Hutchings, T Inch, P Pennington and C Simmons	
	S Dengate and I Harper	
ALSO PRESENT	S Dorey	- Senior Solicitor
	S Hearse	- Strategic Manager (Resources)
	D Heyes	- Finance Manager
	S Kearney	- Planning & Economy Manager
	M Richards	- Democratic Services Officer
	H Roper	- Service Improvement Officer

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

72. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies.

73. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor T Inch, seconded by Councillor James and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2019 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote: For - unanimous)

74. ACTION LIST

Minute 69 a) - Budget 2019/20, Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-20 to 2023-24: Local Housing Allowance

A brief discussion clarified that the matter had been raised to understand why the allowance for North Devon was greater than for Torrington. Councillor Hurley will be attending a meeting and is hoping to speak further with Kit Malthouse as he had not been satisfied with a previous response and lack of response to follow up correspondence.

Minute 69 b) - Budget 2019/20, Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-20 to 2023-24: Letter to Central Government regarding Council Tax Funding of CSP and Minute 69 c) - Budget 2019/20, Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-20 to 2023-24: Local Authority Settlements

A short debate took place on the message the Committee wished to convey to Central Government. The Strategic Manager (Resources) explained that the Government was currently conducting a comprehensive review of how Local Government is funded. Uncertainties had been addressed to a degree by multi-year settlements; a conclusion to the Business Rate Retention Scheme was expected; and the National Audit Office had carried out a review of Local Government funding. It was suggested a response to the conclusions of the reviews might be a way to address the matters raised.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) told the Committee that across the County, the District Councils were jointly focusing on the reviews and consultations.

Councillor Pennington still wished for a letter to be sent to Central Government from TDC's Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Chair confirmed that this will be progressed and Councillor Pennington will be involved.

75. 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.

76. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public contributions.

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

There were no urgent matters brought forward.

78. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

79. PLAY STRATEGY - CALL-IN

Further to the decision of the Community & Resources Committee on 14 January 2019 to refuse the recommendation that a budget of £15,000 - £20,000 from the Policy Contingency Reserve for the preparation of a District wide Play Strategy for the Council be refused, additional information was provided in the report presented by the Planning & Economy Manager to the Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The old strategy, which ran from 2007 to 2012 was considered to be outdated. The Planning & Economy Manager reported that the Council did not have sufficient resources to commission a strategy which is why the proposal had been put forward to appoint consultants.

The Committee discussed TDC play space assets; the need to work with communities, with TDC taking on the role of enabler; and the wider implications in relation to future housing development. Members debated the costs involved in appointing consultants but at the same time acknowledged the need for a strategy.

It was proposed by Councillor Simmons and seconded by Councillor James -

That the recommendation of the Council's Community and Resources Committee (14th January 2019) be rejected and that an amount of up to £20,000 be provided from the Council's Project Reserves to enable the commission of consultants to prepare a play space strategy for Torridge because that will provide benefits for Torridge that might eventually make more savings than the "up to £20,000".

It was proposed by Councillor Pennington and seconded by Mr Dengate –

That the recommendation of the Council's Community and Resources Committee (14th January 2019) be rejected and that an amount of up to £15,000 be provided from the Council's Project Reserves to enable the commission of consultants to prepare a play space strategy for Torridge because that will provide benefits for Torridge that might eventually make more savings than the "up to £20,000".

(Vote: For 5, Against 5)

The Chair, using a casting vote, voted against the proposal

A vote was taken on the proposal by Councillor Simmons and seconded by Councillor James –

That the recommendation of the Council's Community and Resources Committee (14th January 2019) be rejected and that an amount of up to £20,000 be provided from the Council's Project Reserves to enable the commission of consultants to prepare a play space strategy for Torridge because that will provide benefits for Torridge that might eventually make more savings than the "up to £20,000".

(Vote: For 6, Against 4)

The motion was carried.

80. QBR 3

A number of questions on the QBR had been received and answers had been provided directly. A paper detailing the questions and answers was circulated.

The Service Improvement Officer highlighted the main issues:

- Housing Benefit Subsidy Shortfall – increased by circa +30%
- Income showed a decrease of circa 4% over last year which was mainly due to planning issues including a reduction in housing delivery and a reduction in the New Homes Bonus
- Increased expenditure on court cases and staffing i.e. waste and planning

Positive performance had been recorded in the following areas:

- Recycling - recycling rates had increased from 40% to 52% since the introduction of the new regime
- New Homes Bonus – the community grant scheme had supported over 140 projects and £1.2 million had been distributed
- Land charges were now back on track and within target
- Planning performance figures were improving, particularly validation times

Channel shift had been evidenced through the following highlight figures:

- Footfall normally decreased by 10% year on year, however, since December and the move to one site footfall was down 35%
- Website usage had increased by 50% in the last 4 years
 - services, such as planning, land charges and green waste now had electronic submission facilities
 - some third parties such as the DWP and Devon Home Choice also had electronic submission facilities
 - many requests were now received by e-mail

Work was being carried out on the TDC Economic Strategy, drawing on evidence from the LEP Local Industrial Strategy.

The Finance Manager drew the Committee's attention to the 5 key areas of overspend and the reserves identified to partly offset the projected overspend. It was anticipated that the remaining balance would be met from the Transition in Government Funding Reserve later in the year. With regard to capital, the Finance Manager told the Committee that the net Capital Programme Budget for 2018/2019 had been £15,267,661. The earmarked capital reserves are reviewed regularly to accurately reflect when the money will be spent. It was noted that current investments totalled £5m.

Questions were invited and further explanations provided. The meeting then considered the questions and answers paper. Members showed particular interest in the harbour, seeking more information about the amount of business which had been through the harbour during 2018/19 and the nature of the cargo. The Committee felt strongly that consideration must continue to be given to alternative usage and operations.

It was agreed unanimously –

That:

A recommendation be made that the future opportunities for the harbour be added to the agenda for the new Council's visioning day.

New build homes were also discussed in detail and the importance of designing and adopting a growth agenda was highlighted.

It was proposed by Councillor James, seconded by Councillor A Inch and –

Resolved:

That the charges below be included in the Council's Fees and Charges:

Description	Gross Fee*
Administration/Set Up Fee	£72
Termination Fee (if termination occurs within the first year of the term)	£72
Termination Fee (if termination occurs after the first year of the term)	£48
Amendments (which require a change in the original Lease)	£36
Deed of Surrender (termination of lease prior to end of the Break Notice) + Termination Fee as above	£36
Garden Lease Administration Fee	£30
Garden Lease Termination Fee	£30
* VAT is chargeable where the option to tax the property has been exercised	

(Vote: For – unanimous)

81. INCOME GENERATION

The Strategic Manager (Resources) reported that the Income Generation Task & Finish Group had met and actions had been taken. Income was expected during the coming financial year from 2 projects - Caddsdow Blue and Wilkey's Field. A further meeting of the Income Generation Task & Finish Group to be scheduled.

82. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

A meeting of the External Grants Task & Finish Group to be scheduled.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) explained that the call-in in relation to the Avon Lane site would ordinarily have been brought to the next available Internal Overview & Scrutiny meeting. However, in view of the controversial nature of the matter together with the pending election and purdah, it was felt the discussion should be deferred for consideration by the new council. It was unlikely that it would be brought to the first meeting as that was generally set aside for training and setting the Forward Plan. This was discussed and Councillor Laws asked whether it would be appropriate to disclose the names of the councillors who had made the call-in. The Strategic Manager (Resources) advised that it was unclear whether that information should and can be released.

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 5.50 pm.

Chair:

Date: