

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

INTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Town Hall, Bideford

Tuesday, 17 September 2019 - 2.00 pm

PRESENT Councillor P Watson (Chair)

 Councillor P Hames (Vice-Chair)

 Councillors C Cottle-Hunkin, J Gubb, S Langford, J Manley,
 T Inch and S Newton

 Mr S Dengate and Mr I Harper

ALSO PRESENT S Hearse - Strategic Manager (Resources)
 D Heyes - Finance Manager
 M Richards - Democratic Services Officer

 Councillors C Hodson and P Pennington

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Boughton.

22. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Newton, seconded by Councillor Manley and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 July be agreed and signed as a correct record subject to an amendment to Minute 18 – Call-in Westward Ho! Park to indicate the point at which the public had left the meeting.

(Vote: For 9, Abstentions 1)

Matters arising

Minute 18 – Call-in Westward Ho! Park

Councillor Hames asked when Northam Town Council will be approached for further discussion on Westward Ho! park.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) advised that Northam Town Clerk had been in touch with the Senior Solicitor and meeting is to be scheduled.

Minute 20 – Consideration of The Forward Plan – Empty Homes

Mr Harper suggested that, whilst he understood what the Head of Paid Service was saying in relation to operational matters, it was surely up to the Council to decide whether funding should be allocated for a specific post for an Empty Homes Officer.

23. ACTION LIST

The action list was reviewed.

Minute 69a - Local Housing Allowance rate

It was agreed this item should remain on the action list. However, the Strategic Manager (Resources) pointed out that it was extremely unlikely that the Government would make any changes as it would involve significant costs across the country.

Minute 69 - Local Authority Settlements

Nothing new to report.

Minute 20 – Consideration of the Forward Plan: Harbour Board

Councillor Hames asked what would happen to the ideas for harbour usage which were put forward at the last Harbour Board meeting. The Strategic Manager (Resources) responded that it was for the Harbour Board to consider the ideas and make any recommendations to the Community & Resources Committee. Mr Dengate added that the Harbour Board meeting had been very positive.

Minute 20 – Consideration of the Forward Plan: Estuary Strategy

Mr Harper requested that the detailed plan of action (item 7.4, Page 26) be circulated to the Committee.

24. PUBLIC CONTRIBUTIONS

There were no public contributions.

25. 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.

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

The Chair confirmed to Members that the next meeting of the Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee (5 November) will start at 2.00pm as shown on the scheduled of meetings.

27. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

28. QBR 1

The Strategic Manager (Resources) reported that the QBR1 was in the same format as previously – Page 15 presented the highlights from the first quarter; pages 16 – 18 highlighted the financial position and the rest of the report focused on the goals and outcomes. Clarification was given to the colour coding on Page 17 – red = additional costs and green = savings. The Strategic Manager (Resources) asked if there were any questions.

Mr Dengate stated that there were some very positive messages in the highlights section of the report.

Points discussed:

North Devon+

There were concerns about future funding of the organisation and a desire to see it included in the Heart of the South West LEP profile.

Heritage Action Zone Great Torrington

The bid by Great Torrington had been unsuccessful. The Ward Member wanted to know if there were any alternative funds available. Councillor Manley to investigate on receipt of bid details compiled by the Economic Development Officer.

Affordable Housing/Social Housing/ CLTs/Homelessness

Members discussed the percentage of affordable housing, CLTs and provision of Council owned housing stock.

- An update on the current position with regard to the loan fund approved by Full Council for CLTs was requested.
- A report was requested to show what the Council is doing to explore alternative options in the light of the current housing market. The Strategic Manager (Resources) explained in some detail the complexities of Local Council's entering the housing market whether on its own or, through a Housing Company and the fact that it would be premature to spend resources on commencing such a complex exercise before the Council had set it's Strategic Priorities.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) advised that the Council was almost at the point of purchasing a hostel and a further property.

Leisure Centres

It was disappointing to see the reduction in footfall at leisure centres, despite a

marketing push, whilst, elsewhere in the country, leisure centres were performing well and even building new centres. It was noted that 1610 leisure Services were due for a further review by the External Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Harbour Board

It was felt that income details from the land neighbouring the quay should be scrutinised, albeit it was acknowledged that it would be extremely difficult to extract this. The Strategic Manager (Resources) advised that the harbour Board reviewed the accounts at each meeting, including support costs and capital charges.

The Committee reviewed the Questions and Answer sheet which had been tabled. On the whole answers provided satisfactory responses, however, the following issues required further information:

Homelessness - TDC 5 – Safe & Health Communities: Empty Homes and Affordable Housing

The Environmental & Community Safety Manager to provide a response to the question raised.

29. REVIEW OF TREASURY INVESTMENT OPTIONS

A review of the Council's treasury management options had been requested by Members. In addition to responding to this, the report also included the current investment strategy as approved by Full Council.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) spoke about the type of investments required by the investment strategy which restricted deposits to bodies with high credit ratings. Currently, £12m was deposited with such institutions in addition to a variety of short term investments.

It was suggested that the Council should investigate alternative accounts with higher returns. It was noted that all investments were with commercial holdings.

30. EXTERNAL GRANTS T&F GROUP

The Chair advised that the Task & Finish Group comprised the Chair, Vice Chair and a couple of Members from each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) explained that the Task & Finish Group had been set up to review the grants that have been given historically to a variety of organisations and to consider, in the light of budget reductions, what value the Council was getting and whether these organisations still fitted within the Council's corporate strategy. The responsibility of the External Overview & Scrutiny Committee was to scrutinise the organisations, whereas the Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee was tasked with examining the Council's budget plans, hence the requirement for a joint Task & Finish Group. The Community Engagement Officer has started to compile background information.

Clear terms of reference were requested.

The Strategic Manager (Resources) clarified that the amounts in the 2nd column in the table appended to the agenda had been awarded to those organisations where Service Level Agreements were in place. Following discussions about the table, it was suggested that organisations such as North Devon+ and the Burton Art Gallery should be included. This would be something the Task & Finish Group would look at. Further aspects the Task & Finish Group might consider would include how new organisations can be made aware of the grants.

Following examination by the Task & Finish Group, any recommendations would be taken back to each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, who would then make recommendations to the Community & Resources Committee.

Nominations, in addition to the Chair and Vice Chair, were invited for Internal Overview & Scrutiny representation on the Task & Finish Group.

Nominations from the External Overview & Scrutiny Committee will be sought by e-mail.

Internal Overview & Scrutiny Members to sit on the Task & Finish Group –

Councillor Watson
Councillor Hames
Councillor Gubb
Councillor Manley
Mr Dengate

Once membership from External Overview & Scrutiny has been established, Democratic Services will seek to coordinate meeting dates.

31. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was reviewed and duly updated.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and closed at 3.26 pm.

Chair:

Date: