

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCILEXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETINGTown Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HSMonday, 31 July 2023 - 10.00 am

- PRESENT Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin (Chair)
- Councillor A Brenton (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors L Bach, J Craigie, C Hawkins, P Shepherd, D Smith
and H Thomas
- Non Elected Members K Baker
- ALSO PRESENT T Ojikutu - Legal Services Manager
- S Kearney - Head of Communities & Place
- L Adam - Programme Delivery Manager
- T Vanstone - Senior Electoral & Democratic Services
Officer
- K Hewlett - Electoral and Democratic Services Officer

196. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Harding and Staci Dorey (Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring Officer). Tope Ojikutu attended as the Legal Services Manager.

197. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Chair reviewed the minutes page by page with members.

It was proposed by Councillor Brenton, seconded by Councillor Hawkins and–

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 13 June 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

(Vote: yes 6, abstentions 3)

198. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

It was agreed by Chair that people attending to speak regarding the Link Centre would be allowed to address the Committee under Public Participation.

Anna Fors spoke as service user of Link Centre and as a member of Friends of North Devon Link Centre.

Anna provided members with an overview of why they were attending External Overview & Scrutiny Committee and provided some background to their challenge of proposals for the mental health provision locally and the provision of services locally.

She stated her opinion on the potential impact of the proposals both in terms of finance and the impact for service users.

Sonia Gold then spoke as a service user of Link Centre and explained the support she has received from the Link Centre staff and peers. She highlighted how important it was to have one place to access support and how the service had helped her personally.

It was asked that Members support the work of Friends North Devon Link Centre and the services users locally.

Vice Chair thanked the speakers for attending and provided her reasons for support, as well as her thoughts on the benefits of the provision locally.

Chair advised of work that had taken place since the last Committee where this was raised under urgent matters, she also provided some background to the Committees involvement in the consultation process.

It was suggested that the Committee share their feedback with Councillor Hodson as a District Member on the DCC Health & Adult Care Scrutiny Committee.

There was some ambiguity regarding the extension of the consultation period for this proposal. It was agreed that Democratic Services would look to firm up understanding of the consultation process and timescales.

Councillor Craigie advised members work was taking place to prepare a Notice of Motion to Full Council and provided his thoughts on the need to scrutinise the decision making process on this potential change in provision.

199. ACTION LIST

Chair reviewed the action list with members and the following actions were agreed:

- Contact North Devon District Council and explore possibility of joint committees on Agriculture and Dentistry.
- Add to action 192 – request an update in relation to the impact of the resignation of CEO Suzanne Tracey.
- Raise the provision of bitesize training sessions for Councillors and their importance with the Police at the upcoming Community Safety Partnership.

200. 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.

201. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

No items.

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

Chair advised members of the proposed closure of Mobile Libraries in Devon and updated on work taking place to challenge the proposals. Members were advised of the petition and campaign and provided with context on the potential impact.

The led to a discussion regarding the closure of train ticket offices raised and the impact for communities in the Torridge district.

203. NORTH DEVON PLUS

The Head of Community and Place introduced members to North Devon Plus and explained the business focus. He provided details on the Board structure, along with the structure of the organisation and a summary of the roles within.

Louise Adam, Programme Delivery Manager, then introduced herself and provided members with a detailed overview of what North Devon Plus have delivered and achieved.

The Programme Delivery Manager provided a summary of the different aspects of the business, the staff that support this work and how they've supported local businesses and managed the impact of big change locally.

There was particular interest in the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) and detail on timescales and planned funding was shared with members.

During the presentation Councillor Grants were highlighted and it was confirmed to be one of lowest residual budgets last year. It was explained that North Devon Plus also had good intelligence on smaller grants, which Councillors' communities could benefit from as well. Members were advised to contact the Project Officer for more information.

The Head of Community and Place provided members with some insight into how the expertise of North Devon Plus has been beneficial for TDC in terms of the project delivery, and how North Devon Plus work alongside the council's Economic Development Team to support the local businesses and economy.

More details on current projects and programmes North Devon Plus were engaged with were shared, and the Pre-Start Provision (for start up businesses) was also highlighted.

Members were asked their questions.

Following a question in relation to North Devon Plus funding it was confirmed there is core funding of £20,000 from each Local Authority and this is topped up by bid writing. The Head of Community and Place advised how this funding had dropped significantly in recent years and how the organisation had adapted as a result.

Members asked if North Devon Plus supports the charity sector and it was confirmed this was offered through the business support function highlighted in the presentation.

Members asked what support was available for small start up companies looking to go into the solar panel or heat pump industry. The REPF was highlighted and the focus on net zero targets. It was explained that the Business Support function of North Devon Plus would be best placed to support those who wanted to operate in this sector, but it was noted that more specific support around this business area could be explored.

Following a question about the historic funding of North Devon Plus it was confirmed that the statistics regarding support to 4,000 businesses related to 2015 onwards and were equally spread across the years - the scale of support had not reduced due to the reduction in core funding.

Members asked about the kind of support available to social enterprises who want to access funding like the Community Ownership Fund. The Programme Delivery Manager advised that these groups could access support through the business support function, but North Devon Plus were not able to help write bids. It was confirmed North Devon Plus could help with the development of business / marketing plans.

Following a question regarding support for smaller scale online businesses the Programme Development Manager advised of the breadth of support available to businesses in this situation and highlighted some of the programmes available.

Following a question relating to the closure of some of the larger retail shops in the high street the Head of Community and Place provided a summary of how North Devon Plus work alongside the Economic Development team – this area of work was more of a focus for the Economic Development team.

There was a discussion regarding Bideford Pannier Market, and it was confirmed that North Devon Plus could work with the smaller traders, but the larger issues that were raised would be picked up with the Economic Development team. It was also confirmed that the Co-operative set up by the traders at the Pannier Market could make use of North Devon Plus.

Contact details for North Devon Plus were shared and it was confirmed that services were free at the point of use.

Meetings were predominantly online but could be face to face if needed. An exception to this was the Future Farm Resilience consultations, which were nearly always out and about at various farm sites in the local area.

Members requested that the presentation slides be added to Members' Bulletin

It was also suggested that North Devon Plus could return to the Committee to report back on the effectiveness of the Rural England Prosperity Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund.

Chair thanked the presenters for attending.

204. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Chair reviewed the forward plan with members and the following additions and amendment were agreed:

- Members were advised of the change of date for September's joint Community Safety Partnership meeting, which will move to 12 October.
- The September committee date will be used to hold an Extraordinary External Committee where mental health provision will be discussed. It was requested that a panel of local services and service users be formed and questions for the panel would be agreed in advance of the meeting.
- November committee to remain as an Education and Employment focus.
- Explore dates for joint committee on Agriculture with North Devon District Council.

The meeting commenced at 10.03 am and closed at 11.27 am