

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

INTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Town Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HS

Tuesday, 19 March 2024 - 10.00 am

PRESENT Councillor S Newton (Chair)
Councillors C Bright, T Elliott, C Hodson and S Inch

Non-elected Member Mr I Harper

ALSO PRESENT S Hearse - Chief Executive
G Bryant - Finance Manager (S151 Officer)
J Walter - Strategy, Performance & ICT Manager
A Fay - Service Improvement Officer
G Batten - Principal Accountant
K Brown - Democratic Services Officer
K Hewlett - Electoral and Democratic Services Officer

Councillors P Hames and P Pennington

302. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr S Dengate, Councillors W Lo-Vel and C Cottle-Hunkin. Councillor P Pennington substituted for Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin.

303. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor C Hodson, seconded by Councillor S Inch and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th February 2024 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote: For – 6, Against – 0, Abstentions – 1)

Matters Arising

Following a question regarding the new Reserves Policy, it was confirmed that it would be ready for the next budget cycle.

304. ACTION LIST

The Action List was discussed and updated.

A query was raised regarding the progress of discussions with the Harbour Board Chair reference the development of the Harbour. The Chair advised nothing had progressed and would be captured in the wider project of the Estuary Strategy. Information was provided by the Chief Executive that the Harbour would be considered in the Operational Services Business Plan. It was agreed for the action to be added back onto the action list.

Following a query regarding the Heritage Harbour Status, the Chief Executive confirmed no decision had been made and more information on the implications were needed. If a decision is required, then it would be taken to the Community & Resources Committee.

305. PUBLIC CONTRIBUTIONS

There were no public contributions.

306. 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.

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

No items were brought forward.

308. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

309. QBR 3

The Service Improvement Officer commenced the item with a detailed slide presentation of the Themes highlights.

Following this part of the presentation a question was raised as to whether Benchmarking could be included in the report as well as the presentation. The ICT, Strategy and Performance Manager advised that a full Benchmarking report is produced at the end of the year and reasons why this changed from quarterly.

The Principal Accountant progressed the presentation detailing the financial aspects of the QBR3.

Following a query regarding the vehicle parts percentage being relatively high within the adverse variances, the Principal Accountant advised this could be an effect of the poor road conditions however the Waste and Recycling fleet is ageing.

Concerns were raised regarding the fact that the last HATOC (Highways and Traffic Order Committee) and TDC meeting scheduled for 26th February 2024 was cancelled. It was agreed for this to be investigated.

The Chair requested that for future presentations the slides show the highest percentage at the top. The Principal Accountant advised this could be done.

Councillor P Pennington declared a personal interest as he owns land that is affected by the Xlinks Project.

The Question-and-Answer Supplement was discussed in detail with the additional questions/comments made as follows:

- The Chief Executive declared an interest as a Director of Active Torridge. He also advised that Active Torridge had presented at External Overview & Scrutiny the previous week and if Members were minded, their update was currently available to view on YouTube.
 - Confirmation was given that the Levelling Up Partnership project did not include bids for decarbonisation.
 - Reference the Audit report that went to Audit and Governance Committee on 20th Feb 2024, Mr Harper implied that some aspects of the report could be brought to Internal Overview & Scrutiny. The Chair agreed and advised he would read the report in detail and bring anything back he thought necessary.
 - TDC becoming a Direct Housing Provider - the Chief Executive advised that currently TDC are concentrating on their existing stock rather than expanding and developing new, reasons for this were given. He also advised of the Local Authority Housing Fund, and that the Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) was presently looking at the information provided for the scheme. Updates would be brought forward to future Full Council meetings.
 - The Chair expressed it was good to see questions from Councillors outside of the Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
 - Following suggestion that Ward Members be given details of TDC buildings in their Wards, the Chair advised this could come forward on completion of the Asset Management Plan.
- The QBR 3 was noted.

310. REVIEW OF THE QBR PROCESS (INCLUDE RECRUITMENT & RETENTION)

The Chair commenced this item detailing the reasons why Recruitment and Retention had been requested.

He handed over to the HR and Communications Manager who provided a verbal update to the Committee.

Salient points included:

- The LGA (Local Government Agency) reports that 94% of all LAs have difficulties in recruiting since Covid-19 – mainly because employees search

for vacancies further a field which offer more flexibility and working from home.

- All HR policies are being reviewed.
- An internal staff focus group had been set up with a representative from each team to report any issues and/or improvements.
- The Website had been reviewed and refreshed.
- A strong focus on training and development.
- Current vacancies and that none of them are in Waste and Recycling.
- Agency staff
- Review of the HR strategy

The Chief Executive provided additional information to the committee on holding vacancies, TDC being in a better financial position than other LAs who are having recruitment freezes and the process for vacant posts being agreed or not by the Senior Management Team.

In response to a question from Mr I Harper, the HR & Communications Manager advised of the training and development methods TDC use.

The Chair thanked the HR and Communications Manager and moved the meeting onto the Review of the QBR.

The Service Improvement Officer delivered a presentation on the QBR review questionnaire responses. She advised that a further response was received after she had finalised the presentation. The presentation would be updated to include all 19 responses, all statistics corrected and then re-circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

The Chair expressed his concern to the lack of responses from Members and advised he would write the Chair of Full Council advising him of his concerns.

Following some responses suggesting further information be included and/or the QBR be more detailed, it was confirmed that the old QBR use to have more detail but after the last review it was streamlined. The ICT, Strategy and Performance Manager confirmed that our QBR process has been acknowledged as good practice by other LAs.

The majority of responses were satisfied with how the QBR operates.

The Chair thanked all those involved in putting together the survey.

It was proposed by Councillor S Newton, seconded by Councillor C Hodson and –

Resolved:

It be approved that as a result of the QBR survey the Internal Overview & Scrutiny Committee does not recommend any changes to the QBR format.

(Vote: For – unanimous)

311. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan was discussed, and the following was agreed:

- The forward plan can be populated with standing items and following the AGM additional items can be added
- The Estuary Strategy is on the forward plan for the 30th of April. Invite the Head of Communities & Place and the Economic Development Manager for an update. The existing strategy be included in the agenda for the next meeting.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and closed at 11.53 am

Chair:

Date: