

**CORPORATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGULATORY SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

17 September 2020

Present:

Councillors A Dewhirst (Chair), P Colthorpe, Y Atkinson, K Ball, R Bloxham, J Brook, R Edgell, I Hall, J Hodgson, J Hook, R Radford, C Slade and C Whitton

Apologies:

Councillor J Berry

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25:

Councillors R Gilbert, S Hughes and B Parsons

* 186 **Meeting Procedures - Briefing and Etiquette**

The Committee received a short briefing from the Democratic Services Officer on the process and etiquette for remote meetings.

* 187 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2020 be signed as a correct record.

* 188 **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

* 189 **Public Participation**

There were no oral representations from members of the public.

* 190 **Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Head of Scrutiny updated the Committee as to the Work Programme and agreed to bring forward Food Banks and Root Causes to November and to add Active Travel.

* 191 **COVID-19 update (to include Council response, recovery & financial impact)**

(Councillor Parsons attended remotely in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 and spoke to this item at the invitation of the Committee.)

The Council's Chief Executive reported on the current position within the County of Devon relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Key points included:

Overview

- Daily updates were available on the Council's website giving latest figures for the last 7 days, currently 33 confirmed cases in Devon, as against 44 cases in Cornwall; 36 in Plymouth and only 1 in Torbay over the last 7 days;
- Impacting in the next few weeks would be the return to schools, colleges and universities and the need to watch carefully the impact of student behaviour outside of universities;
- Exeter University had been the first University to announce its own testing capacity – procured from the private sector;
- Increased incidents in the County had been from returning younger people from abroad, but more were now being seen from the working age population;
- The Council's website gave access to a national map showing numbers of cases across the whole County and also individual areas of incidents;
- Rates of hospitalisation were very low and there had been very few deaths in the County since early summer;

Testing

- As the economy opened up and schools returned, the rapid demand for testing was outstripping supply, but the Government were hoping to get national testing up to ½ million a day by mid-November;
- There was a need to encourage only those exhibiting symptoms or advised to have a test to apply for one, and a communication would follow shortly to reinforce this message;
- A low rate of between 0.3% and 0.8% of those tested in Devon were actually positive – which was well below the national average;
- There were very few cases in care homes, where regular testing of care home staff was carried out;

Economy

- Up-to-date modelling would be shared with the Committee at a future meeting, but the June modelling predicted unemployment of between 9%-14% with a potential for significant impact later in the year at the end of the furlough scheme;
- There were increasing expectations on Local Authorities to support the national effort;

Organisation

- Business activity in the Council was high with diversion of some resources to look at e.g. safe working for staff, increased issues around cyber security, social care contact with vulnerable people;
- Staff surveys had been carried out which had been well responded to, identifying some areas to follow up on, and these surveys would continue to be done on a regular basis;

Budget

- The in-year budget position estimated an overspend of around £5 millions, which included the Covid-19 Government grant;
- The impact of Covid-19 would see continued pressures on budgets next year; and
- The Government was being lobbied hard for measures to ensure vital services could be delivered into next year.

Cllr Parsons and the Chair expressed their thanks to all staff for their continued hard work during this time.

* 192 5G Spotlight Review update

The Committee considered the Report of the 5G Spotlight Review and the recommendation contained therein.

The Report highlighted at paragraph 5.3 that it was highly likely that only those who felt very strongly about the issue of 5G would have responded to the survey request, and thus was a self-selecting respondent base.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst, **SECONDED** by Councillor Whitton and

RESOLVED that Cabinet be asked to write to the Parliamentary Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, with copies to the Local Government Association, Public Health England and Devon MPs, to request that this Select Committee gives consideration to the earnest concerns expressed by some residents of this County and beyond about the health and environmental impacts of 5G and supports this Government to address those concerns by providing greater reassurance and evidence to the general public that the technology is safe. If such reassurance and evidence cannot be provided, then we suggest further research is urgently undertaken.

* 193 Gambling - update

Mr R Burkitt from the Gambling Commission was in attendance remotely for this item.

The Committee considered the draft letter to be sent to Nigel Huddleston MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport, Tourism and Heritage, in response to his letter of 10 March 2020 regarding Problem Gambling.

The Committee heard discussion and questions from Mr Burkitt and Members as follows:

- Online gambling issues had increased since lockdown, impacting public health, and Mr Burkitt undertook to provide the Head of Scrutiny with the latest data; and organisations such as GamCare would be obliged to provide current data on referrals locally;
- The Gambling Commission recognised the issues and associated impacts of online gambling;
- The UK Government's Manifesto pledged to conduct a review of the Gambling Act which would provide an opportunity to consider public health protections;
- It was Ofcom or the ASA that controlled advertising, and not the Gambling Commission;
- The increased gambling advertisements, particularly Bingo, during TV sporting events; and
- That just one gambler affected between 5 and 8 other people's lives, either socially or economically.

The Head of Scrutiny reported that Devon County Council had been commended by the Centre for Public Scrutiny for its work on Problem Gambling and would share with the Committee its publication when available.

The Committee appreciated Mr Burkitt's attendance and thanked him for his time.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst, **SECONDED** by Councillor Colthorpe and

RESOLVED that the letter be sent to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport, Tourism and Heritage, subject to the Chair approving a minor amendment to the wording of the final sentence, and that a copy be sent to the Cabinet.

* **194** **Highways Performance Dashboard**

(Councillor Hughes attended remotely in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 and spoke to this item at the invitation of the Committee.)

The Committee received the Report of the Chief officer for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste (HIW/20/31) on the Highways

Performance Dashboard, which provided an overview of performance on key seasonal aspects of delivery, namely Operational impact and response to Covid-19; Reactive works including potholes and drainage cleansing; Ash dieback; Increased capital funding; Preparedness for Winter; and Doing What Matters.

Members' questions and Officer's comments included:

- Defects - the PIP triage inspector initiative had been very successful in helping improve delivery; and further changes to the safety defect process would be rolled out across the whole of the County early next year;
- A reminder of the important relationship between the asset and neighbourhood teams, as to planned programme works; and
- Pothole inspections had been brought forward to the summer to coincide looking for ash dieback, which had created a more efficient use of resources.

Members noted the lack of information on civil parking enforcement operations within their Divisions, and the Chief Officer undertook to include this in future reports.

* 195 **Devon County Council Buildings - Fire Safety Review**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support (BSS/20/01), which provided an update on the Council's fire safety measures and the actions taken following the Grenfell Tower fire on 14 June 2017 and the fire in the block of flats housing students from the University of Bolton in November 2019.

The Report set out the Council's response following those events and confirmed the Council's position in relation to cladding on its property estate (including Local Authority maintained schools estate); highlighted the key focus of the Government's interim report into the Grenfell tragedy; and detailed the Council's current fire safety processes and procedures.

Officers clarified that Academy schools were totally independent from Devon County Council, however, the Department for Education did offer advice and provide updates to all schools, regardless of status.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst, **SECONDED** by Councillor Colthorpe and

RESOLVED that the Committee commend to the Cabinet the progress of work so far.

* **196** **Commissioning Liaison Member - CDS**

The Committee received the Report of the Commissioning Liaison Member regarding Connecting Devon and Somerset Broadband, which discussed the procurement of a new contractor to replace Gigaclear.

Members questioned the ownership of cables that had already been laid by Gigaclear but not connected. The Head of Economy, Enterprise and Skills clarified that there was no obligation for commercially delivered networks to be opened up to other providers but stated she would be happy to raise with the company and support communities make a case in such situations.

The Committee thanked the Commission Liaison Members for their report.

***DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 2.32 pm