

**CORPORATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGULATORY SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

19 November 2020

Present:-

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

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillors Croad, Davis, Gilbert, Hart, Hughes and Parsons

* 197 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2020 be signed as a correct record.

* 198 **Matter of Urgency: Problem Gambling**

An item taken under Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972)

The Chair had decided that the Committee should consider, as a matter of urgency, this issue in view of the previous concerns raised by Members.

The Head of Scrutiny had circulated to the Committee the latest letter from Nigel Huddleston MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport, Tourism and Heritage, dated 18 November 2020. In particular, the letter stated that the Government were currently finalising the scope of the forthcoming review of the Gambling Act 2005 and to be assured that there would be an opportunity for the Council's views to be taken into account as part of that process.

The Chair urged Members to read the information contained in the link in the letter relating to the Government's response to the Public Accounts Committee's recent report on gambling regulation that was published in October.

The Committee welcomed the letter and it was agreed the item would be brought back to the next Committee meeting.

* 199 **Public Participation**

There were no oral representations from members of the public.

* **200 Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Head of Scrutiny updated the Committee as to the Work Programme.

RESOLVED that the following be added to the Work Programme:

- Devon Norse contract (January)
- Libraries Unlimited (January)
- Commissioning Liaison Member review (March)

* **201 COVID-19 update (including financial position)**

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

Incidence

- numbers had increased significantly nationally in the past few weeks;
- Devon was running at just under 1,000 cases a week (10 in August), therefore 123 new cases per 100,000 population (half the national average of 272);
- similar rates in Somerset and Dorset, but slightly lower in Cornwall;
- highest rates of increase were in Exeter, East Devon and North Devon;

Impact

- total bed availability in wider Devon including Plymouth and Torbay was at 8-9% capacity being occupied by COVID, but fewer intensive care cases than previously;
- still relatively low death levels across the Council area, averaging around 3 COVID deaths every week;
- Trajectory in NHS – looking at around 15% of bed capacity being occupied by COVID, and higher in the new year, which would impact other NHS treatments;
- relatively low impact in schools – currently 2,500 (3%) of school children were currently isolating as a result of COVID incidents;

Looking forward

- what happens after 2 December would need to be decided very quickly by Government and it was hoped would be announced next week;
- the South West had lobbied hard for any new tiering system to be based on sub-regional arrangements;
- two vaccines had so far been declared and it was expected to hear on the Oxford one shortly;
- mass rollout of any vaccine would be logistically very challenging from a local perspective;
- Devon was one of the counties included in the rapid testing pilot for care home visitors;

Funding:

- since the September meeting, a further 3 tranches of support funding amounting to £10million had been received from Government, which included funds to help provide meals during school holidays;

Organisation:

- different from the first wave, in that schools were open; also recycling centres, thereby less able to redeploy staff to other areas;
- the emergency planning arrangements had been stood up;
- the wellbeing and morale of staff was being constantly monitored and staff were reporting they felt supported; and
- the Council's IT infrastructure had performed well during this period, which had benefited through past investment.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst, **SECONDED** by Councill Hall, and

RESOLVED that a Members' survey be carried out to measure their wellbeing and engagement, as discussed at the recent Member Development Steering Group.

The Chief Executive agreed to report back to the next Scrutiny meeting in January, and the Chair expressed his thanks to all staff for their continued hard work.

* 202

In-year Service Briefings:

(a) Corporate Services

The Committee received a verbal update from the Chief Executive on the in-year position of budget and service delivery within Corporate Services (Digital Transformation and Business Support; Legal, Communications and Human Resources (including Democratic Services), Coroners and Registration, and Treasurer's Services).

The Chief Executive reported that for 2020/21 overall there was a small overspend of £371,000, but it was hoped to balance the budget by year end. Legal Services had seen significant pressure this year relating to child protection proceedings; the Coroner's Service had £100,000 overspend; and there had also been implementation costs relating to the HR management system.

The Chief Executive also reported that next year would see some additional but important investment in the IT roadmap in order to maintain existing infrastructure and to remain resilient.

(b) Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity, which provided an in-year briefing on service delivery within Communities, Public Health, Planning, Transportation and Environment and Economy, Enterprise and Skills. Significant areas of activity this year in all services included:

- £60million funding had now been received for the North Devon Link Road improvement;
- good progress had been made on the Devon Climate Emergency project and an Interim Carbon Plan was due for public consultation from 7 December 2020;
- work was continuing with the Local Nature Partnership, North Devon Biosphere and the five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- the Planning Transportation and Environment service was reporting an underspend, which was predominantly attributed to the lower patronage of the concessionary travel;
- Team Devon had been rapidly set up to collectively develop with district councils a co-ordinated infrastructure of support for the most vulnerable across the county;
- Youth Services had remained active throughout the year, developing an on-street service for young people and a digital outreach service, and had also received additional National Lottery funding of £160,000;
- Libraries Unlimited had seen a significant increase in uptake of digital books and had also developed a choose and collect service; and
- the Communities Team had secured an additional £400,000 from Government emergency COVID funding, which helped to bolster response support for the domestic abuse helpdesks, and employing additional roles within the Early Help arena for families;
- the creation of the Devon Economic Recovery Group, working as Team Devon, where around £10million funding had been secured;
- an Employment Support programme, working with Job Centre Plus, had been created to provide advice and support to finding new employment;
- the purchase of the former Flybe Training Academy, to be leased to Exeter College, to deliver a Future Skills Academy; and
- £1million funding secured to deliver a Mobile Boost voucher programme to improve mobile phone connectivity.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Ian Hall, **SECONDED** by Councillor Dewhirst and

RESOLVED that in setting this year's budget the Cabinet recognise the need to support residents of Devon with prevention and early intervention across services before reaching crisis point. This is not only financially prudent but also responsible in the support of giving everyone the best opportunities in life.

(c) Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste (HIW)

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste (HIW/20/43), which provided an in-year briefing on budget and service delivery. HIW were overall forecasting a budget breakeven position.

Particular points of highlight in discussion with Members and Officers included:

- Public rights of way and country parks had remained open, where usage had significantly increased;
- the Grand Western Canal and Stove Country Parks had again both been awarded the nationally recognised Green Flag award;
- Skanska had announced its intention to withdraw from the Devon highways maintenance contract;
- the new Streetlighting contract had been awarded and LED lighting was now being rolled out;
- Parking enforcement, although stood down in the early part of the year, was now back to normal working;
- the Highways team, including the new Network Operational Control Centre, had now moved from Lucombe House to Great Moor House, Sowton; and
- the Devon Waste Strategy was currently out for public consultation.

* 203 **Treasury Management Stewardship - Mid-year report 2020/21**

The Committee received the Report of the County Treasurer (CT/20/91) on the Treasury Management Mid-Year Stewardship 2020/21, which updated key matters arising from the Council's Treasury and Debt Management activities during the first seven months of the 2020/21 financial year, to enable Members to satisfy themselves that agreed policy had been implemented.

The Report outlined the Borrowing Strategy and its aims for 2020/21 – 2022/23; Analysis of Long Term Debt; Investment Strategy, the current position with the Minimum Revenue Provision; the Council's compliance with the Prudential Indicators as laid out in the CIPFA Code of Practice; and Prospects for 2021/22.

In summary, the Report stated that no long-term or short-term borrowing had been undertaken to date in 2020/21 and the expectation was that no new borrowing would be required during the remainder of the 2020/21 financial year; and that investment income at the end of October stood at around £1.09 million compared to the budget target for the year of £1.542 million.

Looking ahead, falling interest rates would reduce the level of interest income that could be achieved on the Council's cash reserves in future years, and a potential reduction in available cash would mean that the Council would need to manage its capital programme carefully to ensure it remained affordable within the policy of not taking out further external debt.

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

RESOLVED that the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report be endorsed and commended to the Cabinet.

* **204 Highways Performance Dashboard**

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste (HIW/20/44) on the Highways Performance Dashboard, which provided an overview of performance on key seasonal aspects of delivery, namely Reactive works including potholes and drainage cleaning; Ash dieback; Delivery of planned works; Winter service; Carbon reduction; and Civil Parking Enforcement.

The Chief Officer reported that the annual safety defects inspections had been brought forward to the summer months in order to support ash dieback and to free up inspection resource during the peak winter months.

Ash dieback across the County was continuing at an alarming rate with the number of infected trees in each district significantly higher than in previous years. Survey results were shown at Appendix B to the Report.

This recurrent item would come back to the Committee in March next year.

* **205 Speed Management Working Group Update**

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste (HIW/20/18), which gave an update on the progress of the recommendations from the Traffic Speed Task Group.

The Committee also received a Progress Report from the Speed Management Working Group (SMWG). The SMWG comprised Members and Officers and had been set up in December 2019 to manage the implementation of the Task Group's recommendations. The last six months had focused on a review of the SCARF process and also on the scope of the 20mph speed limit in Newton Abbot.

* **206 Standing Overview Group - Climate Change**

The Committee received the notes from the meeting of the Climate Change Standing Overview Group held on 20 October 2020.

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

RESOLVED that this Committee believes the plans carbon neutral target should be before 2050 in order to present a challenge to Government to provide a policy context to allow us to achieve an earlier target more in line with those declared by Districts.

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

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 3.15 pm