

**CORPORATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGULATORY SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

28 January 2021

Present:

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

Apologies:

Councillors R Bloxham and P Crabb

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25:

Councillors Croad, Hosking, Hughes and McInnes

* 211 **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

* 212 **Public Participation**

In accordance with the Council's Public Participation Rules, the Committee received and acknowledged oral representations from the persons mentioned below, on a matter to be considered by the Committee that day, namely Active Travel in Devon (Minute *216):

- (a) Mr I Stewart, Network Development Manager from Sustrans gave a presentation on the proposal for a feasibility study for a traffic-free route between Moretonhampstead and Chagford;
- (b) Councillor N Heyworth, West Devon Ward Councillor for Chagford, spoke about the community engagement for adding the Moretonhampstead to Chagford route to the strategic plan; and
- (c) Mrs C Ash Wheeler spoke on how the Moretonhampstead to Chagford route was supported locally, had reached £8,000 of fundraising, and would respond to the threat of climate change.

The Chairman responded by thanking the above named for their attendance and representations, which would be considered by the Committee during its subsequent deliberations.

* 213 **Scrutiny Work Programme**

- (a) The Head of Scrutiny updated the Committee as to the Work Programme.

- (b) On behalf of the Commissioning Liaison Members, Councillor K Ball updated the Committee on the position regarding Skanska and reported that the timeline for novation to the new company was planned for 1st April 2021.

214 **COVID-19 update**

(Councillor K Ball declared a personal interest by virtue of being a member of a COVID support group in Okehampton.)

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

Prevalence:

- As of yesterday, Devon's headline rate in infectivity for the last 7 days was 124.3 per 100,000 population, against a national rate of 386 per 100,000 – Devon had the second lowest infectivity rate in the country.
- Torbay and Plymouth's rates were 174 and 241 per 100,000 respectively, and Cornwall and Somerset's rates were 183 and 286 per 100,000 respectively.
- As of last night, of approximately 2400 beds across the wider Devon area, 314 were currently occupied by COVID patients, which included some patients from other NHS areas, particularly Somerset and Dorset, who were closer to capacity.
- There were 36 patients currently in intensive care facilities, and 540 residents in the DCC area who were recorded as having died during the course of the pandemic.

Vaccine and Testing

- 95.5% of care homes had received their vaccines – which was a significant achievement.
- Currently, just under 80% of over 80s in Devon (including Plymouth and Torbay) had been vaccinated.
- To complement the national testing programme, County Hall had been set up as a community testing hub targeting particularly those in high risk occupations, the vulnerable and deprived areas, costing approximately £6.5 million, funded by central government grant.
- The Director of Public Health would circulate details of the County Hall community testing hub for Members' information.

Schools

- Schools remained partially open for key worker children and children who were vulnerable, and for the provision of online curriculum.
- Latest attendance figures for those on roll were 29% primary schools, 9% secondary schools and 41% special schools.

There was discussion around the forthcoming elections in May and the associated risks and difficulties involved if they did take place in the current circumstances. Members considered the elections should be delayed to later in the year when infection rates may be lower.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his comprehensive report.

215 **Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2021/22**

The Committee received the Report of the County Treasurer (CT/21/14) on the proposed Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2021/22 financial year, prepared in accordance with the revised Treasury Management Policy Statement and revised CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management, to be submitted to the Cabinet and the County Council for ratification following consideration by this Committee.

The Strategy set out the minimum revenue policy (MRP); capital expenditure funding; prudential indicators; the current treasury position; debt and investments; prospects for interest rates; the borrowing strategy; and the investment strategy. The key issues for 2021/22 were set out in the Overview section of the Report.

A typographical error was noted on page 4 of the Report, in the third paragraph, third line, which should correctly read “...*Council with total internal borrowing of £94 million, i.e. the Council has borrowed £94 million...*”. The error should likewise be corrected at Table 5 on page 7 of the Report.

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

RESOLVED that the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2021/22 be endorsed and commended to the Cabinet.

216 **Active Travel in Devon**

(Councillor Hall declared a personal interest in this matter by virtue of being the Chairman of Cloakham Lawn Sports Centre where part of the Sustrans Cycle Way shouldered the boundary of the Charity’s land.)

(Councillor Hughes and McInnes attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item at the invitation of the Committee.)

(Councillor Hosking attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(2) and spoke to this item.)

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment (PTE/21/3), which provided an update on the County’s active travel plans, namely reporting on progress in delivering the

Cycling and Multi-Use Trail Strategy; updates on national policy and funding initiatives relating to walking and cycling; and looking ahead to how this might impact on the planning and prioritisation of future infrastructure schemes.

The Council had a strong track record in delivering walking and cycling infrastructure, with over £20m invested in a range of urban and rural leisure schemes across the County over the past five years.

Government policy was changing and there was a drive to raise the ambition for increasing active travel in the interests of health, the environment, and the economy.

The Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment's presentation included:

- The completed schemes in Exeter, Barnstaple and Newton Abbot that had been delivered with the benefit of grant funding;
- Proposed schemes included completing the gaps in the Devon Coast to Coast on the Tarka Trail and Ruby Way; and progressing links between Seaton and Colyford and between Sidmouth and Feniton;
- The new Department for Transport, Gear Change document which set out a new bold vision for cycling and walking, and the design principles in the DfT guidance on Cycle Infrastructure Design;
- Applied suggestions so far included, segregation infrastructure/priority side road crossings; on-road treatments; and modal filters; and
- Welcome news that local community funding sources had been found to begin feasibility work to extend the Moretonhampstead to Chagford route, which was similar to the approach taken in other parts of the County, including in Ivybridge and the Boniface Trail between Crediton and Exeter.

Discussion points with Officer and Members covered:

- The Ivybridge to Bittaford local initiative where policy was needed to empower local groups to promote active travel and aid funding to move forward;
- The local aspiration for the Exe Valley trail to be extended to Bampton to enable a route all the way to Exeter; and for cycle routes in rural areas;
- Local Member support for the extension of the Wray Valley trail from Moretonhampstead to Chagford (see Minute *212);
- The need to get local routes included in District Local Plans which in turn would provide opportunities for further funding; and
- The importance of applying 20mph speed limits in certain areas.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst, **SECONDED** by Councillors Colthorpe and Atkinson respectively and

RESOLVED that

- (a) that Cabinet be asked to develop policy which supports local people to develop and realise cycle and multi-use trails in local areas and to include scrutiny where appropriate in the development of policy; and
- (b) that Cabinet include consideration of the 20mph areas in positive active travel strategies.

* 217 **Libraries Unlimited Strategy**

(Councillor Croad attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item at the invitation of the Committee.)

(Mr A Kittow, Chief Executive of Libraries Unlimited and Ms T Witherick, Head of Library Service and Customer Experience were in attendance.)

The Committee noted the Report of the Head of Communities, which provided Members with an update on Library Services during the pandemic. It included data that reflected the demand on services throughout the year and provided valuable learning from changes to the way library members interacted with the services on offer and assisted in understanding the impact the pandemic had on customer behaviours.

A separate report outlined some of the areas of focus in the coming months.

In the third set of pandemic restrictions, the decision had been taken to temporarily suspend the opening of libraries and the mobile library services, but as from 18 January 2021 libraries were offering the resumption of essential and lifeline services such as choose and collect, and public access to computers for essential internet access e.g. benefit applications.

Mr Kittow then gave a presentation, the highlights of which and subsequent discussion covered:

- Key statistics;
- Staff had made over 6,000 telephone calls to vulnerable customers during the pandemic;
- There had been an increase in e-books, e-audio and e-magazines;
- Provision of Choose and Collect, book deliveries and Home Library Service;
- Loss of income from room hire, events, fees and fines, but many online events had taken place;

- Secured recognition of the importance of IT access during lockdown 2;
- Libraries was a trusted source of information; and
- The important role of Libraries in health and wellbeing and economic recovery.

The Chair thanked Mr Kittow and Ms Witherick for their presentation and attendance.

* **218** **Problem Gambling Update**

The Committee noted the Report of the Head of Scrutiny outlining the steps the Committee had taken to influence the law and policy on gambling to safeguard protections for people who might be at risk of problem gambling.

It was noted that on 8 December 2020, the Culture Secretary launched a major and wide-ranging review of gambling laws to ensure they were fit for the digital age as committed to in the Manifesto. The call for evidence would run for 16 weeks and was due to close on 31 March 2021.

* **219** **Standing Overview Group: Community Support during Lockdown**

The Committee received the notes from the meeting of the Community Support during Lockdown Standing Overview Group held on 30 November 2020.

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

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 6.00 pm