

**CORPORATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGULATORY SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

18 November 2021

Present:-

Councillors A Dewhirst (Chair), Y Atkinson, M Asvachin, J Berry, P Bullivant, R Chesterton, M Hartnell, J Hodgson, R Radford and I Roome

Apologies:-

Councillors C Slade and P Crabb

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillors A Davis, R Gilbert, S Hughes and A Saywell

* **14** Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2021 be signed as a correct record.

* **15** Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

* **16** Public Participation

There were no oral representations from members of the public.

* **17** Scrutiny Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny reported as follows:

- Reminder for Members to register their interest in attending the forthcoming visits to the Network Operations Control Centre and, for next year, the Materials Laboratory.
- Opportunity for Members to be involved in the review on Loneliness and to get in touch if interested; and
- That the Budget meeting in January would commence at 9.30am.

* 18 **COVID-19 update and impact on Equality**

The Council's Chief Executive updated the Committee on the current position within Devon relating to the Covid-19 pandemic as follows:

Prevalence

- As of today, Devon now had the highest positive reported cases per 100,000 population in the last 7 days of any upper tier authority in the country, with currently 560 cases per 100,000 population, largely driven by transmission in schools and associated household transmission;
- There were not currently high numbers in hospitals, and NHS modelling forecast showed 150 cases in hospital at month end;
- There were currently 21 patients in intensive care units across Devon (including Plymouth and Torbay); and
- Local numbers in hospitals were: 46 RD&E, 21 Torbay & Southern Devon and 13 North Devon.

Impact

- Much higher vaccination rates within the population meant that Covid was having a less severe impact, but it was likely infection rates would be high through the winter period;
- Sickness rates within the Council remained low, with NHS rates now decreasing; and
- Important that disciplines were kept to mitigate the transmission rates of Covid-19 and other transmissible viruses.

Vaccination

- Devon remained in a good position, with over 90% of 40+ year olds being double vaccinated;
- 80% of 18-30 year olds, 70% of 16-17 year olds; and around 33% of 12-15 years had now been vaccinated; and
- Devon had a good uptake of booster vaccinations, which were known to provide excellent protection.

Resilience

- Workforce issues continued to be significant across both the private and public sector in particular, coupled with supply chain and inflation pressures; and
- Hospital occupancy continued to be under huge pressure as well as the Ambulance Service.

Care homes

- Of the 320 care homes in Devon, there were currently 47 with Covid cases;
- Overall, Devon had the 3rd lowest rate of deaths in care homes of any upper tier authorities; and
- Unlike elsewhere, Devon had not seen a significant impact following the deadline for care home workers to be vaccinated.

Impact on equality

- Although data was currently limited, impact was on workforce shortages; and

- Impact of mental health issues on work related absence, impacting employment and sickness rates.

Members' questions and discussion included:

- the Exeter Nightingale hospital was being repurposed to deal with hospital backlogs;
- the limited logistical support that had been provided by the military to the Ambulance Service;
- that the Health & Adult Care Scrutiny Committee would be carrying out a spotlight review on the Ambulance Service; and
- request for figures on employment pre and post-pandemic for both the Council and wider Devon would be provided post meeting.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his attendance and update.

* **19** **Input to Council Priorities**

The Committee received a verbal report from the Chief Executive on the Council's [Strategic Plan 2021-25](#) which set out a framework for the coming years, which had been considered by the Cabinet on 10 November 2021.

It was noted that over the next four years, the Council would be focussing on recovery and renewal and the priorities had therefore been developed to help Devon achieve the overall ambition to become the best place to:

- Grow up - a commitment to being a child friendly Devon where children and young people were safe, healthy, ambitious, and could fulfil their potential.
- Live well - being a fairer Devon: inclusive, compassionate, and caring, where everyone was safe, connected, and resilient.
- Prosper - being a greener and prosperous Devon, with opportunities to create a sustainable future for all.

The Plan detailed six priorities, which were to:

- Respond to the climate emergency
- Be ambitious for children and young people
- Support sustainable economic recovery
- Tackle poverty and inequality
- Improve health and wellbeing
- Help communities be safe, connected, and resilient

The priorities would provide the basis for an annual plan and progress report for the coming years; the development of the Council's annual budgets; its medium-term financial strategy; service planning; and partnership working as part of Team Devon. It was important that Scrutiny were actively engaged in the reporting process, analysing performance and progress made.

Discussion with Members and the Chief Executive included:

- Devon's retention of young people and University graduates, and discussions with Exeter University.
- Lack of available housing and the close working with district councils, with a request that Members be informed of the issues affecting the delivery of housing in Devon.
- That housing issues in Devon be added to the work programme.

* 20 **In-year Service Briefings**

(Councillors Davis, Gilbert and Saywell attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item at the invitation of the Committee.)

(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 overall Corporate Services would likely forecast an underspend this year. There had however been pressures in Legal relating to children's services legal proceedings; some higher costs in Coroners; and additional HR recruitment costs.

An update on the iTrent system and savings identified would be provided to Members.

(b) Planning, Transportation and Environment (PTE), Communities, and Economy, Enterprise and Skills (EES)

The Committee received the Briefing Paper by the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment, Head of Communities, and Head of Economy, Enterprise and Skills (PTE/21/41), which provided an in-year briefing on service delivery within respective service areas. Highlights and discussion points included:

PTE

- Work was continuing on the Devon Carbon Plan, with feed-in from the Citizens' Assembly;
- Government funding had been secured to retrofit five corporate estate buildings to delivery carbon, energy and cost reduction;
- Partnership working to install 400 electric charging bays across Devon;
- The Rural Electric Mobility Enabler project had just launched, led by EDF.

- Purchase of 30 acres of land in Mid Devon to plant trees which would also provide a net gain in biodiversity, for which Members requested information on location; and
- Work continued on the planning and delivery of major housing growth areas.
- Peninsula Transport had just completed a freight study, which was being considered at the next Board meeting, and partner working continued.
- Members requested that a briefing for local Members be provided before commencing largescale road schemes in the future, such as the A380.

Communities

- The Household Support Fund had launched this week, to support families in need and supporting organisations.
- A Devon Libraries App was now available for download to mobile phones, providing in effect a self-service.
- DYS Space continued its support to young people throughout the pandemic, and an additional £600,000 was secured to deliver additional activity during the year,
- Multi-agencies had responded to the arrival of around 150 Afghan refugees in Exeter and Exmouth.

EES

- A Green Innovation Fund had been launched encouraging businesses to support low carbon opportunities and investment in natural capital schemes.
- Delivery of a Careers Hub service, supporting all 157 state funded secondary schools and colleges.
- Expansion of the Work Hubs programme with five new projects in construction, with a further 10 locations to join in the coming year.
- A briefing note to Members would be provided on employment numbers pre and post-pandemic.
- A Trading Standards Service project that focused on farmers' mental health and wellbeing had been awarded the national Chartered Trading Standards Institute Award for best project.
- The Future Skills Centre (formerly Flybe Academy) was now full and delivering a range of courses through Exeter College.
- The Community Renewal Fund had been announced, with Devon receiving the largest allocation across the country, supporting 13 of 16 projects.
- CDS – the outcome was awaited on a recent government consultation on broadband in Hard to Reach Places, meanwhile CDS continued to work with communities on this.

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

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste (HIW/21/72), which provided an in-year briefing on budget and service delivery, covering those areas not previously reported this year through the Highways Dashboard reports.

Overall, HIW were forecasting an underspend of £214,000 but this was as a result of additional income from the design team of Infrastructure Development.

Waste tonnages had increased significantly during the year, but this element of the service area was currently expected to outturn to budget. Highways and Traffic Management was on track to fully deliver planned works programmes within budget, although this could be impacted by inclement weather over the winter period.

Particular points of highlight included:

- Budget pressures on maintaining current conditions of network, coupled with resource issues and inflation.
- Contractors were in place to deal with the backlog of lining and road markings.
- Devon experienced overall waste growth of 3% in 2020/21, the first time in over 4 years, thought to result from the pandemic impacting on people's behaviour.
- The Community Action Groups continued to grow across the whole of Devon.

* 21 **Food Insecurity & the Council's emerging response and strategy**

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Communities (SC/21/4) on Food Insecurity and the Council's emerging response and strategy.

The Covid-19 pandemic had highlighted a range of inequalities across Devon, including a rise in levels of poverty and food insecurity. During the last year, the Council had invested over £5m in the provision of food and essential supplies, particularly to those families eligible for free school meals. A further £5m would be available for this autumn/winter.

The Council were intending to highlight the need to tackle poverty and inequality as one of its key strategic priorities. The report set out the current priorities for the Council to develop in partnership over the next 12 months.

The report highlighted the concern that levels of household food insecurity were at high levels across the County, with one in ten Devon households experiencing food insecurity.

The Head of Scrutiny clarified that Poverty was an existing item on the scrutiny work programme.

* 22 **Highways Performance Dashboard**

(Councillor Hughes attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) 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/21/73) on the Highways Performance Dashboard, which provided an overview of performance of Devon Highways in the following areas:

- Trials of Walk/Talk/Build approach to minor works
- Reactive works including potholes and drainage cleaning
- NHT Survey Results
- Local Area Capital Programme
- Recruitment for the future of the Service
- Development of Carbon Calculator Tool
- Review of Permit Scheme.

It was noted that the Doing What Matters defects project had gone live yesterday, which would address quality and performance issues, increasing the rate of first time repairs.

Members requested that future reports include a visible dashboard.

* 23 **Treasury Management Stewardship Mid-year report 2021/22**

The Committee received the Report of the Director of Finance (Designate) (DF/21/11) 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 – 2023/24; Analysis of Long Term Debt; Investment Strategy, the Minimum Revenue Provision; the Council's compliance with the Prudential Indicators as laid out in the CIPFA Code of Practice; and Prospects for 2022/23.

In summary, the Report stated that no long-term or short-term borrowing had been undertaken to date in 2021/22, and the expectation was that no new borrowing would be required during the remainder of the 2021/22 financial year; and that investment income at the end of October stood at around £580,000 compared to the budget target for the year of £800,000.

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

RESOLVED that the Treasury Management Mid-Year Stewardship Report
2021-22 be endorsed and commended to the Cabinet.

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

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 2.08 pm.