

**CORPORATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGULATORY SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

16 November 2023

Present:-

Councillors A Dewhirst (Chair), P Bullivant (Vice-Chair), M Asvachin, Y Atkinson, J Berry, J Brook, R Chesterton, J Hodgson, C Slade, R Radford, I Roome, J Trail BEM and J Wilton-Love

Apologies:-

Councillors P Crabb and M Squires

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25(1)

Councillors R Croad, A Davis, R Gilbert, S Hughes, A Saywell and P Twiss

* 130 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2023 be signed as a correct record.

* 131 **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

* 132 **Public Participation**

In accordance with the Council's Public Participation Rules, the Committee received and acknowledged oral representations made by Ms Spurr on a matter to be considered by the Committee that day, namely Treasury Management Mid-Year Report.

The Chair responded, thanking Ms Spurr for her attendance and presentations which would be taken into account by the Committee during its subsequent deliberations.

* 133 **Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Head of Scrutiny updated the Committee on the work programme, highlighting as follows:-

-29 November 2023: Standing Overview Group on Future Finance (update: date confirmed post Scrutiny Committee);

-25 January 2024 at 9.30am (earlier start time): Scrutiny Committee (Budget), followed by 2.15pm ordinary meeting; and

-18 April 2024:
Masterclass on Future Delivery Model for the Highway Maintenance Service.

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/democracy/committee-meetings/scrutiny-committees/scrutiny-work-programme/>

* 134

In-year Service briefings

(a) Corporate Services

(Councillor Saywell attended under Standing Order 25(1)).

The Chief Executive reported the in-year position and the very challenging budget position for the next financial year and the work of the Senior Leadership Team on this, moving Children's Services out of "inadequate" by this time next year, positive engagement sessions with staff to help inform best value improvement and change and a review of governance.

The Director of Finance and Public Value reported on audit and accounting services and the national problem of getting statutory audits signed off. 2023/22 had now been signed off on an unqualified basis. Budget preparation had started very early this year with significant progress being made through a push by the whole organisation to find savings and meet best value. A standing overview group on future finance was set for the end of November/early December 2023.

The Director of Transformation and Business Services reported on a wide range of the directorate's work, including:- budget position and savings; important work on resilience against the increased threat from cyber security and the introduction of 24/7 security monitoring including DCC laptop replacement programme rollout commencing January 2024 as part of the security programme; increases in FOI and subject access requests, ongoing work in customer relations handling complaints across the organisation; property and facilities management progression of £10m capital receipts working with District Councils to repurpose buildings; business support's close working with children's services to reshape children's social care; and progress of the apprenticeship programme.

The Director of People and Culture reported on the wide range of strategic and operational work strands and current budget position, including:- engagement with apprentices, care leavers, 0-25 team, staff representatives; pressures regarding recruitment and retention particularly in areas such as social work; health and wellbeing hub; benefits platform; staff survey responses. The Chair suggested a masterclass on the Directorate's work in the future may help to pick up matters in a wider discussion.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services drew attention to the success of the Registration service; proposed Coroner's merger to take on work in Torbay and Plymouth through a service level agreement; ongoing Governance review work; legal support for children and adult services and a move to reduce agency staff.

(b) Service Delivery for Climate Change, Environment and Transport

(Councillors S Hughes and A Davis attended under Standing Order 25(1)).

The Committee considered a Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport (CET/23/83 on an in-year briefing on service delivery within Climate Change, Environment and Transport. This covered the Planning Team, Highways and Traffic Management (not previously reported via the Highways Dashboard), Infrastructure Development Infrastructure delivery; Waste Management, Transport Co-ordination, and the Environment Group. Discussion included development and viability of district heating networks and how this could be considered early in the planning process with District Councils; levelling up and the Exeter Active Travel Fund time constraints to deliver; flooding issues and climate change affecting highway and planning for new developments to wait for a full Report expected on this matter; waste reduction with 40% residual waste recyclable (a concerning 28% being unopened food) was a disappointingly high level and work was being targeted in areas with highest levels.

(c) Communities and Prosperity - Director of Public Health, Communities & Prosperity

(Councillor R Croad and R Gilbert attended under Standing Order 25(1)).

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Public Health, Communities and Prosperity (PH/23/04) on the mid-year update with regard to Public Health and health protection, Communities, and Prosperity. The Public Health service had been covered by the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee at its last meeting. The Paper in addition to public health covered Communities which included: Food and Fuel Insecurity, Migration and Resettlement Programme, Community Safety, and also Economy, Enterprise and Skills which included: Trading Standards, Future Farm Resilience Programme, Exeter Science Park, Devolution Pilot, Active Devon, Devon Libraries, Youth Service, Skills and Employment, Careers South West; and Learn Devon.

Discussion included:- support to voluntary youth groups providing a range of support services including counselling, complimenting the work of Devon's youth service; fuel and cost of living poverty; South Dartmoor example of integrated library services via post offices.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their Reports and discussion with Members, with consideration to be given to any future Directorate masterclasses (as appropriate).

* **135** **Treasury Management Mid-Year Report**

(Councillor Twiss attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1)).

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Finance and Public Value (DF/23/104), on the Council's treasury and debt management activities, long and short term borrowing, investment income and ongoing uncertainty around the impact current budget pressures. The resolution of SEN deficit issues was likely to be key in determining how the Council managed its external debt over the next year and beyond, with a Safety Valve Report expected to be presented to Cabinet in December prior to submission to the DfE. It was anticipated that Devon was now in a better position to be accepted onto the Safety Valve programme.

The Committee also considered the representations made under the Public Participation agenda item in respect of the Council's banking services contract with Barclays plc and Barclays' position in fossil fuel funding in particular. The Director of Finance and Public Value commented that this would be a standing agenda item in Devon's future 6 monthly regular contract review meetings with the bank, as well as to be considered at contract renewal stage. A question could also be posed at Barclays' AGM.

Members' discussion and comments included:- the borrowing strategy (section 4 of the Report), seeking to reduce its borrowing and borrowing interest rates and work to resolve the budget uncertainty of the SEN deficit and investment strategy (section 5 of the Report).

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst and **SECONDED** by Councillor Atkinson and **RESOLVED**

(a) that this Committee commend the Treasury Management Mid Year Report to Cabinet, commenting especially on the excellent work of the treasury management team in prudent financial management including achieving £4.86 million in the seven months to 31 October, in interest against a full year budget of £3.75 million; and

(b) that this Committee wishes the Cabinet and Executive team well with the ongoing negotiations with government over the high needs SEND block funding and anticipate a positive result in the new year.

* **136** **Community Self-Delivery of Highway Improvements**

Councillor Hughes, Cabinet Member for Highways Management attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item.

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport (CET/23/86) on a proposal to trial the self-delivery of minor improvement works to the highway network (e.g. 20mph speed limits or provision of footways) by Parish and Town Councils on behalf of their communities. This proposal would help address local requests that the County Council had been unable to carry out due to its limited resources, both financial and staffing. The emphasis was on enabling communities where they had the funds and ability to take on this commitment, but not a requirement to do so. The Report included a draft guidance document in Appendix 1 which was intended to help communities to understand what steps would be required such as the need for adequate consultation if a Traffic Regulation Order was required. The trial would act as a proof of concept, with the learning and feedback such as the level of officer support required, the ability to resolve legal issues, and Public Sector Equality Duty considerations used to inform the next steps.

It was proposed to take a Report to Cabinet's next meeting, following consideration by this Committee.

Discussion and Member comments included:-

- the need for a clear step by step checklist for parishes, to include links to the Association of Consultancy and Engineering (for competent practitioners) and a Bond calculator;

- policy to be clear and accessible, to include details such as responsibility, involvement of local County Councillors, requirements to seal Traffic Regulation Orders, quality assurance; adoption of schemes and maintenance costs;

- to establish the likely take up and how well this was to be received by communities;

- whether it would be more efficient for communities to pay DCC who had the expertise to do these types of schemes, but recognising there was a staffing capacity issue across Devon, local authorities and engineering consultants nationally, for traffic management knowledge together with how DCC could respond to the long term workstream;

- capacity/resources of smaller communities to be able to take on minor works projects and that collaborative, partnership working may be a suitable alternative for these communities;

- examples of experience where this type of scheme was currently being progressed within the county (small scale, ad-hoc basis);

- suggestion to start the trial on a small scale with simple, easier to deliver works, prior to any phased further expansion; and

-consideration of any further promotion communications.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst and **SECONDED** by Councillor Atkinson and **RESOLVED**

(a) that the Committee support the proposed trial to enable communities to fund and self-deliver their own minor highway improvements in line with the guidance notes included in Appendix A; and

(b) that Town and Parish Councils be supported in self-delivery by having a checklist as part of the guidance supporting the community in carrying out these works; and

(c) that a Report be submitted to this Committee on progress and take up of the scheme from Town and Parish Councils.

* 137

Devon Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy

Councillor Davis, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item.

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport (CET/23/85) on the Strategy developed in close alignment with local, regional and national policy, including the Devon Carbon and Strategic Plan. It was to form part of a suite of documents supporting the emerging Local Transport Plan 4 on the future of transport in Devon. The Adoption of the Strategy (planned for January 2024) would put Devon County Council in a strong policy framework position to strategically spend an anticipated £7,067,000 of capital funding through the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund and secure future funding.

The availability of suitable charging infrastructure remained a key barrier to the accelerated uptake of electric vehicles. Whilst the number of publicly accessible charging points was increasing rapidly, as more households without access to off-street parking purchase or lease electric vehicles, the demand for publicly accessible chargers would also grow.

The Strategy set out an evidence-based approach to rolling out charging infrastructure across the County and removing some of the barriers that were hindering the uptake of electric vehicles. It had received strong support including feedback on its aims and recommendations at public consultation.

Members discussion and comments included:-

-whether the Strategy had built on lessons learnt from the Rapid Charging Devon project;

-whether the national grid had capacity to accommodate the ambitions of the Strategy; and

-whether options to use streetlighting infrastructure for charging had been considered.

Officers provided assurances that these were covered in the Strategy.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst and **SECONDED** by Councillor Asvachin and **RESOLVED**

that the Strategy, as set out in Appendix 1 to Report (CET/23/85) be supported and commended to Cabinet.

* 138

Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Grant, Update and In-Year Developments

Councillor Davis, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item.

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport (CET/23/84) on the Government's National Bus Strategy on the future of local bus services, linked to the recovery of public transport after COVID19. Government aimed to increase the importance of local bus services as an integrated part of the transport network. Devon had been fortunate in securing BSIP funding achieved in part due to the recently established BUS Forums. BSIP was well aligned with a range of the Strategic Plan priorities.

The County Council has made an excellent start with the work on its BSIP delivering schemes with the £14.1million funding and formation of the Enhanced Partnership with Devon's bus companies. BSIP central government funding depended upon Local Authorities enhancing, not reducing services. In Devon more buses were being kept on the road and there were a number of improvements to bus shelter provision, real time information in Exeter and at key strategic Devon locations and signage.

This followed a period of significant challenge for the public transport sector following the COVID19 pandemic and the operational issues faced locally by Stagecoach during 2022.

The County Council's continued support for the network, together with Government funding allocations and the national £2 fare initiative, meant the existing network was largely maintained and improvements had started to be introduced where possible. Challenges remained, in particular the impact of high inflation, lower passenger numbers since the pandemic and congestion in urban areas, but a corner had been turned and local bus services continued to play an important part of the transport network in Devon.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst and **SECONDED** by Councillor Asvachin and **RESOLVED**:

(a) that the progress towards delivering our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) through Department for Transport (DfT) grant be welcomed; and

(b) that a further update be submitted to this Committee in 12 months time.

* 139 **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI): Mid-year Update**

Councillor Croad, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality, attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item.

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services (LDS/23/22) on notable progress made over the last 12 months, resulting in the achievement of Bronze Trailblazer status for race equality awarded in July 2023.

The Chief Executive and the Senior Leadership Team were committed to ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion was embedded into everything that the County Council did, developing SMART targets and effective data to enable us to measure our performance and develop even better practice.

Discussion included:-

-the role of the Equality Reference Group (including working with the voluntary sector and partners, critical friend) and the overarching role of the Equality Commission;

-review the equality action plan regarding meeting EDI legal requirements (e.g. disability impact assessment for highway schemes), noting the current impact assessments for committee reports;

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst and **SECONDED** by Councillor Slade and **RESOLVED**

(a) that the positive progress made, particularly achievement of Bronze Trailblazer status for race equality be welcomed and the EDI team be commended; and

(b) that equality, diversity and inclusion data is a key area for development for the Council, and integral to the development of the Performance Framework; and

(c) that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services review the equality action plan regarding meeting EDI legal requirements.

* 140 **Cost of Living Spotlight Review - Progress on Recommendations**

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Communities (SC/23/6) Council's key priorities in its Strategic Plan 2021-2025 is to "tackle poverty and inequality" and the Annual Action Plan 2022-23.

This Report (SC/23/6) was an update on approved recommendations following Cabinet's consideration of a Spotlight Review Report (April 2023): [Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday, 12th April, 2023, 10.30 am - Democracy in Devon](#)

Appendix 3 of the Report (SC/23/6) updated figures were:-

-At the end of October 2023: Just over £6m (£6,064,929.95) had been deployed from the Household Support Fund, with transactions to households of £46,582; and

-As of 10/11/23: Growing Communities Fund, £420,000 had been deployed to support 207 community groups and project initiatives.

The Head of Communities also highlighted the employee discount scheme and District Councils council tax discounts being introduced to care leavers.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst and **SECONDED** by Councillor Hodgson and **RESOLVED**

(a) that the update Report relating to the progress of the recommendations contained within the Cost of Living Spotlight Review Report (March 2023) be welcomed and the team who had driven and delivered this be commended; and

(b) that a further progress Report on the cost of living recommendations and subsequent developments be presented to this Committee in 12 months time.

* 141 **Future Meetings**

Please use link below for County Council Calendar of Meetings:

<http://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=175>

* 142 **Head of Scrutiny**

The Chair and Members wished to place on record their appreciation of Camilla de Bernhardt Lane's work as Devon's Head of Scrutiny, in developing the Council's scrutiny role during her long service. Members wished Camilla every success in her future national scrutiny role at the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

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

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 2.15 pm