

**CORPORATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGULATORY SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

24 November 2022

Present:-

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

Apologies:-

Councillors P Crabb, M Hartnell, R Radford and J Wilton-Love

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillors R Croad (remote), A Davis (remote), R Gilbert (remote) and S Hughes.

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Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2022 be signed as a correct record.

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Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

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Public Participation

There were no oral representations from Members of the Public.

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COVID-19 Update

The Director of Public Health updated the Committee on COVID -19.

Here referred to:

- the stable position with approximately 1/50 of the population infected, and 95 patients in Devon hospitals of which 2 were in a high dependency unit;
- 8/9 outbreaks in residential/nursing homes which were being supported and
- the vaccination programme uptake in Devon's residential and nursing homes by residents and staff and partners were prepared for the impact of Winter with regard to C-19 and flu.

Details were included on the County Council's live demonstration:

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) dashboard - Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)

The information related to all of Devon (including Torbay and Plymouth).

Members' questions and discussion points with the Director related to the position in China and their different approach with zero tolerance, tight lockdowns and quarantine requirements and a limited vaccination programme.

The Director undertook to provide further information on the vaccination programme in regard to children and young people.

* 78 **Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Head of Scrutiny updated the Committee on the work programme:

- a Cost -of-Living Spotlight was being arranged with a data review on 28 November and Spotlight Review on 19 December and other members across the two other Scrutiny Committees would be invited (Councillor Hodgson agreed to serve on the Review);
- a Spotlight Review was being arranged in regard to a new system to replace the FINEST finance system; and
- visits to the Material Laboratory was being arranged on a date to be confirmed (Councillors Dewhirst, Chesterton Hodgson and Roome agreed to be included in a visit) and other Scrutiny members will be invited.

Members referred to a recent visit to County Council's My Devon Customer Centre and commended the work of the multi - skilled staff and management.

The Work programme was available at [Scrutiny Work Programme - Democracy in Devon](#)

* 79 **In-year Service Briefings**

(a) Corporate Services

The Interim 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 with the Cabinet in developing a Financial Sustainability Programme to mitigate the impact on corporate and front line services and staff with collaboration across all services and disciplines. Late notification by Government of the settlement now expected in early January also created a very difficult timeline for the budget setting process for 2023/24.

The Director of Finance and Public Value reported on the underlying budget pressures in the current and next financial years relating to inflationary, work

force and demand lead service pressures and management actions to minimise projected overspends, particularly in adult and children's services to achieve a balanced budget.

Additional information on the latest position for 2023/24 would be circulated to all Members when available and prior to the Scrutiny round of budget meetings in January 2023.

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services also reported on budgetary pressures relating to legal services in child care and in particular the high external agency costs; and issues relating to recruitment and retention of in-house solicitors for example.

(b) Service Delivery for Climate Change, Environment and Transport: In-Year Briefing

(Councillors S Hughes and A Davis attended under Standing Order 25 and spoke to his item with the consent of the Committee in regard to their respective portfolios).

(Councillor F Letch attended in accordance with Standing Order 25 and spoke to this item in regard to Road Casualty figures and fatality rates which was available on the County Council's website and which would be the subject of a presentation to the next meeting of the Mid Devon Highways and Traffic Orders Committee, as well as the other Hatocs).

The Committee considered a Paper by the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport (CET/22/73) 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.

Members' questions and discussion points with the Director included:

- any correlation between the reduced road casualty figures and 20 mph speed limits on which further information would be provided to Members;
- the planned establishment of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy which was in its early stages of development, and which could be the subject of a future Masterclass or item at a Standing Overview Group meeting;
- work to reduce litter and fly tipping and additional information on enforcement actions/levels of fixed penalty notices issues by District Councils would be circulated to Members;
- confirmation that works carried by Statutory Undertakers on the highways were subject to inspection and remedial action where necessary;

- the outcome of a recently announced Traffic Commissioners' ruling in relation to service complaints against Stagecoach, Devon (details were available at: [Decision for Stagecoach Devon Ltd t/a Stagecoach South West - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#));
- Scrutiny response in relation to the [Devon Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy - Have Your Say](#) and where it was agreed the Chair and Vice Chair, Councillors Asvachin and Trail would discuss a draft response with Officers on behalf of this Committee;
- disposal and use of portable BBQs and policy on which further information would be provided by the Director and her Waste Management Team;
- confirmation that major residential development planning applications were subject to statutory consultation by Local Planning authorities with the County Council as the Highway Authority and local County Council Member input was included as part of the process; and
- reference to textiles within the County Council's developing Waste Strategy available here: [Waste management strategy for Devon - Waste and Recycling](#)

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

(Councillor R Croad and R Gilbert attended under Standing Order 25 and spoke to this item with the consent of the Committee in regard to their respective portfolios).

The Committee considered a Briefing paper by the Director of Public Health, Communities and Prosperity on the mid-year update in 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.

Members' questions and discussion points with the Director of Public Health, Communities and Prosperity, the Head of Economy, Enterprise and Skills; and Head of Communities included:

- the national 16 Days of Activism – Activism to end violence against women which the County Council supported as part of a multi-agency working and learning to challenge gender based violence and on which more information would be sent to Members;
- the inclusion of the cost of living index in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and data base; and a One Devon summit and advice

and support from the County Council and work to address the increasing number of scams and fraud;

- the level of EU funding via the Prosperity Fund for District Councils and additional funding for the Council (3m over three years) on which more information would be provided to members;
- support for the rural economy and on which more information would be sent to Members in regard to Agri-tech, green skills and opportunities; and the future farms resilience programme; and the share of funding for the County Council following exit from the EU; and
- concerns from a member about a lack of response in regard to the 'space' youth service the details of which the Cabinet Member agreed to receive for his attention.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their report and response to members' questions.

* 80 **Race Equality Action Plan - Progress**

(Councillors I Hall and R Croad (Cabinet Member) attended in accordance with Standing Order 25 and spoke to this item with the consent of the Committee in support of the Action Plan and progress achieved to date)

The Committee considered the Report of Organisational Change on work to understand the impact of structural racism within the organisation and its effect on our ethnically diverse staff and the steps which were being which enabled the Council's ethnically diverse staff to feel safe, included and welcomed. An inclusive and diverse culture would help increase motivation, trust and confidence, recruitment and retention, and would also help staff feel valued and respected, increasing innovation and creativity.

This Committee had been charged with the task to monitor progress and be provided a report detailing progress every six months.

Since the last report to this Committee in March 2022, the Council had published an Anti-Racism Framework and corporate Race Equality Action Plan. The recommendations from the audit had been condensed into 16 objectives which sat under four organisational themes. There were currently 80 actions aligned to these objectives as detailed in the Report.

The Report outlined progress to date as reported to Cabinet in September. and the work and activities carried out since the report to Cabinet.

Members' questions and discussion points with the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, who was now the Officer lead for the Plan included:

- the progress in strengthening resources, governance and accountability in respect of the 18 points listed in the Report for example relating to

Objective 8 recruitment and selection methods in regard to HR policies and procedures and appropriate job descriptions;

- the importance of member briefings / training to be held in December 2022 and January 2023 and further information would be circulated;
- whether JSNA information included data in regard to minority communities in Devon (following the recent national census) which would be taken up with the Director of Public Health, Communities and Prosperity; and
- support for the provision of suitable space/room for staff contemplation irrespective of faith.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor A Dewhirst, **SECONDED** by Councillor C Slade and

RESOLVED that the achievements in the progress of the Action Plan be commended and the planned next steps to further advance race equality and commitment to a 'zero tolerance' approach to racism be supported.

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Treasury Management Mid-Year Stewardship Report 2022/23

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Finance and Public Value (DF/22/102) on key matters arising from the Council's Treasury and Debt Management activities during the first seven months of the 2022/23 financial year. The Report was intended to enable members to ensure that agreed policy was being implemented. This report, together with any comments offered by this Committee would be considered by Cabinet on 14th December.

The Report covered the Borrowing Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25 and the investment Strategy for 2022/23, the minimum revenue provision, prudential indicators and prospects for 2023/24.

Members' questions and discussion points with the Head of Investments included:

- ongoing discussion with the Department for Education around the deficit on Special Education Needs and capitalisation of revenue which would be subject to approval by the Secretary of State and implications for external debt over the next year and beyond;
- the ringfenced external borrow for the Plymouth and South Devon Free Port with other local authorities and the limited risk for the County Council on which further information would be provided to Members; and
- the additional investment income achieved.

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

RESOLVED that the report be commended to the Cabinet noting that no long term borrowing had been undertaken to date in 2022/23.

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Future Management of Local Bus Services

(Councillor A Davis attended in accordance with standing Order 25 and spoke to this item with the consent of the Committee and referred to the support for the bus network in Devon, the challenges faced by the County Council and operators in achieving net zero on the network by 2030)

The Committee considered a Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport (CET/22/72) on the progress made with the establishment of the Enhanced Partnership (EP) and what this meant for the management of local bus services. The Report also provided an update on the challenges faced the County Council as Public Transport Authority and Devon's bus companies on the future of the local bus service network.

A link to the Enhanced Partnership: [Transport websites \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

The Report outlined the role of the EP Board which first met on Thursday 3 November and would have regular quarterly meetings and linked to the EP board would also be the Bus Users and Stakeholders (BUS) Group which would comprise a wider range of bus user representatives and stakeholders to provide a second tier of peer review and performance consultation.

The Report also outlined the State of the Local Bus Service Network, current patronage levels, changes to the commercial network, the County Council funded services, the regulatory framework, consultation on the EP and Scheme document, and the County Council's Strategic Plan where Transport was a major theme.

The establishment of an Enhanced Partnership was a positive step forward in restoring confidence in the local bus network and would lead to more formalised joint working between the County Council and local bus companies. However it came at a time when the funding from the BSIP submission had been much reduced and the overall transport market continued to face unprecedented challenges.

Member questions and discussion points with the Director and the Head of the Transport Co-ordination Service included:

- the extent of County Council supported services covering some 80% of the network; and the decreased patronage level at 80% of pre-pandemic levels;
- the availability of Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funds for bus infrastructure improvements (bus shelters for example);
- disappointment by local members at the Traffic Commissioners' findings in relation to Stagecoach reliability particularly in Exeter;

- the opportunity to improve and influence services via the EP arrangements including use of smaller operators and whilst noting that direct control/ownership/franchise arrangements were not permitted; and
- that a Masterclass on the control and ownership of bus services and associated risks/issues would be useful before any further recommendations to Cabinet on any proposal for representation to Government.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor A Dewhirst, **SECONDED** by Councillor Y Atkinson and

RESOLVED that in recognising the vital role of the connectivity provided by the bus network in Devon, the Cabinet be requested to speak to Government to secure greater investment in the local bus network as being essential in promoting public health and supporting carbon reduction and climate strategies.

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Item Previously Circulated

Information previously circulated to Members since the last meeting, relating to topical developments which have been or are currently being considered by this Scrutiny Committee:

Link for the Risk Registers for the respective Scrutiny Committees: [Risk Registers - Democracy in Devon](#)

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

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 1.50 pm