

**CORPORATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGULATORY SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

23 March 2023

Present:-

Councillors A Dewhirst (Chair), C Slade (Vice-Chair), Y Atkinson, J Brook, M Hartnell, J Hodgson, R Radford, J Trail BEM and J Wilton-Love
M Asvachin (remote).

Apologies:-

Councillors J Berry, P Bullivant, R Chesterton, P Crabb and I Roome

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillors A Davis (remote), R Croad, S Hughes, F Letch and A Saywell

* **99** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meetings held on 20 January 2023 (ordinary and Budget) and of the special meeting on 21 February 2023 be signed as correct records.

* **100** **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

* **101** **Public Participation**

There were no oral representations from Members of the Public.

* **102** **Scrutiny Work Programme**

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

- visit to the Holsworthy Anaerobic Digestion Plant Visit on 20 June 2023.
- Masterclass on the annual refresh of the work programme with a provisional date Friday, 26 May 2022.
- Further consideration for the work programme at the annual refresh: (i) performance of Utilities on the highway network (statutory undertakers); (ii) unauthorised/authorised advertising policy on Council property; (iii) loneliness impact/support; and (iv) review of the 20mph implementation/enforcement.

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

* **103** **Covid Update**

The Chair reported on an update by the Director of Public Health. The current Covid infection rate remained low and relatively stable, and most up to date information from ONS data indicated an infection rate of approximately 1:50 people.

The number of patients in hospital within Devon had fallen over the past month with the latest figures indicating there were 129 patients in hospital within Devon who have tested positive for covid.

The Health Protection Board and Local Engagement Outbreak Board had been stood down and the Director was no longer providing an update at Team Devon.

The Director of Public Health would however report any significant changes to the Committee.

Members referred to the informative and detailed overview updates provided by the former Chief Executive (and lately by the Director of Public Health) and the need for a wider review on impacts across different demographics and sectors and lessons learnt. This would be added to the topics for consideration as part of the Work Programme.

The Committee agreed to remove the standing update item from future Scrutiny agendas.

* **104** **Devon Libraries Update**

(Councillor R Croad attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke with the consent of the Committee and referred to improved lending rates generally and for children and visits overall, increased use of digital books, budgetary pressures, development of a new library in Bideford, and details of a current review of the Mobile Library Service; and Councillor F Letch attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(2) and referred to the excellent library Service in Crediton and the need for a Mobile Service in rural areas and promoted the use of voluntary organisation/services).

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Communities (SC/23/2) on a Devon Libraries Update produced in collaboration with the Council's provider of Library Services, Libraries Unlimited.

The value of Devon's Library network and how it served local communities was described in an attached reference document Libraries – Case for Support brochure.

The Report covered building back after Covid; the current activities across the library service including Children's services, the Libraries for Life campaign, warm spaces, volunteering, what goes on in the library, financial pressures, looking forward, mobile libraries, investing in library services and the future strategy.

Members' discussion points with the Chief Executive of Devon Libraries and the Communities Business and Commissioning Lead included:

- Members commended the service and the County Council for not closing any libraries since the inception of Libraries Unlimited and the figures relating to increased patronage;
- the revenue and capital cost impact and implications of the aging Mobile Library vehicles fleet (4 vehicles) and forthcoming review and public consultation; and possible measures to mitigate the impact in any decreased services by an improved digital/audio offer (particularly in remote areas), resale of donated books, commercial advertising and other income generation opportunities; and support for the voluntary community libraries and links with community cafes etc, all of which was being considered by the Service and could be referenced in the forthcoming consultation on a review of the Mobile Service;
- the new Bideford library would be ready 2023 with a £1.8m investment creating a modern library and learning space; and
- review of the future libraries commissioning strategy in the autumn this year working closely with Libraries Unlimited, local community organisations and Devon's residents to build a sustainable and thriving range of services into the future.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the positive report.

* 105

Highways Performance Dashboard - Winter 2022/23

(Councillor S Hughes attended in accordance with Standing Order 25 (1) and spoke to this item with the consent of the Committee and gave an overview of the work of the Highways and Traffic Management Service across the last 6 months; and Councillor F Letch attended in accordance with Standing Order 25 (2) and referred to street lighting and promotion of 'dark skies' for wildlife benefits).

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Climate Change, Environment and Transport (CET/23/22) on an overview of the performance of the Highways and Traffic Management Team over the winter period. This covered Reactive Works, Cyclical Operations, Tree Safety Management (including vegetation), the Customer Engagement Project, the Capital programme delivery, Street Lighting and traffic Signals, Carbon Reduction, and Utility Companies working in Devon.

Members' discussion points with the Deputy Director included:

- the recent announcement by Government of an additional £9.4m funding which had been allocated: carriageways (£5.5m), local area capital programme £1.5m (to be allocated by neighbourhood teams); skid resistance £0.5m; 'A' roads £0.5m; and £1.3m deferred capital schemes from a total national allocation of £200 m for highways maintenance for the financial year 2023-2024;
- the continued pressures in maintenance and consequent managed decline of the network in the short and medium terms; and the reactive nature of works as a result of lack of resources as detailed in the open and frank Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan;
- explanation of the priority to the repair of potholes for safety reasons from the safety defects budget (as a first time repair) and difficulties relating to the appertaining weather conditions; and the 5% random inspection of repairs as part of the quality assurance process;
- risk based management approach in terms of Tree Safety Management;
- the inspection process in regard to Utility Works (including fibre ducts on pavements) which included random audits and limited action available to the Authority if issues arose after a 12 month period;
- the local area capital programme (doing what matters) for locally determined priorities;
- despite a RAC report which related to a 40T limit, the generally good condition of bridges in Devon (highest number in Devon nationally [twice as much as the next highest]) and the best nationally;
- the versatile central street light management system and objectives to reduce lighting where appropriate (in consultation with local councils and communities as appropriate) and reduced carbon impact;
- programmed resurfacing works in Halberton (on which more information was requested by the local member); and Member requests that the Gully Cleaning Programme details be split in relation to Exeter and Mid Devon; and that information on the white lining programme be included in the next dashboard report; and that further information on the inspection and findings relating to Shaldon Bridge be made available to the local Member; and
- the impact of climate change on the network including increased levels of water on the highway and importance of maintenance of drainage assets.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the comprehensive report.

* 106

Standing Overview Group (SOG): Highways Asset Management Plan

The Committee considered the Report of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee Standing Overview Group of 8th February 2023. This covered the Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan, Strategic Asset Management and the impact of funding challenges.

The SOG had recommended the following to this Committee:

That the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee accepts this report as an accurate record of the meeting and makes the following recommendations to Cabinet:

(a) that the Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan contains further reference to taking opportunities for joint working with districts, towns and parishes on wider aspects of road maintenance such as litter picking; and

(b) that a map system to allow councillors to easily identify the maintenance category of Devon roads be developed (alongside the plans to provide councillors with access to the asset condition map).

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

RESOLVED that the above recommendations be commended to the Cabinet subject to the addition of the following to recommendation (b):

and that Members be permitted the ability to discuss with Officers the Maintenance hierarchy of roads.

* 107

Motorhomes Task Group Report

The Committee considered the Report of the Task Group on the development of a county-wide policy for the provision of longer and short term sites for Recreational Vehicles and Campers.

The Terms of Reference for the Task Group had been:

- To understand the benefits and frictions that surround motor homes.
- To examine the impact of overnight parking on local residential areas
- To examine the above with reference to seafront areas and other tourist destinations throughout the whole area of Devon.
- To consider what a county-wide consistent and clear policy for the provision of longer- and short-term sites for Recreational Vehicles and Campers with associated amenities and services should include, recognising the unique challenges of different areas of the county in developing the policy.

The Chair of the Task Group explained the rationale for the recommendations, complexities and issues involved and that this process represented the first part in policy development.

Members also referred to the good availability and excellent quality of commercial sites in Devon.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Hartnell, **SECONDED** by Councillor A Dewhirst and

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be requested approve the recommendations and actions with a report against progress to this Committee in 9-12 months' time.

* 108 **Cost of Living Spotlight Review**

The Committee considered the Report of the Spotlight Review held on Monday 19th December 2022 following a scoping session.

The scope of the review had been:

- To examine the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on Devon residents.
- To gain an understanding of the role of the Council in supporting Devon residents.
- To identify and explore practical solutions that could be implemented by the Council so to reduce this impact and protect those at risk of falling into poverty.
- To examine the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the provision of Council services.

The Chair of the Review explained the rationale for the recommendations and acknowledged the supportive measures in place as outlined in the report and their limitations in the current period of high inflationary pressures and the impacts on the most vulnerable members of Devon's communities.

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

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be requested to endorse and act on the recommendations within the Report, with a report against progress of the recommendations to this Committee in 6 months' time.

* 109 **Modernisation of the Corporate Financial System Spotlight Review Report**

(Councillor A Saywell attended in accordance with Standing Order 25 (1) and spoke to this item with the consent of the Committee and referred to the critical importance of the replacement project).

The Committee considered the Report of the Spotlight Review held on Friday 10th February 2023 (following a scoping session).

The Scope of the review was *"to evaluate the Future Finance Project's aims, plans and risks to determine if the approach aligns to our corporate priorities and best value. In particular, focusing on quality, governance, and budget."*

The timing for this Spotlight review was determined by the Council's need for Scrutiny involvement on the future corporate finance system before contracts were awarded. This was expected to be awarded by April 2023. As such, this report had been forwarded straight to Cabinet on 8th March 2023 with this Committee reviewing it at this meeting.

The Chair of the Review explained the rationale for the recommendations and critical nature of the replacement project and that the Review's recommendations had been approved by Cabinet.

A member also referred to the budget allocation for the project which had included a significant contingency.

A review of progress of the project would be undertaken by this Committee's Standing Overview Group (SOG) in three months' time.

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

RESOLVED that the recommendations contained in the Report as submitted and approved by the Cabinet, be formally endorsed.

* 110

Items Previously Circulated

The Committee noted the list of information previously circulated to Members since the last meeting, relating to topical developments which had or were currently being considered by this Scrutiny Committee:

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

(b) Food Rescue Project – Project Brief.

Members noted that the Risk Registers would help inform the Committee's future work programme (for determination at the annual Masterclass on the programme).

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

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 1.56 pm