

**CORPORATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGULATORY SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

25 January 2024

Present:-

Councillors A Dewhirst (Chair), P Bullivant (Vice-Chair), J Brook, R Chesterton, J Hodgson, C Slade, R Radford, M Squires, J Trail BEM and J Wilton-Love

Apologies:-

Councillors M Asvachin, Y Atkinson, J Berry, P Crabb and I Roome

* 146

Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2023 be signed as a correct record.

* 147

Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

* 148

Public Participation

There were no oral representations from Members of the Public.

* 149

Scrutiny Work Programme

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

- 31 January 2024 at 10.30am: Standing Overview Group on the Local Transport Plan
- 28 March 2024 at 10.30am: next Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee, items include Community Policing, Winter Highways Dashboard Report, Motorhomes Task Group update on recommendations,

RESOLVED that the following items be amended:

- Locality Budget to move from March to the June meeting.
- Multi-Agency Devon Prevention Serious Violence Strategy and Needs Assessment to be added to the workplan
- Devolution Deal to bring to an all Member Briefing session on 11 March.

[Scrutiny Work Programme - Democracy in Devon](#)

* 150 **Call In of Cabinet Member Decision - Community Safety Funding agreement between DCC and HM Prison and Probation Service**

Councillor Dewhirst removed himself as Chair for this item and the Vice Chair took up the role of Chair.

In accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules, the Chair of the Corporate, Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Committee (Councillor Dewhirst) had invoked the call-in procedure in relation to the decision of the Cabinet Member for Integrated Adult Social Care not to renew or extend the Community Safety Funding agreement between Devon County Council and HM Prison and Probation Service when it expired on 31st March 2024. The grounds for this call-in were below and discussed with the Monitoring Officer, as required by the Scrutiny Procedure Rules. "The reason is that this facility is used by the charity Circles South West providing outstanding support for discharged prisoners and there is a risk that a decision by Devon County Council, to not extend or renew the Funding Agreement, could contribute to a decision by the Ministry of Justice to close the provision. This could have negative impacts for the people affected as they face substantial barriers to obtaining settled accommodation. The people affected may be recalled to prison, moved to approved premises outside of the Devon County Council geographical boundary."

The Committee was advised of correspondence from Circles SW (Senior Circles Coordinator) 27 December 2023 clarifying their position:-

"I wish to make you aware that, at no time has Circles South West made any representations to the County Council or any other party with reference to this matter, nor does Circles South West have any formal agreement with the Oakfields Project which is directly impacted by the County Council's decision not to extend or renew the Funding Agreement to which this refers. Circles South West (CSW) is an independent Charity which works with men and women convicted of sexual offences and living in the community, providing an additional layer of support and accountability for those individuals and working in close collaboration with the Police and Probation Service in order to help reduce the risk of them reoffending and to prevent further victims of harmful sexual behaviour. CSW is one of a number of organisations and agencies locally, including both the Police and Probation Service in Exeter and the South West Community Chaplaincy organisation, all of whom support or manage the individuals currently housed at the Oakfields Project and all of whom share the same concern, which is for the impact on those individuals and on the wider community should this facility no longer be available to them.

To reiterate, therefore, Circles South West has not made any representations on this matter nor does the organisation have any vested interest in the

continuation of the funding, other than for the benefit which this provides to both the individuals who are accommodated at Oakfields and the wider community which is made safer by virtue of the fact that these individuals can be more closely monitored and supported.

I would be grateful if this could be highlighted for the benefit of the Scrutiny Committee and for the avoidance of any doubt.”

The three accompanying documents (i.e. Record of Decision, Proposal letter and Impact Assessment) were available at [Decision - Approval not to extend or renew the Community Safety Funding Agreement - Democracy in Devon](#)

Councillor Dewhirst was invited to make a statement to the committee and explained that the funding had been used to pay for the property where the ex-prisoners were housed and that if Ministry of Justice or another organisation would fund the accommodation or provide similar suitable accommodation from the beginning of April he would withdraw the call-in.

Councillor McInnes, Cabinet Member for Integrated Adult Social Care, attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item. He informed the meeting he was content with his decision not to extend or renew the 10 year agreement. He explained that this was not a statutory duty for the Council and officers had been in discussions with the Ministry of Justice since January 2022 about the likely non-renewal of the Funding Agreement when it ended. Exeter City Council had been engaged with and members representing the Exeter area had also been informed.

Members' and officers discussion included:-

- Lack of evidence about the outcome of funding the programme
- Concern about the possible effect of not continuing to fund
- No information about any benefits as a result of the funding
- Acknowledged that it was not the statutory responsibility of the Council and budgets were stretched
- This had been a contribution from the Council and there was no contract between the Council and the Charity and therefore no monitoring had been in place.
- It was not known if there was funding from other sources for this.
- The Ministry of Justice were the service deliverer, and it was responsible for asking for funding from organisations.
- The Ministry had not said it would have to close the service if the funding did not continue, it would consider in line with their policies.
- Confidence that Government would find a suitable solution.

The Committee voted on whether to refer the call-in back to Cabinet with two in favour and seven against and so it was

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member Decision to not extend or renew the Community Safety Funding Agreement between Devon County Council and HM Prison and Probation Service (formally Devon and Cornwall Probation Trust) when it expires on 31st March 2024 be endorsed.

* 151 **Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2024/25**

Councillor Dewhirst resumed the position of Chair of the Committee.

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Finance and Public Value (DFP/24/06) regarding the strategy and plans for the coming year as part of the budget process. This Strategy would be considered by Cabinet along with the draft budget for 2024/25 on 9 February, to become part of the budget to be approved by Council at its budget meeting on 15 February 2024.

It was highlighted that a key issue of the pressure on the Council's cash resources was in relation to the Safety Valve Intervention Programme in relation to Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND). Conclusions of discussions with the Department for Education were still awaited on this.

There was also the expectation that new external borrowing of £50 million would be required to fund the 2024-25 capital programme and to replace previous internal borrowing.

Members' discussion included:- the criteria for the strategy remained the same and it was a prudent approach, effect of less cash and missing earnings, investments in some projects such as Exeter Science Park and Skypark were mainly for economic development.

Councillor Hodgson asked about the amount invested in Skypark and was informed this would be checked and reported back to her.

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

RESOLVED that the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy, as updated be commended to the Cabinet, alongside the recognition of the significant work of the Treasury Team.

* 152 **Future Finance Project - Update on Progress and Recommendations - SOG Report**

The Committee received and noted the SOG Report and recommendations for information.

* 153 **Plymouth and South Devon Freeport Update**

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Economy, Enterprise and Skills (EES/24/1) regarding an update and the progress made on delivery of the Plymouth and South Devon (PASD) Freeport. The Plymouth and South Devon Freeport was one of 8 current Freeports designated by Government and led by Plymouth City Council in partnership with Devon County Council, South Hams District Council, and the private sector. This was an ambitious programme aiming to create over 3500 jobs and play a crucial role in economic recovery and growth.

The Freeport continued to make progress and processes were in place to ensure the seed capital investment could be drawn down. The incentives announced in the Autumn Statement have potential to support the Freeport secure additional investment and develop identified growth sectors and opportunities. The announcement also provided a time extension to tax incentives providing further potential to maximise the impact from the Freeport designation.

Members' discussion included:- security arrangements and the purpose of the investment zones, money invested and how excess funding can be used and if there are any restraints, ensuring the creation of new jobs aren't coming from other parts of Devon.

It was agreed to report back to the Committee with details on the priorities and percentages for reinvestments.

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

RESOLVED that the update report and the progress made on delivery of the Plymouth and South Devon (PASD) Freeport be welcomed, particularly the additional jobs, the work on hydrogen, but noted concerns on the impact on local businesses.

* 154 **Election of a Scrutiny Domestic Sexual Violence and Abuse (DSVA) Champion**

The Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality requested nominations for a Member Champion on each of the three Scrutiny Committees in order to support him to better understand the Council's responses from across its services.

Councillor Atkinson, who previously occupied the role on the Children's Scrutiny Committee, was unable to attend the meeting. However, the committee were content to ask if she would like to continue in the role.

It was **AGREED** unanimously to ask Councillor Atkinson to continue as the DSVA champion.

* **155** **Future Meetings**

Please use link below for County Council Calendar of Meetings:

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

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

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 3.27 pm