

15 MARCH 2018

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel held in Committee Room 1, Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Thursday, 15 March 2018

* Cllr M A Steele (Chairman)
Cllr A K Penson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* A R Alvey
* W G Andrews
* G C Beck
* M J Kendal

Councillors:

* Mrs A E McEvoy
* A D O'Sullivan
* D B Tipp
* C A Wise

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

B Rickman, Leader & Corporate Affairs Portfolio Holder
M R Harris, Local Economic Development, Property & Innovation Portfolio Holder
J D Heron, Finance, Corporate Services & Improvement Portfolio Holder

Officers Attending:

Mrs R Drummond, Ms S Parry and A Rogers

Apologies:

Cllr Penson.

44 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2018 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

45 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by any member in connection with any agenda item.

46 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

47 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman reported the first allocation of the Challenge Fund, a Government initiative which would provide money to support the rollout of full-fibre broadband to 13 areas of the UK. He explained that the Chancellor had also committed more

than £500 million a year to support the new Post-16 T Levels, (which are similar to apprenticeships), with £50 million a month being made available to help employers prepare for the 'T level work placements. £1.5 billion had also been allocated to departments and devolved administrations in preparation for the UK's exit from the EU.

The Chairman requested that the Challenge Fund for full-fibre broadband and also T Level work placements be considered as part of this Council's work to support local businesses, and it was agreed that the relevant officers be asked to investigate these issues and report to the Panel as appropriate.

Action: Heleana Aylett and Matt Callaghan

48 CORPORATE FRAMEWORK (INCLUDING SERVICE STRATEGIES)

The Panel noted the arrangements for bringing forward service-related strategies for submission to the Panel, for delivery of the Corporate Plan priorities.

The Chairman requested a briefing on the organisational strategy before it was submitted to the Panel, and officers undertook to arrange this.

Action: Rebecca Drummond/Sheryl Parry

49 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel considered its future Work Programme.

The Panel noted the following proposal made by Cllr D Harrison at the Council meeting on 26 February 2018:

“That this Authority, when sending out Council Tax bills, includes an invitation to residents living in Band H properties to pay a voluntary additional sum of £100, £250 or £500 which the Council will use to support programmes that maintain and improve public services, especially those that have most impact on the poorest, most vulnerable members of our community.”

The Deputy Leader of the Council had suggested that the matter be considered by a Task and Finish Group. Some members opposed the suggestion, and queried the costs of sending out a leaflet to residents about this issue. After discussion, it was agreed that the matter be considered by the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Task and Finish Group when it met later in the year.

It was noted that the annual report on the provisional budget out-turn and annual performance would be submitted to the June Panel meeting.

It was agreed that the ICT Strategy, the People Strategy and the Procurement Strategy be rescheduled to the June meeting.

The Panel requested that the item concerning 'Access to alternative funding sources for voluntary organisations and parish/town councils' be clarified at the June meeting.

An update on Universal Credit was requested at the September meeting.

A brief update was given on progress on the Customer Services Strategy. A great deal of work was being undertaken in the background on changes to ICT systems to improve the customer experience which would result in efficiencies and produce cost savings. It was recognised that these were dependent on work currently being undertaken to the ICT infrastructure, and that much of this work including work on the Council's website, was interlinked. A procurement exercise was being undertaken, the results of which would be brought to the Task and Finish Group in May.

It was confirmed that other local government websites had been research and best practice identified, whilst integrating with the Council's back office systems. Members recognised that, whilst the delay had not been ideal, as much progress as possible was being made within the current constraints. They requested an update at the June Panel meeting.

Members also requested an update on Democratic Engagement Task and Finish Group work at the June Panel meeting.

It was commented that, when task and finish groups were set up, there should be a clear start and finish date for each of the projects. The Chairman agreed that this should be done wherever possible.

The Chairman raised the topic of employee-owned services (the John Lewis model) and reported on an informal discussion with Cllrs Rickman and M R Harris and the Chief Executive on the matter. He sought members' views on the issue. Members requested that specific examples of the model being used in other authorities be sent to them, and, subject to members' views, draft terms of reference be circulated to the Panel for agreement at the June meeting.

Given the amount of work due to come before the Panel at the June meeting, it was agreed that the Broadband in the New Forest item be deferred to September.

Members noted that an Economic Development Strategy was nearing completion and the Executive Management Team had suggested that a task and finish group be set up to provide feedback to the Economic Development Manager with a view to sharpening the document's focus, prior to its submission to the Panel. Cllrs O'Sullivan, Mrs McEvoy and Steele volunteered to serve on the task and finish group with Cllrs M Harris and Rickman attending. A further three members would be sought from an open invitation to the whole Council, and Cllrs Steele and Harris would finalise the membership of the group, which would meet once or twice as necessary to complete the work.

The Panel considered suggested amendments to the terms of reference of the Property Investment Task & Finish Group.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the terms of reference of the Property Investment Task and Finish Group be amended to read as follows:

“To monitor work undertaken under the Commercial Property Investment Strategy and the Residential Property Investment Strategy.”; and

- (b) That the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Task and Finish Group consider the following proposal by Cllr Harrison when it meets later in the year:

“That this Authority, when sending out Council Tax bills, includes an invitation to residents living in Band H properties to pay a voluntary additional sum of £100, £250 or £500 which the Council will use to support programmes that maintain and improve public services, especially those that have most impact on the poorest, most vulnerable members of our community.”

50 PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES

Cllr Rickman was pleased to report that the Council had responded well to the recent snow conditions, during which 89 boilers at Council properties had been serviced (after malfunctioning in the low temperatures). The Council had been operating its emergency provision for rough sleepers during the exceptionally cold weather.

Cllr Rickman was asked about the consequences of the Government's decision to create two new unitary authorities in Dorset, including Christchurch, and the impact on any potential partnership working between this Council and Christchurch Borough Council. Cllr Rickman reported that Christchurch Borough Council was taking legal advice about opposing the decision. He confirmed that, in general, the current intention was to encourage the sharing of services with other authorities whilst maintaining the Council's independence.

Cllr Harris reported that he had been in correspondence with Margo James MP, Minister of State for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport concerning broadband in the New Forest. Cllr Harris felt it was necessary for the Council to map out where broadband was working effectively in the New Forest and where it was not.

Cllr Harris reported on his involvement with the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and it was noted that Anne-Marie Mountifield, Chairman of the Solent LEP, would be visiting the New Forest in May. The LEPs had access to Central Government funds for local economy initiatives. Cllr Harris also intended to contact Virgin concerning mobile telephony coverage in the New Forest.

On the LEADER Programme, Cllr Harris reported that good work was being done but it was hoped that the LEPs would take over this work once the UK left the EU.

With regard to property investment, the Council had acquired a property in New Milton, but the market was quiet at present. It was Cllr Harris' view that additional external support and expertise was needed in the Property Services section to pursue the Council's investment strategy and speed up investments.

It was noted that the Film New Forest Project was progressing well and it was suggested that the recent promotional film should be made more widely available. It was available to view on the filmnewforest.com website. The recent networking event in Brockenhurst had attracted over 100 attendees and the film had been shown to college students in Totton and Brockenhurst.

In conclusion, Cllr Harris reported that the total budget for the areas covered by his portfolio amounted to £728,000, whilst its costs amounted to £756,000. He felt it important to concentrate on generating income.

Cllr Heron reported on his significant involvement in monitoring progress of various ICT projects and contracts, and updating the systems.

CHAIRMAN