

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 18 May 2020 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

F W Letch (Chairman)
W Burke, R J Chesterton, Mrs C P Daw, J M Downes,
R Evans, Mrs I Hill, B Holdman, B A Moore, R L Stanley,
B G J Warren and A Wilce

Also Present

Councillor(s)

G Barnell, L D Taylor and Mrs N Woollatt

Present

Officer(s):

Jill May (Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation), Andrew Busby (Group Manager for Corporate Property and Commercial Assets), Lisa Lewis (Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement), Matthew Page (Group Manager for Human Resources), Sally Gabriel (Member Services Manager), Maria De Leburne (Legal Services Team Leader), Clare Robathan (Scrutiny Officer) and Carole Oliphant (Member Services Officer)

1 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN (00.03)

Cllr B A Moore was duly elected Vice Chairman of Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2020-2021

(Proposed by Cllr B G J Warren and seconded by Cllr J Downes)

2 VIRTUAL MEETING PROTOCOL (00.04)

The Committee **NOTED** the Virtual Meeting Protocol

3 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00.05)

There were no apologies or substitute Members

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (01.32)

There were no declarations made at this stage of the meeting

5 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (01.44)

There were no members of the public present.

6 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (01.48)**

Subject to an amendment to minute 130 (Paragraph 4) to include 'The Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration was unable to provide costs of employing consultants and offered to respond to the questioner in writing. The Chairman asked that the response be sent to all members of the committee'

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th February 2020 were approved as a true record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

7 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET (05.48)**

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet on 7th May 2020 had been called in.

8 **CABINET MEMBER FOR WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND SUPPORT SERVICES (06.02)**

The Committee **NOTED** the *report from the Cabinet Member for Working Environment and Support Services which provided an overview of area's within her portfolio.

She explained that this was her first report as Cabinet Member for Working Environment and Support Services.

In response to a question asked about staff wellbeing, mental issues and increased anxiety due to the current crisis the Cabinet Member informed Members that both Members and staff had access to confidential counselling services and the details had been widely circulated.

The Group Manager for Human Resources confirmed that managers had been talking frequently to staff and that there were a mixture of opinions with some staff coping well with working from home arrangements and others not so well. He stated that a staff survey was about to be launched about the current arrangements to gather information on how staff felt about the current situation and what was working for them and what was not. He envisaged that staff would be working from home for some time.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that the completion dates for the coaching and training plan to upskill managers had been moved to October because of the current crisis.

She also confirmed that there was no longer a requirement for staff to complete paper timesheets as the outward facing MyView had been extended which meant that all timesheets could be completed electronically.

In answer to a question about the capacity of the Legal Services team to support issues such as planning enforcement, the Legal Services Team Leader explained that the team prioritised their work on a daily, weekly and monthly basis and that more serious issues would take priority such as injunctions. She explained that if additional support was required then the team may look at additional support from

external suppliers but this would come at a cost to the department instructing Legal Services.

The Legal Services Team Leader further explained that not every breach of planning enforcement would require legal enforcement action as many of the issues could be solved by negotiation. Also, any prosecution would need to meet the public interest and evidential test before proceeding. Serious cases such as anti-social behaviour injunctions or other injunctions for example would take priority.

Asked to further explain the correlation between the new Sickness Policy and management intervention, the Group Manager for Human Resources explained that the policy outlined what was expected of employees and managers (e.g. that staff had to report their sickness promptly to their line manager) and that these measures needed to be applied to incidents of both short and long term sickness.

He explained that the feedback from employment engagement was logged through the impact group and the results were circulated to all staff.

There was a general discussion about the support front line staff working on the call centre were receiving and the Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement confirmed that the reception opening times had been drastically reduced and staff were having regular 1-2-1 support from managers to establish if anyone required further support. They were actively looking at the working environment within Phoenix House to see if there were ways to minimise anxiety for staff.

She responded to a concern that special needs customers were not always offered the correct support by customer facing staff and stated that customers were always triaged but it was not always apparent what additional support was required. She confirmed that staff were encouraged to use private rooms and breakout area's if these would benefit customers.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that she would provide further generic information on the types of grievances being raised by staff.

The Group Manager for Property Services and Commercial Assets confirmed that the actions on the fire risk assessments had been actioned, further work was being done to improve fire resistance throughout the properties on the fire dampeners as identified on the capital medium term financial plan for 2020/2021. Satisfactory fire safety inspections by Devon and Somerset Fire Rescue Service had been completed during 2020.

The Group Manager for Human Resources confirmed the membership of the staff impact group as 15+ members of staff from across the workforce, himself as Chair and members of the Leadership Team.

Note: *Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

9 CHAIRMANS ANNUAL REPORT (37.27)

The Committee **NOTED** the Chairman's Annual *Report which outlined the achievements of the Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal year 2019-2020.

Reference was made to the Customer Experience Working Group and that a final report was being worked on to be brought back to Committee with recommendations.

Note: *report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

(The meeting ended at 2.57 pm)

CHAIRMAN