

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

17 February 2021

-: Present :-

Councillor Howgate (Chairman)

Councillors Atiya-Alla, Barrand, Brown, Bye (Vice-Chair), Mandy Darling, Foster, Kennedy and Loxton

(Also in attendance: Councillors Barnby, Brooks, Cowell, Steve Darling, Dudley, Barbara Lewis, Chris Lewis, Mills, Morey, Pentney, David Thomas and Jacqueline Thomas)

28. Response to concerns raised by constituents relating to the implementation of 5G technologies

The Cabinet Member for Adults and Public Health, Councillor Stockman, outlined the submitted report which provided an update on the meetings held to discuss concerns raised by local residents relating to the implementation of 5G technologies. This included herself, Julia Chisnell – Consultant in Public Health and Councillor Howgate - Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator taking part in the Devon Spotlight review on this issue. Members noted that the Spotlight Review had intended to comprise of three elements including holding a meeting with an expert panel but that this had not been possible due to Covid-19 restrictions. The report on the outcome of the Spotlight Review was appended to the submitted report and noted by the Board.

Members discussed and asked questions in relation to the following:

- the timing of bringing the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Board;
- if Members had seen the final report of the Parliamentary Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report on Broadband and the Road to 5G published on 22 December 2020;
- the merits of writing to the Parliamentary Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee and other bodies to ask them to provide greater reassurance and evidence to the general public that the technology is safe and improved communications in this respect; and
- the difference in views of 'experts'.

Resolved:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Board note the outcome of the Devon Spotlight Review on 5G and take no further action on this issue.

29. Budget Monitoring 2020/21 - Quarter 3

The Board considered and noted the budget monitoring report which provided a high level budget summary of the Council's forecasted revenue and capital income and expenditure for the financial year 2020/2021. It was based on the figures as at the end of Quarter 3.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Cowell, advised that the non-collection of business rates and Council Tax continued to be a pressure and that the recovery of this would be spread over the next three years as agreed by the Government, but that there was still a need to be prudent with a Covid-19 Reserve to be used to respond to additional pressures that may arise depending on how the pandemic develops. He acknowledged the positive work of medical practitioners and volunteers in Torbay who were working to ensure that people are vaccinated as quickly as possible.

The Board asked a number of questions in respect of the following:

- the variance in the Children's Services budget – this was as a result of reducing the number of residential placements and turnaround in staff recruitment, retention and agency staff with some additional costs arising from school transport and the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and investment in fostering, the Social Worker Academy and Special Educational Needs (SEN) Services;
- concern in respect of communications to residents who had taken advantage of Council Tax payment holidays and how and when this would be paid back and what lessons could be learned for future schemes – Members were informed of the processes undertaken and the Deputy Leader of the Council expressed his regret for any anxiety residents had experienced as a result and gave assurance that the Council would not be pursuing residents through the Courts and would find ways of working with them to meet any shortfall and signpost to available financial support;
- Government grant funding and how this was being allocated and how much related to the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 tax years, this included automating processes to make it easier to pay businesses for subsequent grants without the need for them to reapply provided that the criteria remained consistent;
- the total impact of the Revenue Budget needing to include £2.2m which was the difference in Covid-19 spend compared to Government Funding (it was agreed that the report to the Cabinet would be amended to reflect this);
- impact of the current and future revenue and capital budgets as a result of the removal of the Investment Fund following the announcement that the Public Loan Works Board would no longer fund investments to generate yield;
- how the Government Grants were allocated and if more details could be provided to Members in the future;
- economic impact of Covid-19 and what the Council was doing to address this;
- collection of the additional Council Tax premium for those properties who had been empty for more than 10 years;

- extra spending on climate change and opportunities to invest in cleaner and greener vehicle fleet; and
- Capital Plan scheme costs.

30. Draft Interim Climate Change Emergency Task and Finish Report February 2021

The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Councillor Howgate, presented the report of the Climate Change Emergency Task and Finish Group and thanked all those who had contributed towards the review, which would be submitted to the Cabinet meeting on 23 March 2021.

The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, Environment and Culture, Councillor Morey, welcomed the report of the Group and highlighted some of the work already being undertaken to address climate change.

Resolved:

That the Board approves the report of the Climate Change Emergency Task and Finish Panel and recommends to the Cabinet:

- (i) that all reports to Councillors include enhanced information on how the decision will impact on climate change;
- (ii) that, in order to achieve consistency in the application of our Environmental Policies, the Assistant Director Planning, Housing and Climate Emergency be requested to develop and issue a guidance document setting out how Policies in the Local Plan relating to climate change should be complied with. That guidance should explain compliance will mean submitting a statement, similar to the design and access statement, explaining how the policy is being considered;
- (iii) that the Panel would welcome a Cabinet Member to be responsible for taking the lead on driving forward mitigations and preventative actions to address the climate change emergency;
- (iv) that the Torbay Council draft consultation response to the Interim Devon Carbon Plan set out at Appendix 2 to the submitted report be endorsed;
- (v) that the Climate Emergency Officer be requested to ensure the proposed initial 10 key actions are prioritised to show the actions that will achieve the biggest impact at the top of the list and that future action plans be also prioritised in this way;
- (vi) that the Climate Emergency Officer be requested to work with relevant lead officers to ensure wider publication of the Cosy Devon Partnership and Exeter Community Energy schemes to ensure that Councillors and residents are aware of what is on offer;

- (vii) that the proposed approach outlined in the submitted report to address the climate change emergency and enable Torbay to be Carbon Neutral by 2030 be endorsed; and
- (viii) that a cross party climate change emergency working group be established to include the relevant Cabinet Member and other interested parties to take this important issue forward (unanimous).

Chairman/woman