

MENDIP DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Board held on Monday, 15 February 2021 held online via Microsoft Teams commencing at 6.30 pm.

SCRUTINY BOARD COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Councillors Chris Inchley (Chair)
Alison Barkshire, Adam Boyden, Michael Dunk, Drew Gardner,
Philip Ham, Barbi Lund (Deputy Chair) Janine Nash, Sam Phripp,
and Nigel Woollcombe-Adams

SUBSTITUTES PRESENT:

Councillor Eve Berry substituted for Councillor Terry Napper

OTHER COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Councillors Shane Collins, John Clarke, Francis Hayden, Edric Hobbs,
Tom Killen, Liz Leyshon, Tom Ronan and Laura Waters

OFFICERS PRESENT:

Tracy Aarons	Deputy Chief Executive and Lead Officer
Richard Bates	Section 151 Officer
Dave Burn	Interim Democratic Services Manager
Claire Dicken	Democratic Services Supervisor
Julie Jackson	Performance and Improvement Officer
Kelly Knight	Economic Development and Scrutiny Officer
Duncan Moss	Deputy Corporate Finance Advisor
Sara Skirton	Head of Service, Corporate Services

ALSO PRESENT:

Agenda Item	Subject	Actioned By
1	Chairs Announcements The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that the established rules for virtual meetings would be followed.	
2	Apologies For Absence Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nick Cottle, Terry Napper, Lois Rogers and Helen Sprawson-White.	

3	<p>Declaration of Interest</p> <p>None</p>	
4	<p>Public Participation</p> <p>a. Items on the agenda:</p> <p>Two members of the public registered to speak on items on the agenda. A summary of their comments is set out below.</p> <p>Mr Nick Petts addressed Scrutiny Board in relation to item 7 on the agenda, Climate Emergency and Ecological Group.</p> <p>Mr Petts advised the Board that the Friends of Easthill applauded the fact that climate working was being made part of the scrutiny process and looked forward to receiving information as to how this work would be embedded across the council's services.</p> <p>He added that studies showed that it was important to ensure human demand did not exceed supply. It was therefore important that land was managed appropriately and nature based solutions sought.</p> <p>With that in mind, it was felt that the Easthill site needed to be protected.</p> <p>Ms Theresa Hadland addressed the Scrutiny Board in relation to item 8 on the agenda, Corporate Performance Management Report Quarter 3 2020/2021.</p> <p>Ms Hadland summarised the position with regards to the Easthill site. She added that the purpose of the pause announced in December 2020, was to enable the commissioning of works to assess the site. However, since that time no progress had been provided and an update was therefore requested.</p> <p>She then made reference to a letter from the Friends of Easthill sent to Cabinet on 10 January 2021, which sought a response on the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long does the council foresee the investigation process for the land at Easthill will take? 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What surveys and reports will be commissioned for Easthill? When will they happen and when will each report be available? • Which groups/bodies are the council engaging with in order to find alternative brownfield sites and are other areas in Mendip being considered? • Which groups/bodies are the council engaging with to explore other methods to move forward the social housing agenda? • Has an assessment been made as to where in Mendip there is most social housing need? • Is other government funding being researched to help with brownfield site development? <p>The Chair thanked the members of the public for their contributions and undertook to refer the matter to the Leader for a response.</p> <p>b. Items not on the agenda:</p> <p>None</p>	
5	<p>Previous Minutes</p> <p>Councillor Woollcombe-Adams moved and Councillor Ham seconded that the minutes of the last meeting be accepted subject to the following amendment:</p> <p>Insert “Electric” on page 9, first paragraph of the minutes after the word “new” and before the word “Vehicle”.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2021 be approved as an accurate record of the proceedings, subject to the following amendment:</p> <p>Insert “Electric” on page 9, first paragraph of the minutes after the word “new” and before the word “Vehicle”.</p>	Claire Dicken

<p>6</p>	<p>Review of Scrutiny Working Groups</p> <p>The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the report, which stated that four working groups had been run by the Scrutiny Board, and that they had delivered a number of actions over the last eighteen months.</p> <p>The report identified the remits of the groups and the activities they had focused on during the period.</p> <p>The report went on to consider the relevance of each of the groups going forwards and recommended amendments as appropriate based on the progress so far and the changing environment the Council was working in.</p> <p>Councillor Lund was keen for the Contracts Working Group to continue given the actions highlighted in the performance management report F7 and F12 and in the build-up to the new unitary. If colleagues agreed, she offered to lead the Group.</p> <p>Councillors Barkshire, Dunk, Ham and Nash all indicated a desire to serve on the Contracts Working Group.</p> <p>Councillor Ham repeated an earlier request for a Scrutiny Group on commercial business support and high street after COVID, given the second spike.</p> <p>The Deputy Chief Executive and suggested an update for the next meeting, with a view to establishing how best to take this matter forward.</p> <p>The Chair moved the recommendations in the report, subject to the inclusion of a change in approach for the Contracts Working Group, which were seconded by Councillor Lund.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the Policies and Strategies Working Group and the Access Working Group be maintained. 2. That the Contracts Working Group continue to meet given the actions highlighted in the performance management report F7 and F12 and in the build-up to the new unitary. 	<p>Tracy Aarons</p>
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	<p>3. That Councillor Lund lead the Contracts Working Group supported by Councillors Barkshire, Dunk, Ham and Nash.</p> <p>4. That the Deprivation Working Group be reformed as the Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage Group with the amended remit identified in the report.</p>	
7	<p>Making Better Use of The Climate and Ecological Working Group</p> <p>The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the report. She highlighted that the Climate and Ecological Emergency Group was a working group which had been formed by the new Administration in 2019, to kick start its work on identifying actions to address the aspirations articulated as part of the climate and ecological emergency declaration. The ecological emergency declaration was declared by the Council in February of the same year, while it worked to develop its new Corporate Priorities.</p> <p>With the approval of the new Corporate Plan by the Council, with its explicit priority and actions focused on addressing the climate and ecological emergency, the role of the working group shifted with a focus on the monitoring of actions.</p> <p>The report reviewed the intentions of the working group, its role within the organisation and considered how it could contribute most effectively to the workings of the Council and achievement of the corporate priorities.</p> <p>A discussion followed and a summary of the key points is set out below.</p> <p>Councillor Lund wished to be provided with evidence to show the link between CEEG action plans being integrated into the operational business plans. The Deputy Chief Executive offered to discuss this directly with Councillor Lund.</p> <p>A copy of the Quarter 3 performance information in relation to CEEG was requested.</p> <p>It was reported that due to new interim priorities the update had been delayed and would be</p>	Tracy Aarons

	<p>posted on the Councillors site when available.</p> <p>The recommendation in the report was moved for approval by Councillor Boyden and seconded by Councillor Dunk.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>That the Climate and Ecological Emergency Group be moved formally into the Scrutiny structure and made a permanent working group.</p>	
8	<p>Corporate Performance Management Report Quarter 3 2020/2021</p> <p>A report had been produced which provided a summary of actions and projects supporting the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2020/23.</p> <p>Additionally, the Corporate Performance Management report provided performance information in relation to Q3 2020/21:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate complaints and praise, • Freedom of Information (FOI) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)/DP (Data Protection) requests • Finance • Human Resources (HR) statistics • 5 Councils Partnership Land Charges • Housing Services (homelessness, temporary accommodation, Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)) • Planning and Growth (Major, Minor and Listed Building consent) • Neighbourhood Services (Fly tipping, Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance) • Community Health Services (service requests, enforcement) • Somerset Waste Partnership (Waste and Recycling) <p>Performance management has interdependencies with governance matters, such as those reported to Audit Committee. The Council is working corporately to ensure transparency and integration of performance and governance information.</p>	Julie Jackson

Members were asked to:

1. Consider and comment on the information contained within this report.
2. Identify any issues or performance exceptions that the committee wish to highlight as a concern to Cabinet.
3. Where performance exceptions are identified consider whether the proposed actions are adequate and appropriate to address concerns and improve performance to the desired level.
4. Consider the content, level of detail provided and the format of the report and make any recommendations for improvements

During the discussion that followed, various points and suggestions were made including the following:

The level of support required to local businesses in relation to Brexit and the impact be measured.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that it was still early days. Environmental Health Teams have been helping businesses, primarily those who trade food and drink. However, the lockdown had slowed things down. She added that once things were up and running the position would become clearer.

In terms of apprentices, it was confirmed that the target will be reviewed in Quarter 1. It was also envisaged that the apprenticeship scheme would be broadened across the county as part of Somerset's economic recovery.

Councillor Dunk sought further information in relation to CC9 and CC10. In relation to CC9 he was surprised Quarter 3 was showing green, given very little had happened. He also sought a progress update on CC10.

Officers undertook to reply to Councillor Dunk directly.

In terms of the Real Living Wage the Section 151 Officer confirmed that phase 2 covered contractors.

The Board was advised that officers were continuing to look at enhancing engagement with Parish and Town Councils. Members' suggestions, based on their own experience at Parish level would be welcomed. Councillor Gardner suggested that a survey of the Parish and Town Councils be undertaken as part of that exercise. Officers undertook to feed the recommendation back to the Portfolio Holder.

In response to Councillor Lund's comments regarding E2, as to whether the promotion of innovative design was linked to the Corporate Projects Response to Climate and Ecological Emergency; the Performance and Improvement Officer undertook to discuss this with the Head of Service.

Councillor Nash requested further detail on the figure for vacancies. The Head of Corporate Services advised that this was now likely to be reduced due to recent recruitment exercises. The Section 151 Officer added that Heads of Service had recently reviewed their staffing budgets. The Performance and Improvement Officer advised she would refer this to the Heads of Service.

Councillor Ham praised the contractors for collecting fly-tipping quickly in the current circumstances. In regard to the decrease in Street Cleansing performance he felt this warranted further investigation. The Performance and Improvement Officer undertook to refer this matter to the Head of Neighbourhood Services.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the Landscape Consultation had been extended until 28 February 2021. Further promotion would be undertaken and members were encouraged to promote the consultation amongst their contacts.

The Chair added that he would like evidence to be compiled showing the level of support provided by Mendip District Council to the NHS and other COVID activities, such as the business grants, within the Quarter 4 report.

RESOLVED:

The report was noted and where performance exceptions were identified the proposed actions were considered adequate and appropriate to

	address concerns and improve performance to the desired level.	
9	<p>Achieving land Access to Deliver Multi-User Paths</p> <p>A report had been prepared which stated that following Cabinet approval in June 2020 to adopt a project 'to reduce the volume of commuter related car journeys in Mendip' along 14 proposed connections, the Council had been working with Greenways and cycle routes, Parish Councils and local volunteer groups to identify, map and survey the potential routes of the proposed connections.</p> <p>The next stage of the project was to achieve land access to allow construction of the paths.</p> <p>This paper detailed the various potential ways that access could be achieved and sought a recommendation from Scrutiny Board that Cabinet delegate authority to allow the Deputy Chief Executive and project team to progress in the most expeditious way possible. In order to achieve land assembly, deliver the schemes and minimise risk to delays.</p> <p>During the discussion that followed, clarification was provided to some the key points raised, as follows:</p> <p>The process was complex and fluid with a number of contributory factors to be considered. These would also determine the final costs. The Council had not identified preferred routes as the next stage of work will help identify those that can come forward more easily or at less cost which would allow more than focused consideration of prioritisation.</p> <p>Consultation was ongoing with relevant partners and agencies.</p> <p>The Chair moved the recommendation in the report, seconded by Councillor Lund.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>That Cabinet be requested to:</p>	Kelly Knight

	<p>1. Delegate authority to the Deputy CEO, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Projects, Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) commence with landowner approach and negotiations on each of the identified preliminary routes (ii) evaluate and select the most appropriate method of land access and potential acquisition (iii) return to Board with a justified, outline business case for delivery of each route <p>2. Approve an initial allocation of £50,000 to cover the initial costs such as the relevant ecological assessments, valuations and path design related to the preparation of the above business cases.</p>	
10	<p>Urgent Business</p> <p>None</p>	

The meeting finished at approximately 8 20 pm.