

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Asset Management Forum held on 1 December 2020

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 9.30 am and ended at 12.25 pm

34 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

35 Notes from the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 9 January 2020 were confirmed as a true record.

36 Declarations of interest

Councillor Paul Hayward – personal, minute 41 - Parish Clerk to All Saints, Chardstock and Newton Poppleford and Harpford Parish Councils who may in future have to make decisions on asset transfers.

Councillor Dan Ledger – personal, minute 41 – Ward Member for Seaton.

37 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

38 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There was one item classified in this way and agreed to be considered in private session.

39 Introduction to Service, portfolio and asset management priorities

The Service Lead – Place, Assets and Commercialisation gave a presentation on the broad remit of the service, portfolio and asset management priorities.

He highlighted the staffing levels and defined the meaning of asset management for a Local Authority. The importance of asset data was stressed as key for informing strategic decisions on the Council's assets.

The current Council portfolio was outlined as circa:

- 465 land assets
- 434 buildings
- £1.1m rent roll
- 411 leases and licences

The broad areas of work of the teams within the service were outlined to the Forum as set out below:

Place and Prosperity Team:

- Place-prosperity projects across the Council's own asset base and working with others towards enhancing social, economic and environmental wellbeing of localities and communities through land and property;
- Unlock both physical developments and wider improvements to a locality and delivering greater place prosperity through the delivery of places to live, work and visit, connectedness, amenity and improved service delivery;
- Close links with Growth Development and Prosperity Service, Streetscene and Countryside services.

Estates Team:

- Manage leased out portfolio
- Acquisitions
- Disposals
- Estate management
- Statutory and non-statutory valuations/viability appraisals
- Property records
- Strategy and policy
- Support HRA

Property and Facilities Management:

- Reactive maintenance
- Planned maintenance and servicing
- Capital Investment
- Health and Safety Compliance
- Suitability and sufficiency
- Facilities Management of corporate offices

The key themes and projects across the service were outlined as:

- Climate change
- Corporate landlord function, understanding of assets performance and resulting decision making;
- Asset devolution;
- Commercialisation;
- Place Making;
- Investment in existing buildings and move away from reactive to proactive.

Discussion on this item included:

- Ensure that climate change is the greatest priority in the work of the service;
- Clarification of the background to the Mamhead slipway being listed as an asset;
- Clarification on how beach huts and beach hut sites are listed as assets;
- In response to a question about including carbon neutral target within the 30 year maintenance plan of an asset, the Service Lead confirmed that there was no reflection in costs on achieving the carbon neutral target, these costs being based on replacement of components at end of useful lives, maintenance and compliance costs rather than enhancement of assets, but outlined that this could be considered as part of the investment protocol;
- There were currently few empty premises; those that were empty were either currently being marketed for re-let or about to go to market;
- Members should have access to the asset register in order to be fully informed when taking a decision on any asset;
- The outstanding issue with differing systems holding asset information was outlined and it was hoped that a solution to draw the remaining data together was close to resolution.

Resolved that the presentation on the work of the service be noted.

40 **Service Planning**

The key themes proposed for the Service Plan 2021/22 were presented as a short report under the following themes:

- Place and Environment
- Economy
- Homes and Communities
- Council and Council services

The elements within the themes were explored by the Forum and supported.

Resolved that the report be noted.

41 **Community Asset Transfer Policy**

The Forum were asked to assess the continuing suitability of the draft policy.

Cabinet resolved on 2 October 2019 to endorse the policy in principle and commence consultation with town and parish councils. Following that, consultation was put on hold while consultation took place through the Careful Choices initiative; but due to the current pandemic, the consultation on the Asset Transfer Policy was yet to start.

Councillor Pook, as former Chair of the Forum, gave the Forum background on the draft policy and his views on what the next stages could involve.

The Forum discussion on elements of the draft policy included:

- Distinctions between minor and major assets, and how the timeframe for transfer should reflect those differences;
- Consideration of the Council acting as lender of funds to assist town and parish councils to finance the adoption of assets;
- Assurances that assets transferring to lower tiers were not then lost to the public if devolved down further;
- Important to deal with those town and parishes that had already shown interest and potentially identified assets that they wish to take on;
- Need to share clear data on ownership of assets;
- Need to be mindful of resources needed both at a District and local level to process asset transfers;
- Replace reference to the Council Plan to be Statement of Intent;
- Review timescales and make appropriate to size of asset being transferred;
- Need for Forum members to work through the assets with officers;
- Effective communication to manage expectation of what assets would be considered for transfer.

Discussion took place on the report detail on the next steps to progress the draft policy to an adopted policy, which included:

- If consultation with Town and Parish Councils on the draft policy was necessary. The Forum were reminded that Cabinet had already agreed for the consultation to take place, and that it gave lower tier councils an opportunity to comment, particularly if they felt that the timescales or processes involved would be difficult

to meet. The suggestion that consultation was not needed was subsequently withdrawn;

- Consultation period would commence before the next scheduled meeting of the Forum in March 2020, and be conducted over six weeks. The Forum were keen for the consultation to be clear that this was consultation on the process, and not the opportunity to discuss individual assets at this stage.

Resolved that the agreed consultation with Town and Parish Councils commences in January/February as resources permit, (but committed to commence before the next AMF meeting in March) for a six week period, on the draft policy with questions to obtain feedback on the policy itself rather than the aspirations at this stage of different Councils.

42 **Commercial Investment**

Mention was made on the most recent acquisition, reported to Cabinet on 8 October 2020. No other investment opportunities are actively being progressed due to the current pandemic and new direction being sought.

The Forum were asked to provide direction on:

- The appetite for commercial investment;
- How to align investment with the Council's priorities;
- How to align investment with supporting economic recover from the pandemic;
- How to align investment to provide quality social and affordable housing;
- Decision making relating to investment.

Discussion by the Forum included:

- Ensuring early engagement of Ward Members as part of the framework followed;
- Review urban capacity studies to help identify possible sites for development;
- Borrowing from the Public Loans Board for commercial investment was no longer permitted if the purpose of the investment is to purchase solely for yield. More information was needed to determine if there was still availability to borrow if the purpose was for social benefit, with yield as a secondary benefit;
- Existing framework would now require updating if the Council were to switch to social benefit being the primary driver, due to the change in legislation;
- Opportunity to review the framework fully to incorporate necessary and suggested changes. An informal and closed discussion on the framework with Forum members, open to all Councillors to contribute, was considered the best option to develop the review before debate at the Forum in a public meeting and recommendation onto Cabinet and Council.

Resolved that a special meeting of the Forum, not open to the public, be held to begin the review on the Commercial Investment Framework, prior to the next scheduled meeting of the Forum in March 2021.

43 **Exclusion of press and public**

That under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting as exempt and private information (as set out against each Part B agenda item), is likely to be disclosed and on balance the public interest is in discussing the items in private session (Part B).

44 **Marpool Workshops**

The Forum received an update on the site and discussed instructing officers to review options for the site.

Resolved that the report be noted, and officers are instructed to review the site further and report back to the Forum on future options.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

P Arnott
P Hayward (Chair)
D Ledger
J Rowland
G Pratt

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

M Armstrong
K Blakey
P Faithfull
N Hookway
G Jung
A Moulding
H Parr
G Pook

Officers in attendance:

Tim Child, Service Lead - Place, Assets & Commercialisation
Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer
Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance
Rob Harrison, Senior Estates Surveyor
Alison Hayward, Project Manager Place, Assets & Commercialisation
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer
Steve Pratten, Interim Principal Surveyor

Councillor apologies:

F King

Chairman

Date: