

AGENDA ITEM 9g

Super Link

Notes of the meeting held on Thursday 17th September 2020.

Zoom, 7pm

Present:

Town and Parish Council

Cllr Brian Lamb - Bere Ferrers Parish

Cllr Charles Dumbleton – Highampton Parish

Mayor Clare Tyson – Hatherleigh Town

Cllr Chris Edmonds – WDBC Tamarside Ward & Lifton Parish

Cllr Julie Yelland – WDBC Okehampton South Ward

Cllr Neil Jory – WDBC Milton Ford Ward, Leader of the Council

Cllr Kevil Ball – WDBC Okehampton North Ward, DCC

Cllr Caroline Mott – WDBC Bridestowe Ward

Cllr Debo Sellis – WDBC Tavistock South East Ward, DCC

Cllr Gay Hill – Chagford Town

Cllr Ginnie Parker – Tavistock Town

Cllr James McInnes - DCC

Cllr Jenny

Cllr Judith

Cllr Kate Royston – Gulworthy Parish

Cllr Leroy St Louis – Stowford Parish

Cllr Lynn Daniel – WDBC South Tawton Ward

Cllr Neil Howes – Plasterdown Parish

Cllr Patrick Kimber – WDBC Hatherleigh Ward

Cllr Peter Crozier – WDBC Bere Ferrers Ward

Cllr Peter Back – Hatherleigh Town

Cllr Philip Sanders – DCC

Cllr PJ Waters – Bratton Clovelly Parish

Cllr Terence Kempster – Inwardleigh Parish

Cllr Terry Pearce – WDBC Mary Tavy Ward

Cllr Tom

Cllr Tony

Cllr Terry Southcott – WDBC Bridestowe Ward

Cllr Bob & Joy Tucker – Sampford Courtenay Parish

WDBC – Andy Bates & Steve Mullineaux

Clerk – Bethany Aubertin

Cllr Jory opened the meeting thanking those in attendance and introducing the new Chief Executive Andy Bates.

The first item on the agenda was the **Covid emergency**. Cllr Jory described it as the perfect storm. WDBC acted quickly and efficiently in organising home working for all staff, although this was aided by the fact that most officers were used to this way or working for at least some of their week. A lot of things have moved online including full Council meetings.

Cllr Jory talked about how WDBC had supported their community and protected the vulnerable, supported by Town and Parish Councils who were praised for their amazing response.

The Business Rates team in WDBC usually only has 1.5 members of staff for both West Devon and South Hams authorities. However, during lockdown they had 37 members of staff working flat out to deliver the small business grants.

All of this response has come at a cost, although not as much as the top tier Councils delivering social care etc, and there has also been a substantial loss of income.

WDBC is now working on their recovery plan which they are building from the bottom up with a lot of member input. The mantra they have adopted for this plan is “build back better”. There have been some benefits to have come from this including better links with the community and more environmental factors such as adapting to online meetings which can continue in the future.

There has been an effect on the local economy and initial projections from DCC suggest up to a 32% unemployment rate. WDBC have recognised that their economy is linked to tourism in one way or another and so they need to look at ways to support this.

Another issue that has been highlighted is that broadband coverage in the Borough is in the bottom 5% of the country and that a bigger push needs to be made with Connect Devon and Somerset and BT and finding ways to improve the coverage in remote and isolated communities.

Despite the pressures on finances, Andy Bates and Cllr Jory wanted to ensure something was done to support town centres. This has led to the town centre support initiative – £90,000 has been allocated to a fund with £20,000 having been paid out already at the time of the meeting. This is to aid Covid-safe procedures within town centres to make shopping safe for visitors. On top of this, there are town centre boost grants available for a project within the town.

In addition to finances, WDBC have recognised that toilet facilities are really important in towns at this time and they have temporarily reopened some. They have also offered the use of car parks for events to be held or free parking to be offered in a bid to support events. Advertising space has been booked in local papers in order to highlight the local shopping and businesses.

Andy Bates echoed the thanks and credit to Steve and his team at WDBC for having put in place the emergency response in such an efficient manner.

Concerns were raised regarding the unemployment predictions and support being required for the local supply chain and not just the shops. Cllr Jory advised that the way that local businesses stepped up during lockdown showed that we can create a circular economy. Andy advised that Businesses closing and unemployment, although they will impact on Business Rates and collection, it is

something all Councils are facing and they are continuing to lobby Central Government for support on this.

The next item on the agenda was **Budget**. Cllr Jory advised that the revenue budget is £7.2 million and it was quickly identified that WDBC were looking at a shortfall of £1.5 million partly due to lost income and partly increased expenditure. Central Government announced that £15 billion had been put aside to support Councils with their increased costs. However, the first funding payment was £39,000 and most of this went to top tier Councils. After a lot of lobbying the second wave of funding was substantially more at £589,000.

Despite all of the pressures from Covid, WDBC managed to put together a balanced budget.

The leisure centres in WDBC are not currently open and a paper is come forward about this on 22nd September proposing help to get them back open again through loans and deferrals.

There was a question about the economic development officer post that was announced at last year's Superlink meeting. Steve advised that they were in the process of filling that post and that there had been a setback due to an applicant changing their mind late on in the process. It was agreed that this is a really important role and it will allow for WDBC to bid for and hopefully get additional funding.

Following Budget, the next item discussed was **Local Outbreak Management**. There is a Covid-19 tactical management group, working closely with Public Health England who are overseeing the response to any outbreaks. The data can be found on the Deon County Council website, which even tells you where different spikes have occurred down to quite small areas. This data is managed and updated daily.

The response to a local outbreak involves a team of officers from DCC and WDBC's Environmental Health team. Recent spikes in South Hams and Plymouth have been traced back to residents having been on holiday.

Cllr Ball provided some information regarding testing. The CEO of DCC had advised in a recent meeting that capacity is increasing and a lot of work is being done to help that happen. There were a few issues nationally causing issues including people getting tested with minor cold symptoms and the majority come back negative. It is estimated that around 25-27% of people being tested probably don't need to be. It is being advised to wait a little longer before getting tested to ensure that you have Covid-19 symptoms and not a cold but it was recognised that DCC understood that residents would want to get tested as a precaution.

The case numbers in local areas is largely a result of student returning to Plymouth and Exeter universities. However, Exeter University has implemented their own testing procedure so this should not impact on the testing availability to residents.

Steve provided some information regarding the WDBC response and work. Their Environmental Health officers okay a key part in the outbreak response. They are currently operating webinars for local businesses on how they can make sure they are Covid-safe. The team are currently experiencing around 150 complaints per month from residents regarding establishments not following correct processes and procedures. It is thought that if we have a local outbreak, the EH

team will be called upon to aid the track and trace process. Also, their senior EH officer has been seconded to Devon Public Health which has given them a bit of inside info.

Devolution – finally Cllr Jory wanted to touch on this as it had been discussed a lot recently. The proposed changes appear to be more of a reorganisation than devolution and it appears to be from Whitehall wanting to converse within fewer authorities, preferring unitary trust. However, as Devon is so big, they would need to be two and this could potentially cause a rich/poor area divide. There are also a number of other issues with unitary trusts in Devon including social services and remote areas meaning local officers would be required. There doesn't seem to be any capacity in central government to look in to this further at the moment so it wouldn't be any time soon but may well come up again.

The meeting was then opened up to any question –

Cllr Lamb of Bere Ferrers Parish asked a question regarding legal advice. WDBC had previously mentioned being able to offer legal advice to Parish Councils. They have asked DALC for some advice who have said they are unable to help.

Steve advised that they had hoped to do this but unfortunately they do not have the capacity within their legal team at the moment to offer this. However, they do have strong relationships with DALC and NALC and Steve advised he would make some calls to find out why they are not offering assistance.

Cllr Lamb then asked a question regarding the funding discussed for town centres. He advised that although not a town, Bere Ferrers Parish which includes Bere Alston has a larger population.

Andy Bates advised that this funding is a specific package of support for businesses and so this is where it needs to be directed and why it has been aimed at towns.

Cllr Johnson of Tavistock Town wanted to thank WDBC for the support they had offered TTC recently. TTC have been under huge financial strain and are very grateful to have had WDBC by their side.

There were questions regarding crime in the area. Bethany advised that Insp Sloman was unable to attend the meeting but is always happy to answer any questions which can be directed to him at Mark.SLOMAN@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk.

The meeting closed at 8.26pm.

