

Northern Devon Futures Board

Notes of a meeting of the Northern Devon Futures Board held at Petroc on Monday 25 April 2022 at 1.30 p.m.

PRESENT:

Louise Adam, North Devon+
Nicola Allen, Petroc
Andrea Beacham, One Northern Devon
Bill Blythe, Petroc
Stuart Brocklehurst, Applegate
Toby Davies, Devon and Cornwall Police Constabulary (virtually)
Dominie Dunbrook, North Devon Council (virtually)
Stuart Elford, Devon and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce (virtually)
Chris Fuller, Torridge District Council
Councillor Rufus Gilbert, Economy and Skills DCC (virtually)
Shaun Harrington, Torridge District Council
Steve Hearse, Torridge District Council
David Hoare, Selaine Saxby MP Office
Councillor Ken James, Torridge District Council
Tim Jones, SW Business Council and North Devon Plus (virtually)
Nina Lake, North Devon Council (virtually)
Sean Mackney, Petroc (Chair)
Mike Mathews, Lineal
Ken Miles, NDC
Sarah-Jayne Mackenzie-Shapland NDC (virtually)
Alison Mills, NDC
Jon Triggs, NDC
Janet Williams, Torridge District Council (virtually)
Councillor David Worden, Leader of NDC
Dr John Womersley, One Northern Devon

1) Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from the following:

Phillip Butterworth, Arts Council England
Andy Cotton, Tarka Trust
Alan Dykes, TDK Lambda
Alison Hernandez, Police and Crime Commissioner
Fran Hughes, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
David Ralph, Heart of SW and LEP
Selaine Saxby, MP
Phil Norrey, Devon County Council

2) Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were announced.

3) Key Outcomes from the Housing Summit – including the Housing Survey

The Board considered the key outcomes from the Housing Summit (circulated previously).

Sarah-Jane McKenzie-Shapland advised that the housing survey had been incorporated within a specific strand of the Housing Programme for North Devon Council.

Ken Miles advised that North Devon Council had put together a housing programme to try to respond to the housing issues. There was some duplication across partners. North Devon Homes had also undertaken a housing survey at the same time as the Council which may have contributed to a lower response to the Council's survey. The Council was currently developing a database of empty properties, with a view for officers to work with the owners to make them available for housing. It would be useful to have a follow-up meeting with partners to ensure that activities were co-ordinated.

Tim Jones advised that procurement and delivery needed to be included within the programme in light of the rise of construction costs by around 30% and affordability to build affordable housing.

Ken Miles advised that the Council was currently undertaking early discussions with Exeter University regarding the setting up of a housing company.

Bill Blythe confirmed that Housing would be a sub thematic group of the Place and Community (Housing) group.

4) Future Plans and Resources – to Include the Thematic Groups

Bill Blythe reported that since the last meeting of the Board, discussions had taken place regarding putting more resources corporately (i.e. North Devon Council, Petroc and Torridge District Council) into supporting Northern Devon Future to ensure that work continued meetings of the Board. 5 thematic groups had been identified and the outcomes would be reported to the Board.

Steve Hearse reported a bid for funding to the Local Government Association had been successful which both Councils and Petroc had supplemented with funding to enable resources to be provided corporately.

It was agreed that the Chairs for each thematic group would be appointed at the first meeting of the group and that the secretariat leads would be as follows:

Economy Innovation and Skills – Chris Fuller
Climate Emergency (Environment) – Janet Williams
Place and Community (Housing) – Dominie Dunbrook
Children and Young People – Nicola Allen
Health and Wellbeing – John Womersley and Andrea Beacham
Nicola Allen would be contacting the secretariat leads shortly to arrange the first meetings of each group.

5) Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity Fund

The Board considered a paper by Ken Miles (circulated previously) regarding the Levelling Up (LUF) and Shared Prosperity Fund.

Ken Miles advised that the deadline for the submission of round 2 bids was by 6 July 2022. North Devon Council would be submitting a bid similar to the bid submitted for round 1 in relation to the Ilfracombe Seafront project which would incorporate physical works to be undertaken at the seafront and the Landmark. Councils were required to submit an investment plan in relation to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) by 1 August 2022. The guidance included reference to consulting with key stakeholders and that by having the Futures Board in place provided an opportunity for partners to consider the contents of the investment plan. He suggested that a Task and Finish Group be set up to consider the investment plan.

Steve Hearse advised that Torridge District Council had submitted a bid for Appledore shipyard and advanced marine technology.

Councillor Worden expressed disappointment that North Devon was only in priority 3, however was delighted that Torridge District Council was in priority 1. £1.2m had been allocated to North Devon.

David Hoare advised that Selaine Saxby MP was disappointed with the allocation awarded to North Devon. It was important that Councils had control over how to allocate this fund. He explained how the Government had calculated the amount awarded to each area which had been based on indices such as employment rates, qualifications, average journey time to employment etc.

Dr Womersley stated that the funding would provide an opportunity for partners to work together, however he made a plea that any work was assigned to a person as a specific piece of work and not in addition to their other duties.

Stuart Brocklehurst advised that partners should be working together on “shovel ready” schemes to enable applications to be made when funding opportunities arose.

SarahJane McKenzie-Shapland advised that NDC were looking at wayfinder interventions to link the seafront to the High Street in Ilfracombe and was also working with Devon County Council on a town renewal strategy.

Steve Hearse advised that the SPF criteria for submitting a bid was not particularly clear. If the devolution bid was successful, strategic funds would be awarded at a combined authority level. A Regeneration Board had been set up in Bideford which was working with Devon County Council on larger projects to ensure that there were "shovel ready" schemes ready for the next round of bids. The funding to develop the plan was only announced once the bid had been submitted.

Bill Blythe advised that Petroc through Devon County Council had been successful in security funding through the Community Renewal Fund (CRF) which were pilot activities linked to the SPF. He was currently working with Dominic Dunbrook in relation to the SPF.

Ken Miles advised that the key pilot projects within the CRF would feed into the SPF. By having the Northern Devon Futures Board in place provided a good stepping stone for the devolution deal. Dominic Dunbrook was working with the Biosphere Reserve regarding widening its remit further.

The Board supported the following:

- (a) the draft LUF bids from both NDC and TDC as discussed above.
- (b) accepted designation as the stakeholder body for the purposes of the SPF and identify any further stakeholders that would be relevant.
- (c) that the thematic groups consider interventions and measures for inclusion within the SPF Investment Plan and that these meetings be set up as soon as possible and report back to a future meeting of the Board.

6) Devolution and The County Deal

Steve Hearse provided an update to the Board on the Devolution and the County Deal. He advised the following:

- Background and reasons for the submission of the Devolution bid
- The 3 choices of devolution offered by Government: Level 3 (Mayoral Combined Authority), Level 2 (County Deal) and Level 1 (Joint Committee).
- The County Deal was a new form of devolution in England which allowed existing local authority partners to work together through a new body to deliver national funding and powers.
- Partners in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay were one of nine pilot areas identified in the White Paper for County Deal negotiations. Devon, Plymouth and Torbay seeking a level 2 deal without the need for a mayor would however create an upper tier combined authority.
- There were 5 primary areas of offer from Government to Level 2:

- Additional/dual control over nationally held housing powers and funding;
- Devolution of skills and employment funding and powers to the local area;
- Additional control over public transport commissioning and infrastructure funding;
- Folding in of the LEPs existing functions and its business voice; and
- Enhanced alignment of the Shared Prosperity Funding and other place based investment
- National/regional picture for devolution bids
- The area had initially indicated its interested in 8 core themes for devolution:
 - Housing
 - Skills, employment and education
 - Transport and infrastructure
 - Economic development and innovation
 - Health and care
 - Climate change
 - Regeneration and place
 - Governance
- The devolution deal was seeking to achieve:
 - Boosting productivity and living standards by growing the private sector
 - Spreading opportunities and improving public services
 - Restoring a sense of community
 - Empowering local leaders and communities
- Proposed structure
- Key principles for Devon partners
- The current update on accepting the offer. The Board had made an agreement in principle to undertake the negotiation.
- Plans for negotiation
- Emerging asks from the Levelling Up menu. Phil Evans, DCC had been appointed as the Project Officer

It was agreed that a copy of the presentation slides would be circulated to the Board. Tim Jones expressed concern regarding folding in of the LEPs existing functions and gaps within the devolution model. From a business perspective he expressed concern regarding how businesses would deal with the different administrative boundaries.

Councillor James expressed concern regarding the disparity between the economy of North and South Devon. There would only be 1 representative from District Councils appointed to the Combined Authority Joint Committee.

Steve Hearse advised that discussions had taken place with Leaders regarding having greater District Council representation on the Joint Committee and that these would continue to take place.

Councillor Worden advised that Leaders of the Devon District Councils would continue to make representations to the Unitary Authorities and Devon County Council regarding greater District Council representation.

Ken Miles advised that it was a County deal, therefore Devon County Council could continue to negotiate with the Government without District Councils. The District Councils were building on the Team Devon approach where a great deal of trust had developed between County and District Council officers. The best option was to submit bids into a Devon Combined Authority rather than to the Government.

Dr Womersley expressed disappointment that the proposed area boundaries did not mirror the NHS boundaries as the NHS had a boundary with a place based approach.

7) Health Inequality Plan

Andrea Beacham provided an update to the Board on the One Northern Devon Northern Devon Health Equality Strategy. She highlighted the following:

- Devon Inequality Gap
- What values and priorities we could infer from the system we have created?
- How much resources are we collectively applying to tackle the growing inequality faced by so many in our population?
- Are we applying those resources in the best way?

Toby Davies questioned whether in reality there would be an equal service for all as the Police adopted a service depending on the need i.e. most vulnerable.

Andrea Beacham advised that there was some learning from other partners who did not treat everyone equitably for different reasons. It was about treating everyone fairly.

Dr Womersley advised that there was a need to engage with individuals at all levels and that partners engaged in different ways.

Andrea Beacham and Richard Blackwell outlined a potential system based approach which partners by working together would make more of a difference and could identify gaps in service provision. This would be presented to the One Northern Devon meeting on 23 April 2022 where partners would be requested to start mapping a system. The Health Inequality Plan would be presented to a stakeholder workshop on 29 June 2022 and would be launched in November 2022.

Ken Miles advised that everything was connected, however there were difficulties in committing to funding as the Council only received 1 year financial settlement and it was therefore difficult to commit.

Mike Mathews advised that as an employer they took an interest in the wellbeing of its employees and the importance of looking after employees. This was an important message to get across to other employers.

Toby Davies advised that it was important to provide a service that was right for the individual. Sharing success stories would encourage other partners to connect.

Councillor Worden advised that there was a need for a holistic approach to all issues and that the proposal was a good step forward.

Andrea Beacham advised that a mapping exercise would be undertaken locally so that the information was captured. The system based approach was about joining up and working together.

Ken Miles advised that the Board was set up for future collaboration.

8) Local Plan Update

Shaun Harrington provided an update on the Local Plan Review “people and place”. He outlined the following:

- North Devon and Torridge Local Plan 2011-2031 – background and how the plan formed the principle part of the development plan for northern Devon.
- Local Plan review which was required to take place at least every 5 years.
- Context of the review
- Local Plan review process to-date
- Local Plan update and that the project management documentation, project programme, branding and statement of community involvement had been approved by the joint Planning Policy Committee on 28 January 2022.
- Project Plan for the review of the Local Plan
- Development Plan preparation process
- Plan preparation. Only at the very start of the process – step 1 2022 evidence gathering and engagement. Step 2 in 2023 detailed policy development and plan production would be undertaken.
- Topic areas which would be included within the Local Plan
- Opportunities to get involved with formal consultations and soft engagement.
- A “soft” launch was undertaken from 17 March to 29 April 2022 which included a community survey, statement of community involvement and the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA). This was launched with a number of social media posts, press and radio coverage. This would lead to formal consultation being undertaken at the end of 2022.
- The Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document was currently out for consultation which started on 31 March and ended on 13 May 2022. This document provided detailed technical guidance that supported the delivery of affordable housing through planning application. This had been produced as a result of the current housing crisis and would support the existing Local Plan.

Councillor James hoped that there would be meaningful engagement with the process to assist with the development of the policies within the Local Plan and to take account into account that there were a number of people in the area that wanted to stay and buy a property.

Shaun Harrington advised that the Local Plan review had to be undertaken in accordance with Government guidance and timescales and was evidence based. There was a need to be mindful of strategic projects which needed to be included within the Plan.

SarahJane McKenzie-Shapland advised that the Local Plan was the delivery mechanism for spatial ambitions, therefore it was important that health, cultural and other stakeholder requirements were included within the plan. It was important that all partners were involved and had an input at the evidence gathering stage of the process to avoid duplication.

Tim Jones queried whether the Local Plan would be sufficiently flexible to respond to changes i.e. labour market problems etc.

In response to questions, Shaun Harrington advised that the Local Plan was required to adhere to a legal framework. There would be opportunity to format the Plan to give more flexibility. He advised that visioning was the next stage of the process. It would be difficult to engage on a particular topic as were required to work to tight timescales. Engagement would be carried out with stakeholders and if particular topics were raised as part of this process, separate conversations would then be had on these areas. There was a need to find "shovel ready" projects to ensure deliverability. Both Councils were currently carrying out a review of existing planning applications to look at whether the timeframe for completion in terms of housing could be reduced. There were a number of housing schemes that needed to be achieved as part of the Local Plan, however there also a need to ensure that the Plan was adoptable at examination and therefore evidence gathering was an important part of the process. He requested that responses to the soft launch consultation be made via email by the end of this week and then further engagement would take place with stakeholders separately in relation to growth.

9) Cultural Strategy

The Board considered a report by Alison Mills (circulated previously) regarding the Northern Devon Culture Strategy.

SarahJane McKenzie-Shapland outlined the report to the Board and advised that Alison Mills and Chris Fuller had been involved in the preparation of the strategy.

Dr Womersley suggested that an executive summary be produced setting out the purpose of the strategy.

Sean Mackney advised that the Board that recommendation 2.3 had already been considered as part of the item on Levelling Up.

Alison Mills advised the Board that this was the first draft of the strategy. Further consultation would take place with cultural stakeholders prior to the final version being produced and that an executive summary would also be produced. The initial draft had been produced as part of the Levelling Up Fund and application to the Arts Council.

In response to a question, Alison Mills advised that the Biosphere would be re-consulted as part of the review and that this part of the strategy along with the wellbeing would be expanded upon further in the document. There was a need for the strategy to have connection in strategic terms.

Chris Fuller advised that there was a need to focus on the opportunities available. There would be links to the World Surfing Reserve.

Dr Womersley suggested that One Northern Devon could be used as an engagement tool and was an opportunity to work together.

Andrea Beacham advised that One Northern Devon had set up an Art and Culture Group which needed to be linked into the strategy.

Alison Mills advised that the strategy would be delivered by a partnership that would be set up. There were a number of models of partnerships around the country.

The Board supported the following:

- (a) That comments and views on the draft strategy be forwarded to Alison Mills within the next 3 weeks;
- (b) Endorses the formation of a Cultural Partnership as outlined in the Strategy to oversee its delivery.

10) Date of Next Meeting

The Board agreed that an extraordinary meeting of the Board be arranged in June 2022 to consider the Shared Prosperity Fund and to consider the Cultural Strategy for final approval.

11) Any other business

There was no other business.

Meeting ended at 4.29 p.m.

