

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (INTERNAL) COMMITTEE



Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny (Internal) Committee** held on **Tuesday, 8th November, 2016** at **2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Musgrave
Vice Chairman Cllr Yelland

Cllr Evans
Cllr Moyse

Cllr Kimber

In attendance:

Councillors:
Cllr Baldwin
Cllr Benson
Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Cloke
Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Leech

Cllr Moody
Cllr Oxborough
Cllr Parker
Cllr Pearce
Cllr Sanders

Officers:

Head of Paid Service
Executive Director (Service Delivery & Commercial Development)
Group Manager – Business Development
Group Manager – Support Services & Customer First
Support Services Specialists Manager
Contact Centre Manager
Specialist – Performance & Intelligence

35. **Apologies for Absence**

***O&S(I) 35**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs W G Cann OBE, M Davies, L J G Hockridge, J R McInnes, C Mott and P J Ridgers.

36. **Confirmation of Minutes**

***O&S(I) 36**

The minutes of the Meeting held on 6 September 2016 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

37. **Declarations of Interest**

***O&S(I) 37**

Members and officers were asked to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of this meeting, but there was none made.

38. **Public Forum**

***O&S(I) 38**

It was noted that no issues had been raised by the general public.

39. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**

***O&S(I) 39**

The most recent (published September 2016) Hub Committee Forward Plan was presented for consideration.

In discussion, particular reference was made to:

- the Devolution agenda item. As an update, the Head of Paid Service informed that this agenda item was now likely to be deferred to a Hub Committee meeting in the new year; and
- the Joint Local Plan. The lead Hub Committee Member was invited to provide an update on the JLP and, in so doing, reference was made to:
 - o a Special Council meeting having been added to the Member Meeting Calendar to consider the JLP. The Committee was reminded that this meeting would be held on Tuesday, 28 February 2017;
 - o an update report on the five year land supply would be considered by the Hub Committee at its meeting on 29 November 2016. In referring to a recent appeal decision, the lead Hub Committee Member had since concluded that the Planning Inspector had used the wrong methodology to calculate the housing need in the Borough. Nonetheless, a number of previously held concerns were reiterated by Members. Further disappointment was also expressed that a recent case officer report presented to the Planning and Licensing Committee had given emphasis to the lack of a five year land supply, which it was felt conveyed the wrong message to Developers;
 - o two small sites having come forward during the recent consultation exercise. The lead Member confirmed that he was in the process of contacting the local ward Members for these potential sites;
 - o two Member Workshops being arranged during November to consider the draft policies that would underpin the JLP and specific site allocations;

- the Member Steering Group meeting on a fortnightly basis at Plymouth City Council offices;
- the project still working towards the timetable that the public examination would take place during the late summer / early autumn of 2017.

40. **Economy Working Group Recommendations**

O&S(I) 40

The Committee considered a report that summarised the findings of the Economy Working Group.

The lead Hub Committee Member for the Economy provided a detailed introduction on the report and explained the justification for each of the nine recommendations made by the Working Group

In the subsequent discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) In respect of the inevitable cost pressures arising from the proposal to increase the Council's Establishment by virtue of employing a part-time Level 4 Economy Specialist, there was a general acceptance that this recommendation required more consideration prior to its presentation to the Hub Committee on 29 November 2016. In particular, the principle of investigating a matrix type approach (e.g. where the economy work strand was the responsibility of a number of different officers) was felt to require greater consideration;
- (b) A number of Members expressed their opposition at the recommendation to reduce funding from Villages In Action (VIA) from £8,000 to £4,000. In their opposition, these Members felt that VIA made an invaluable contribution to rural communities in the Borough and had a knock-on economic benefit. In support of the Working Group recommendation to reduce funding, other Members were of the view that the proposal to increase the funding to Business Information Point would need to be funded from somewhere and economic vibrancy was considered to be more critical than maintaining the current level of funding for VIA. When put to the vote, this part of the recommendation was declared **LOST**;
- (c) In stating the importance of supporting the voluntary sector, a Member also expressed her opposition to the proposal to reduce funding to South West Museum Development. Such were the heritage, cultural and tourism benefits arising from Museums that the Member felt it would be a retrograde step to reduce their funding;
- (d) Widespread support was expressed at the recommendation to financially support the Youth Markets initiative;
- (e) As a general point, a Member stated his regret that the recommendations of the Working Group were not sufficiently focused on creating wealth or charging for Council services;

- (f) In paying tribute to the work undertaken by the Working Group, some Members were of the view that the profile of the Economy agenda had now been raised and a way forward suggested. Therefore, it would be considered a great shame if the recommendation was not advanced to the Hub Committee on the basis of a lack of support for some relatively minor issues.

It was then **RECOMMENDED** to the Hub Committee that:

1. the proposed Our Plan Annual Delivery Plan (as outlined at Appendix 1 to the presented agenda report) be adopted for the period to March 2018;
2. funding be increased to Business Information Point for business support services from £8,340 in 2015/16 to £15,100 in 2016/17;
3. funding be reduced to South West Museum Development from £2,000 in 2015/16 to £1,000 in 2016/17;
4. the practice of the Council offering economy grants be ceased with immediate effect;
5. the Youth Markets initiative be supported from 2016/17 with funding of £1,000;
6. a part-time level 4 Economy Specialist be recruited to focus on the Council's economy work. Funding for this post in 2016/17 to be drawn from the Innovation Fund (Invest to Earn) Earmarked Reserve. Ongoing funding for this role will be via the staffing establishment, which is to be increased for 2017/18 onwards;
7. a West Devon Economy Working Group (comprising of 4 Members) be established; and
8. this Working Group submit periodic reports to the Hub Committee.

41.

Transitional Resources Monitoring Report

***O&S(I) 41**

Consideration was given to report that provided Members with an update on the impact on services areas of the temporary, fixed-term transitional resources approved by the Council on 28 June 2016 (Minute CM 21 refers) to improve customer satisfaction and public perception of the Council.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (i) Officers were invited to expand upon the comment in the presented agenda report whereby the recruitment of apprentices had proven to be challenging. In so doing, officers informed that the volume of applications had been less than anticipated and, on several occasions, those who had applied had failed to turn up for an interview. Officers had subsequently sought feedback from the Department for Work and Pensions and had been informed that local authorities were not deemed to be exciting organisations to work for;
- (ii) A number of Members acknowledged the extreme work pressures that were being placed on Development Management Specialists

and the Committee wished to put on record its gratitude for those officers who were working in very difficult circumstances;

(iii) In recognising the risk that the upward trend in performance could be affected once the transitional resources had left, Members questioned the likelihood of this eventuality. In reply, officers confirmed that they were confident that, at the end of this period, the upward trend would be maintained and continued. The only exception where officers could not be so confident was the Development Management service, which was the one area that continued to give cause for concern;

(iv) There was a general recognition that overall performance had now stabilised and was improving in certain areas. In sharing their own experiences, a number of Members subsequently welcomed and commended this performance trend.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the Committee note the contents of the Transitional Resources Monitoring Report and the progress made to date.

42. **Progress Report for Contact Centre**

***O&S(I) 42**

The Committee was presented with the latest progress report on the performance of the Contact Centre.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

(a) recent service improvements. Members welcomed both the recent improvements in the Contact Centre and the issues being resolved following the switchover to the new telephony system;

(b) decreasing footfall. The Committee noted the comment that footfall continued to decrease across all sites and requested that this matter be kept under review.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the Committee:

1. continue to support the work being undertaken to improve Customer Services and monitor performance through regular updates; and
2. note and endorse the updated Action Plan.

43. **Overview of the Website Development**

***O&S(I) 43**

The Group Manager – Support Services and Customer First provided a demonstration of the new Council website and advised that the underlying principles included it being:

- designed from the perspective of the customer and not the Council;
- accessible from a mobile phone;

- low band width and cloud hosted;
- critical to get it 'right first time';
- essential to reduce the number of webpages on the site. In expanding upon this point, officers informed that the current website contained 10,000 pages, with 30% of these not being viewed once in the last twelve months; and
- possible to deploy webchat.

Following the presentation, there was widespread support for the new website. In terms of next steps, it was noted that Members would be invited to test the new website (before it went live) in the next few weeks, prior to a Customer Focus Group then being invited to do the same. Ultimately, it was intended that the new website would go live early in the new year.

44. **Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2016**
***O&S(I) 44**

The Committee was presented with a report that presented the Ombudsman's Annual Letter 2016 for review.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) Officers were congratulated for the positive nature of the Annual Review Letter and the fact that the Council received the lowest number of complaints in Devon. The view was expressed that this was an example of the benefits of an increased corporate emphasis being given to complaint handling;
- (b) It was confirmed that the Ombudsman would not get involved in a complaint until all aspects of the Council's own Complaints process had been followed.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the Committee has reviewed the Ombudsman Annual Letter for 2016 (as outlined at Appendix A of the presented agenda report) and welcomes the improved performance in this respect.

45. **Q2 Performance Measures**
***O&S(I) 45**

The Committee considered a report that presented the performance measures for Quarter 2. In summary, the report noted that performance had generally improved slightly in comparison to the previous quarter.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the ability for Members to be able to see live performance dashboard information as and when they wished. To support Members in accessing and maximising the benefits of the dashboard information, a Member Drop-in session had been arranged;

- (b) performance information relating to the percentage of customer contact through online interaction. In emphasising the importance of channel shift, the Committee recognised that this was a key indicator to demonstrate whether or not customers were self-serving.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the performance levels against target communicated in the Balanced Scorecard and the performance figures supplied in the background and the exception report be noted; and
2. the Committee has reviewed the new online dashboards and has taken the opportunity to make comments (as outlined in the content of the minutes above).

46. **Task and Finish Group Updates**
***O&S(I) 46**

(a)T18 Programme – Interim Review

As an update, a Group Member reminded the Committee of the terms of reference that were underpinning this review.

The next meeting was still to be reconvened and the main purpose of that meeting would be to consider a list of potential questions that would be asked of the identified key witnesses.

47. **Committee Decisions Log**
***O&S(I) 47**

The latest version of the Committee decisions log was presented to the meeting and, with no debate or discussion, it was:

RESOLVED

That the published Decisions Log be noted.

48. **Draft Annual Work Programme 2016/17**
***O&S(I) 48**

The Committee took the opportunity to express its views in relation to its 2016/17 Work Programme.

In so doing, reference was made to the request made by the Overview and Scrutiny (External) Committee at its meeting held on 11 October 2016 whereby responsibility for considering the Joint Local Plan should be transferred to this Committee as a standing agenda item (Minute *O&S(E) 38 refers). The Committee subsequently endorsed this request and agreed that its future work programme should be updated accordingly.

49. **Member Learning and Development Opportunities Arising**
***O&S(I) 49**

The Committee noted that Member Briefings were to be held in the upcoming months in relation to the Joint Local Plan and the Performance Dashboards.

Furthermore, Members were also reminded of the opportunity for them to trial and test the new Council website prior to it being launched.

The Meeting concluded at 4.35 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
