

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY JOINT COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny Joint Committee** held on **Tuesday, 17th January, 2017** at **2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Musgrave
Vice Chairman Cllr Sellis

Cllr Ball
Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Cloke
Cllr Davies
Cllr Kimber
Cllr Leech
Cllr Mott

Cllr Moyse
Cllr Pearce
Cllr Ridgers
Cllr Roberts
Cllr Stephens
Cllr Watts
Cllr Yelland

In attendance:

Councillors:
Cllr Benson
Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Moody

Cllr Sampson
Cllr Sanders

Officers:
Head of Paid Service
Executive Director – Service Delivery & Commercial Development
Group Manager – Commercial Services
Section 151 Officer

1. **Appointment of Chairman**

***O&S 1**

It was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and when put to the vote declared **CARRIED** that: 'Cllr C R Musgrave be declared Chairman for the duration of this meeting'.

2. **Apologies for Absence**
***O&S 2**
Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs W G Cann OBE, J Evans, L J G Hockridge, N Jory, J R McInnes and J Sheldon.

3. **Declarations of Interest**
***O&S 3**
Members and officers were asked to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of this meeting. These were recorded as follows:

Cllr J Yelland declared a personal interest in Item 7: 'Draft Budget Proposals 2017/18' (Minute O&S 6 below refers) and specifically the recommendation relating to the Council Tax Support Grant paid to Town and Parish Councils by virtue of being a town councillor and remained in the meeting during consideration of this agenda item.

4. **Public Forum**
***O&S 4**
The Chairman informed that no issues had been raised for this meeting in accordance with the Public Forum Procedure Rules.

5. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**
***O&S 5**
In considering the latest Forward Plan, the following points were raised:-
 - (a) Members requested that, upon publication of a Hub Committee meeting agenda, all Members of the Council be in receipt of a notification email that included a link to the agenda webpage;
 - (b) For clarity, it was confirmed that the Joint Local Plan agenda item would bypass the Hub Committee and would be presented direct to the Full Council meeting on 28 February 2017.

6. **Draft Budget Proposals Report 2017-2018**
O&S 6
The Committees considered a report that provided Members with a detailed position statement on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. In addition, the report provided Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members with the opportunity to have an input into the draft Budget proposals for 2017/18 prior to the consideration of the Hub Committee and Full Council.

In presenting this agenda item, the Section 151 Officer tabled an additional paper that outlined a summary of the changes to the report that was initially considered by the Hub Committee at its meeting on 19 December 2016 (Minute HC 44 refers).

In the subsequent discussion, reference was made to:

- (a) the 2017/18 Local Government Finance Settlement. Having been informed that the provisional settlement for the Council would see funding reduced by a further 37% between now and 2019/20, a number of Members expressed their deep frustrations at this announcement. In acknowledging these concerns, the Section 151 Officer advised that she had compiled a strongly worded consultation response letter to the Department for Communities and Local Government, which she would ensure was circulated to all Members. Members also stated their disappointment that the late announcements from central government each year were particularly unhelpful when the Council was trying to set its Budget;
- (b) the reduction in planning fee income. It was noted that the main reason that income had reduced was attributed to the extensive reduction in large scale renewable energy related planning applications. Officers proceeded to confirm that this trend was consistent throughout the South West region;
- (c) additional planning resource. Whilst acknowledging that planning fee income was reducing (point (b) above), the Committees were advised that the number of planning applications being received by the Council was in fact increasing. Since the Development Management service was already under immense pressure, officers were now recommending that the budget include provision for some additional staffing resource;
- (d) the income generation agenda. A Member expressed his frustration at the apparent lack of progress being made by the Council in relation to becoming more commercially minded and income generative. In response, officers referred to some examples of proposals that had been brought forward that had subsequently been deemed unacceptable by Members. In conclusion on this point, there was a general acceptance that both officers and Members had a big role to play in progressing the income generation agenda to counter the significant budgetary pressures facing the Council;
- (e) increasing the Council Tax for 2017/18. Whilst regrettable, there was unanimous support amongst Members to recommend that Council Tax be increased by £5 for 2017/18. Such was the extent of the ongoing budget reductions from central government, that Members reluctantly felt it to be absolutely essential for the Council Tax Base to be built up as much as possible;
- (f) future budget reports. A Member requested that, in the future, budget reports should be presented differently to provide a wider suite of options for Members to choose from;

- (g) the recent Member Survey. Since only half had completed the Survey to date, all Members were urged to complete it to help the Council inform its work in bringing forward and prioritising income and efficiency initiatives;
- (h) New Homes Bonus funding. Whilst accepting that the Council had to utilise £700,000 of New Homes Bonus funding to balance the 2017/18 Revenue Budget, a Member emphasised that this situation was not sustainable and the Council could not be so reliant on this funding source in future years;
- (i) a reduction in the Council Tax Support Grant paid to Town and Parish Councils. Since town and parish councils were not subject to any capping rules, Members expressed their support for the proposed reduction. Furthermore, it was confirmed that feedback to the Borough Council had indicated that this proposal had not proven to be particularly contentious amongst the town and parish councils;
- (j) car parking charges. Some Members were of the view that the Car Parking Strategy Group needed to undertake a detailed review of car parking charges during 2017/18 and consideration should be given to an increase in 2018/19;
- (k) the garden waste service. Since a number of Members wished to discuss the future of the garden waste service, it was therefore **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and on being put to the vote declared to be **CARRIED** and "**RESOLVED** that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that exempt information is likely to be disclosed as defined in Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12(A) to the Act.

A lengthy debate ensued during which it became apparent that a number of Members were now supportive of the principle of charging for a garden waste collection service.

As one option before a final decision was taken by the Council, a Member requested that consideration be given to an annual charge being linked to the relevant property's Council Tax Band, with the charge being collected as part of the Council Tax for the property.

Once all Members were content that they had no further issues to raise in this regard, it was then **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and on being put to the vote declared to be **CARRIED** and "**RESOLVED** that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting."

It was then **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and when put to the vote was declared **CARRIED** that the Hub Committee give consideration to the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** that:-

1. Council Tax for 2017/18 should be increased by £5 (which equates to a Band D Council Tax of £218.39 for 2017/18). This equates to a Council Tax requirement of £4,356,612;
2. the financial pressures of £595,571 be noted;
3. the contributions to Earmarked Reserves of £277,000 be noted;
4. the proposed savings of £473,171 be noted;
5. an ICT Earmarked Reserve be created of £42,000;
6. £700,000 of New Homes Bonus Funding be used to balance the 2017/18 Revenue Budget;
7. £100,000 of the Budget Surplus Contingency Earmarked Reserve be used to fund £50,000 for the Joint Local Plan and £50,000 for five additional Case Managers within Development Management for a period of one year;
8. the Capital Programme projects for 2017/18 (as outlined at paragraph 9.1 of the presented agenda report) be supported, with one exception being that the Affordable Housing Bid should be reduced from £350,000 to £200,000;
9. the financing of the Capital Programme be made up of £238,000 of New Homes Bonus funding, £402,000 of Better Care Funding and £80,000 from the Budget Surplus Contingency Earmarked Reserve;
10. the principle of transferring an allocation of New Homes Bonus monies for 2017/18 to an Earmarked Reserve called: 'Community Investment Fund – Dartmoor National Park' be supported. (NB. monies from this Fund will be applied for (and drawn down) by the Dartmoor National Park Authority as and when required. This amount is a one-off payment and the position will be considered annually by the Council as part of the Budget setting process. The condition is that this is for use within the boundaries of the Borough Council only);
11. it be noted that the Council Tax Support Grant being paid to Town and Parish Councils will be reduced by 8.6% for 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20. (NB. this equates to a payment of £70,841 for 2017/18;
12. the minimum level of the Unearmarked Revenue Reserves be maintained at £750,000;
13. car parking charges be frozen for 2017/18 and that charges be reviewed by the Car Parking Strategy Group in time for the 2018/19 draft budget setting process;

14. the principle of charging for a garden waste collection service be supported; and
15. the principle of using Reserves to close the remaining budget gap in 2017/18 be supported. (NB. the Committee note that the Council could use the 2016/17 Budget Surplus Contingency Earmarked Reserve to close the Budget Gap in 2017/18.

7. **Joint Local Plan Update - Standing Agenda Item**

***O&S 7**

As part of the standing agenda item on the Joint Local Plan, particular reference was made to:-

- (a) the Informal Council session on 16 January 2017. A number of Members commented on the effectiveness of the Informal Council session and felt that the presentation given was particularly helpful;
- (b) the importance of the informal Member Session on 31 January 2017. Members were strongly encouraged to attend the scheduled session on 31 January 2017, which was felt to provide a major opportunity to influence the Joint Local Plan proposals before they were published in time for the Special Council meeting on 28 February 2017. In the event that any Members were unable to attend this session, they were advised to make contact with either the lead officer or the Borough Council Member representatives on the Joint Steering Group;
- (c) the tight project timescale. The Head of Paid Service informed that huge progress had been made and the project still remained on target to meet the initially agreed timescale.

8. **Future Approach to Arts**

***O&S 8**

The Committees considered the following request arising from the Council meeting held on 6 December 2016 (Minute CM 46 refers):

'Taking that viewpoint a step further, some Members also felt that there was the potential need for a task and finish group review to be undertaken into all aspects of the Council's commitment and future approach to the Arts agenda. The request was therefore made to refer this matter to Overview and Scrutiny for its consideration.'

In discussion, there was general support for the establishment of a task and finish group and the following Members expressed a wish to serve on it: Cllrs Cheadle, Moyse, Musgrave, Pearce and Roberts.

To maximise the effectiveness of this group, the importance of clarifying its purpose and establishing a clearly defined set of Terms of Reference were emphasised. Since the appointed Members served on a combination of both Overview and Scrutiny Committees, it was

also agreed that responsibility for agreeing the terms of reference should be delegated to both Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen.

9. **Member Learning and Development Opportunities Arising
*O&S 9**

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) A further reminder was given regarding the importance of the Joint Local Plan Member Session on 31 January 2017;
- (b) Some Members remarked on the effectiveness of the two Committees meeting together and requested that consideration be given to the future Calendar of Meetings including provision for more frequent joint Committee meetings being held.

The Meeting concluded at 4.15 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
