

SOUTH HAMS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL



Minutes of a meeting of the **South Hams Overview and Scrutiny Panel** held on **Thursday, 13th June, 2019 at 10.00 am** at the **Cary Room - Follaton House**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Birch
Vice Chairman Cllr Smerdon

Cllr Pennington	Cllr Jackson
Cllr McKay	Cllr Reeve
Cllr Rose	Cllr Sweett

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Abbott	Cllr Bastone
Cllr Brown	Cllr Hawkins
Cllr Holway	Cllr Hopwood
Cllr May	Cllr Pannell
Cllr Pearce	Cllr Rowe

Officers:
Chief Executive
Group Manager – Customer First & Support Services
Specialists Manager
Head of IT Practice
Head of Practice – Environmental Health
Senior Specialist – Environmental Health
Senior Specialist – Democratic Services

1. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 28 March 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

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

3. **Public Forum**

In accordance with the Public Forum Procedure Rules, the Chairman informed that one question had been received for consideration during this agenda item.

Question from Mr Robert Vint

'How will the Council be assessing the viability of a 2030 target for achieving carbon-neutrality in its Climate Action Plan, what independent organisations is it contacting for advice on how to do this and by what date does it currently intend to set a target?'

In response, Cllr Pearce made the following points:

- The Executive had recommended to the Special Council meeting on 25 July 2019 that: *'An Action Plan be developed that outlines how the Council will address the Emergency and meet or exceed the targets set by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, including an assessment of the viability of a 2030 target, to be brought to Council for approval within six months'* and it would be through this process that the Council would assess the viability of a 2030 date;
- The Council was already working with a range of organisations, including Exeter University, through the Climate Emergency Response Group (CERG) that was chaired by Devon County Council;
- It was expected that a range of organisations would be engaged through the process of producing the Action Plan;
- The Council did not have a date by which it intended to set a target other than as detailed in the Executive recommendation to the Special Council meeting.

4. **Government Overview & Scrutiny Guidance**

A report was presented that sought to brief the new Panel on the 'Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities' that had recently been produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

In his introduction, the Chairman of the Panel drew particular attention to the following extracts of the Guidance:

- The importance of ensuring early and regular engagement between the Executive and Scrutiny;
- The need to maintain the interest of full Council in the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel;
- An effective Overview and Scrutiny function needing to have a defined impact on the ground, with the Panel making recommendations that would make a tangible difference to the work of the Council;
- The view that Scrutiny works best when it had a clear role and function;
- With regard to shortlisting topics, these should reflect the overall role of Scrutiny in the Council and, when considering whether an item should be included on the work programme, Members should consider the following questions:
 - o Do we understand the benefits that Scrutiny would bring to the issue?
 - o How could we best carry out work on this subject?
 - o What would be the best outcome of this work? and
 - o How would this work engage with the activity of the Executive and other decision-makers (including partners)?

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Panel:

1. support the contents of the 'Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities';
2. convene an all Member Training Session in September 2019 that will incorporate the viewing of a web streamed Devon County Council Scrutiny Committee meeting and will review the effectiveness of the first three Panel meetings (held in June, July and September 2019).

5. Executive Forward Plan

The Panel was presented with the most recently published Executive Forward Plan. In accordance with Procedure Rules, the Chairman had requested prior to this meeting that the Leader provide responses to a series of questions on the following Executive agenda item:

(a) Climate Change Programme

Question 1. Prior to the Special Council meeting on 25 July 2019, can Members be informed which professional advisors will be consulted and which strategies are being considered by Plymouth, Exeter and Teignbridge Councils to help them achieve carbon neutrality by 2030?

In response, the Leader reminded the Panel that the Council had yet to formally consider the Executive recommendations and it was therefore

very early days to be in a position to provide such information. However, the Leader and Chief Executive both emphasised that a great deal of combined working was already being carried out. Whilst both the University of Plymouth and University of Exeter had committed to supporting the work, there were potential procurement matters that would require addressing.

Assuming that Members approved the Executive recommendations on 25 July 2019, then the Council would also then commit to working with the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group.

Question 2. Prior to the July Special Council meeting, can Members be informed which professional advisors the Council is considering using and which strategies will it consider adopting, in order to assess the viability of a target for the South Hams of Carbon Neutrality by 2030?

In reply, the Leader informed that the Response Group would be setting up a website that would contain extensive information (including the notes and action points arising from meetings) and be hosted by Devon County Council. Once it was established, officers gave a commitment to providing a link to the website to all Members.

In highlighting that resources were scarce and a co-ordinated response would be vital, the Leader stated that the work required to calculate the Council's Carbon Footprint would be far more straightforward than the research required to establish the Devonwide picture.

Question 3. The Council aims to produce a Climate Action Plan within six months – prior to the Special Council meeting in July, can Members be provided with a draft timetable of stages to reach that goal, including how and when external experts, this Panel, other Members and the public would be consulted?

Whilst it was felt too early to be able to provide this information, the Leader recognised the importance of keeping the wider membership fully informed and she gave a commitment for Members to be kept informed of progress via regular updates in the Members Bulletin.

Question 4. In drawing up the Action Plan, will the Council seek to identify, assess and maximise the potential economic, social and environmental 'co-benefits' of the following:

- *reducing Council energy bills;*
- *generating income from renewable energy opportunities;*
- *reducing fuel poverty and hypothermia;*
- *reducing air pollution;*
- *creating new local business, employment and investment opportunities;*
- *increasing local economic resilience and self-reliance; and*
- *increasing tree cover and biodiversity?*

With the possible exception of increasing tree cover and biodiversity, the Leader was of the view that each of these points were classified as 'business as usual' for the Council.

Question 5. Prior to the July Special Council meeting, can Members be informed what steps are being taken or proposed in respect of working with other councils to address the proposed Emergency?

The Leader advised that this question had been addressed in the previous responses that had been given.

In the subsequent debate, reference was made to:-

- (a) the decision-making process at Special Council. The overriding view was that the commitment to provide regular updates in the Members Bulletin, coupled with the website link being circulated, would be sufficient and there would consequently be no need for an additional report to be produced for consideration at the Special Council meeting;
- (b) the development of the Action Plan. Assurances were given to the Panel that all Members would be fully involved in the development of the Action Plan;
- (c) the proposed Member Workshop. Whilst the final details were still to be confirmed, it was noted that the provisional date of Wednesday, 18 September 2019 had been set aside for the Workshop to be held at the Woolwell Community Centre.

6. **IT System Update**

A report was considered that provided an update on the IT systems issues that had been experienced by Members since May 2019 and presented an outline plan for reducing the impact of future issues.

In introducing the report, both the lead Executive Member and lead officer apologised to Members for the inconvenience that they had experienced with their IT devices. Whilst it was no excuse, there were a number of challenges and complexities around providing IT support to a diverse range of Council services.

The lead Member also wished to remind her colleagues of the ability for IT officers to remotely access their devices without the need to make a visit to the Council offices and her intention for a quarterly update report to be presented to the Panel to enable for performance to be regularly monitored. Finally, the Member also highlighted that an 'IT Resilience' report was to be presented to the next Panel meeting on 11 July 2019.

During the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised:-

(a) A number of Members paid tribute to the support that was being provided by the Member IT Officer and the Panel welcomed the news that his contract had recently been extended;

(b) Whilst the issues had been very frustrating, the Panel felt that the regular communication from officers had in part mitigated the levels of impact and disruption experienced by Members;

(c) A Member had given advanced notice of the following question:

'What research, if any, was carried out before the purchase of the new Surface Go tablets into the likelihood of the small size of the type being displayed causing eye strain if the device is used for any length of time? Also what research, if any, was done on the suitability of the smaller keyboard for use for writing longer documents, especially for those with ageing or arthritic fingers?'

In response, the lead Member informed that the Surface Go devices were rigorously tested during the previous Council and this was not identified as being an issue during the trial. However, the importance of Members having a positive experience with their IT devices was recognised and if any Members were experiencing such issues, then they were encouraged to speak to her and/or the Head of Practice for IT outside of this meeting;

(d) With regard to communicating with IT officers out of normal office hours, it was confirmed that consideration had been given to this option. However, it had been concluded that the cost of providing out of hours IT support was very expensive and currently deemed unaffordable;

(e) The benefits of all Members having the 'Blackberry Client' application installed on their mobile phones to enable them to access their Council emails was emphasised by a number of Members.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Panel:

1. request that the IT Head of Practice consider the best methods and frequency for communicating system outages and resolution times to Members;
2. ask that the IT Head of Practice note the concerns raised by Members and ensure that these are highlighted in the IT Resilience report that is to be presented to the Panel meeting on 11 July 2019; and
3. encourage all Members to have the 'Blackberry Client' application installed on their mobile phones.

7. **Food Safety Service Plan**

Consideration was given to a report that provided Members with the opportunity to comment upon and agree the Food Safety Service Plan 2019/20.

During the ensuing discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the potential impact of a no deal Brexit. Whilst the implications were potentially very significant, officers did assure the Panel that the Council was fully prepared for this eventuality;
- (b) the achievement of maintaining a 100% food safety inspection rate in each of the last two years. The Panel paid tribute to the team's performance and noted that very few local authorities achieve this level of performance. As a general point, a Member asked whether there was any scope to slightly reduce the inspection levels on the traditionally highest scoring establishments in order to release some time for officers to undertake alternative duties;
- (c) areas for improvement and future development. In referring to the list of areas identified, the Panel did pay particular attention to the importance of *'continuing to integrate Case Managers, Specialists and Locality Officer roles into the related work streams, with a view to freeing up officers to deliver service at the appropriate level'*;
- (d) working relationships with the NHS and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). Officers advised that they were developing good working relationships with the NHS and local CCGs and it was recognised that there was significant opportunities for the Council in this respect;
- (e) income generation opportunities. The importance of the service investigating all possible options to increase income was recognised. Indeed, such was the importance, that the Panel requested a six-monthly update on this matter.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Food Safety Service Plan 2019/20 be approved, subject to, a six-monthly progress report being presented to the Panel that makes reference to opportunities available to the service to increase income and the areas identified for improvement and future development.

8. **O&S Work Programme**

During consideration of the latest version of the Panel's Annual Work Programme, the following additions, amendments and deletions were made:

- (a) With regard to the Peer Challenge Action Plan Update (that was to be considered at the Panel meeting on 11 July 2019), the Panel felt that it would be useful for a copy of the Peer Review Team's concluding report to be circulated to all Members in advance of this meeting;
- (b) It was agreed that an additional agenda item entitled: 'Review of Council's Property Assets' should be added to the Work Programme for consideration at the next Panel meeting on 11 July 2019;
- (c) Members concluded that an agenda item entitled: 'Delivery of Social Affordable Housing within the South Hams' was worthy of further consideration by the Panel. In light of the close linkages with the 'Homelessness Strategy Action Plan – Annual Update', it was concluded that both items should be considered by the Panel at its meeting on 5 September 2019. With regard to the Housing and Homelessness agenda, the value in all Members attending the training session on the morning of Thursday, 4 July 2019 was stressed;
- (d) The Panel approved the suggestion that a 'Town Centre Strategies Update' agenda item be considered by the Panel at its 17 October 2019 meeting;
- (e) In respect of the 2019 Customer Satisfaction Survey, it was agreed that the results would be presented to the Panel meeting on 21 November 2019;
- (f) In light of the Panel decision to receive a six monthly progress report on the Food Safety Service Plan 2019/20 (Minute O&S.7/19 above refers), it was agreed that this should be scheduled for the Panel meeting on the afternoon of Thursday, 23 January 2020.

The Meeting concluded at 11.55 am

Signed by:

Chairman
