

# WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Minutes** of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday, 4th September, 2018** at **2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

**Chairman** Cllr Yelland  
**Vice Chairman** Cllr Cheadle

Cllr Baldwin  
Cllr Kimber  
Cllr Pearce

Cllr Cloke  
Cllr Moyse  
Cllr Ridgers

**In attendance:**

Councillors:

Cllr Edmonds  
Cllr Samuel

Cllr Jory

Officers:

Group Manager – Customer First & Support Services  
Section 151 Officer  
Cop Lead - IT

32. **Apologies for Absence**

**\* O&S 32**

Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllrs J Evans, J R McInnes, J B Moody, C R Musgrave, G Parker, D K A Sellis and J Sheldon.

33. **Confirmation of Minutes**

**\* O&S 33**

The minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 31 July 2018 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

34. **Declarations of Interest**

**\* O&S 34**

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

35. **Public Forum**

**\* O&S 35**

There were no issues raised during the Public Forum session at this meeting.

36. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**

**\* O&S 36**

During consideration of the most recently published Hub Committee Forward Plan, the Committee made reference to the Hub Committee meeting agenda for its 11 September 2018 meeting that had recently been published. In so doing, Members acknowledged that the size of the agenda for this meeting was more manageable than had been suggested on the last Forward Plan.

37. **Medium Term Financial Strategy Presentation**

**\* O&S 37**

The Section 151 Officer delivered a presentation that outlined a series of recommendations on the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

In the ensuing discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) an alternative to recommendation 1. To reflect the need to be realistic in the current budgetary climate, an alternative recommendation was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** to read as follows:-

‘That the strategic intention be set to raise Council Tax by the maximum allowed in any given year (without triggering a Council Tax Referendum) *to endeavour to continue to* deliver services. (NB. the actual Council Tax for any given year will be decided by Council in the preceding February);

When put to the vote, this alternative recommendation was declared **CARRIED**.

- (b) the pressure being placed on low income households. By continuing to raise Council Tax, some Members highlighted the additional pressure and financial burden being placed on residents. Officers advised that this point was recognised and a revised Council Tax Reduction Scheme was due to be presented to the next Hub Committee that would recommend the adoption of a revised Council Tax Reduction Scheme. It was confirmed that the proposed revisions would result in a more needs assessed approach being adopted;

- (c) the Business Rate Pilot status for 2019/20. Assuming that the bid was supported, then the intention was for Central Government to

inform those applicants who had been successful before the end of the year;

- (d) the planning reserve. Having been informed that there were very little monies remaining in the planning reserve, the Committee recognised the need for it to be replenished;
- (e) levels of Reserves. A Member expressed his opposition to any potential proposal being put forward to draw down reserves in order to balance the Council's 2019/20 Budget;
- (f) the Pension Strategy. Some Members felt that there were opportunities in respect of the Strategy and, in expressing the view that the investment return on the Pension Fund had not been particularly good, it was suggested that Fund Committee representatives should be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee;
- (g) setting an Upper Limit on External Borrowing. The majority of Members were supportive and considered it to be prudent to cap an upper limit on Council borrowing;
- (h) Informal Council sessions. Since a number of elements of the Committee debate had referred to discussions at a recent Informal Council session, some Members were of the view that the format of these should be reviewed. In particular, requests were made for consideration to be given to an agenda being circulated in advance and notes being recorded;
- (i) the Employment Green Book. Whilst Members felt it incumbent to review all options in relation to the Green Book, it was recognised that any proposals to vary terms would be difficult to resolve.

It was then:

### **RESOLVED**

That the Committee express the following views to the Hub Committee and the Council as part of the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy:

1. That the strategic intention be set to raise Council Tax by the maximum allowed in any given year (without triggering a Council Tax Referendum) to endeavour to continue to deliver services. (NB. the actual Council Tax for any given year will be decided by Council in the preceding February);
2. That an application be submitted for Business Rate Pilot status for 2019/20, with agreement being given to a 40% District / 34% Devon County Council / 1% Fire split for the 75% scheme. In the event of the Pilot bid being unsuccessful, that agreement be given to the Council remaining part of the Devon Business Rates Pool for 2019/20;

3. That Central Government and Devon MPs be actively lobbied to support a 2019/20 Devon Pilot bid;
4. That the Council actively lobby and engage with the Government, Devon MPs and other sector bodies (e.g. the District Councils Network and the Rural Services Network) for a realistic Business Rates Baseline to be set for the Council for 2020 onwards;
5. That the Council responds to the technical consultation in support of the Government eliminating Negative Revenue Support Grant. In addition, the Council should continue to lobby for Rural Services Delivery Grant allocations that adequately reflect the cost of rural service provision;
6. That £375,000 of New Homes Bonus funding be used for 2019/20 to fund the Revenue Base Budget and then reduce this funding to £100,000 by 2020/21 and £50,000 by 2021/22 for modelling purposes;
7. That a review be undertaken by the Financial Stability Review Group into the annual level of contributions to Earmarked Reserves (£50,000) and the adequacy of the existing level of Unearmarked Reserves (£1.2 million) and Earmarked Reserves (£4 million) with recommendations being made by the end of October 2018. (NB. this will assess the adequacy of Reserves levels in light of future plans and pressures);
8. That the Council takes specialist pension advice on the options for the Council's Pension position, with the aim of reducing the current contributions, increasing affordability, whilst best managing the pension deficit;
9. That the Council sets an Upper Limit on External Borrowing (for all Council Services) as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy of £50 million;
10. That the Council continue with the Local Government Terms and Conditions of the Employment Green Book for at least 2019/20. That a review of all options for reducing staff costs (by varying terms from the Green Book from 2020/21) be undertaken, with an initial report being presented back before the end of 2018/19.

38.

**Exclusion of Public and Press**

**\* O&S 38**

**RESOLVED**

That in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business as the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Act is involved.

39. **IT Procurement -Exempt  
O&S 39**

The Committee considered an exempt report that provided an update on the IT Procurement exercise.

In discussion, the Committee expressed its support for the proposed way forward.

It was then:

**RESOLVED**

That the Committee endorse the IT Procurement exercise and recommend to the Hub Committee that the proposed way forward (as outlined in the exempt agenda report presented to the Committee) be approved.

40. **Re-admittance of Public and Press  
\* O&S 40**

**RESOLVED**

That the public and press be re-admitted to the meeting.

41. **Joint Local Plan: Standing Agenda Item  
\* O&S 41**

By way of an update, the Committee noted that the latest predictions were that the Plan would be presented to the three Councils for adoption early in 2019. Such had been the time slippages already, the importance of the Plan before presented to the Councils before the May 2019 local elections was stressed.

In respect of the five year land supply issue, officers could only reaffirm that the weight given to the Plan was still a matter for individual Planning Inspectors to determine. Therefore, at this time, the Council could not emphatically claim that it currently had an adequate supply. As a result, the importance of this point being borne in mind during the Development Management decision-making process was emphasised.

A Member also stated that, until a Plan was adopted, a number of Neighbourhood Planning Groups had put their work on hold.

Finally, the Committee asked that officers arrange a Joint Local Plan (JLP) Member Briefing Session be arranged in the next few months.

42. **Task and Finish Group Updates (if any)  
\* O&S 42**

The Chairman informed that the Committee did not currently have any reviews being undertaken by Task and Finish Groups.

43. **Rural Broadband Working Group Update ( if any)**

**\* O&S 43**

During the update, reference was made to confirmation that the Connecting Devon and Somerset Programme Manager would be attending the next Committee meeting on 2 October 2018. As a consequence, it was agreed that a meeting of the Working Group should be convened to take place before this date to consider compiling a list of all Member questions to send to the representative in advance of 2 October 2018.

44. **Annual Work Programme 2018/19**

**\* O&S 44**

The Chairman introduced the latest version of the Work Programme for the next 12 months.

In discussion, it was agreed that:

(a) a Task and Finish Group should be appointed to review the outreach services that were currently being provided in Okehampton. By way of a target, it was intended that the Group should present its findings to the Committee meeting on 6 November 2018. Whilst it was agreed that Cllr Cheadle would chair this Group, expressions of interest would be sought from the wider Committee Members to join him on this Group;

(b) an additional agenda item entitled: 'Localities: Action Plan' should be added to the Programme for consideration at this Committee meeting on 6 November 2018.

45. **Member Learning and Development Opportunities Arising from this Meeting**

**\* O&S 45**

In discussion, the Committee was reminded of the contacts details for the recently appointed Member IT Support Officer and Members were urged to utilise his expertise.

In addition, Members were reminded that the Committee had requested a JLP Member Briefing and the annual budget setting workshop had been arranged to take place on Monday, 8 October 2018.

The Meeting concluded at 4.00 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chairman**

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