

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on
Tuesday, 15th January, 2019 at **2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman

Vice Chairman Cllr Cheadle

Cllr Baldwin
Cllr Kimber
Cllr Moyse
Cllr Parker
Cllr Ridgers
Cllr Sheldon

Cllr Cloke
Cllr Moody
Cllr Musgrave
Cllr Pearce
Cllr Sellis

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Cann OBE
Cllr Lamb
Cllr Roberts
Cllr Samuel

Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Mott
Cllr Sampson
Cllr Sanders

Officers:

Group Manager – Customer First & Support Services
Group Manager – Business Development
Section 151 Officer
Commissioning Manager
Head of Devon Building Control Partnership

75. **Apologies for Absence**

* O&S 75

Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllrs J Evans, J R McInnes and J Yelland.

76. **Confirmation of Minutes**
* O&S 76
The minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6 November 2018 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record, subject to inclusion of the following amendment:

For minute number O&S 69 'Quarter 2 Performance Measures', the introductory sentence be amended to read: 'The Lead Member for *Resources and Performance* presented a report.....'
77. **Declarations of Interest**
* O&S 77
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.
78. **Public Forum**
* O&S 78
There were no issues raised during the Public Forum session.
79. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**
* O&S 79
Members considered the latest version of the Hub Committee Forward Plan. In so doing, the following points were made:-

(a) The Committee asked that the Leader of Council give consideration to his Forward Plan being updated to outline each of his and the Deputy Leader's roles and responsibilities;

(b) With regard to the 'Joint Local Plan (JLP) Working Arrangements after Adoption' future agenda item, it was noted that this report would now be included with the JLP adoption report that would be bypassing the Hub Committee and presented straight to the Council meeting on 26 March 2019.
80. **Devon Building Control Partnership Update**
* O&S 80
The Committee considered a report that provided an overview of the performance of the Devon Building Control Partnership.

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

(a) The Head of the Partnership confirmed that the service continued to strive to be as financially self-sufficient as was practically possible. With regard to the non-chargeable work (i.e. the work costed back to the Council), Members noted that this amounted to approximately 25% of the Partnership's total workload and recent trends suggested that this percentage continued to decrease;

- (b) The Committee was advised that the Business Plan that underpinned the Partnership was committed to investigating the potential for expansion (provided that it was of benefit to the existing three partners). In addition, Members were advised that the Partnership worked closely with colleagues in neighbouring local authorities and discussed with potential additional partners remained ongoing;
- (c) With regard to the reduction in building standards in large scale developments, the Head of the Partnership recognised that this was an issue that was replicated across the country. In advising that the Partnership had a lack of control over quality, the representative informed that the Local Authority Building Control (LABC) organisation was making representations nationally in an attempt to reverse this trend. The point was also made that Members should be lobbying their local MPs to exert some influence;

Moreover, it was felt that, as the Local Planning Authority, the Council also had a role to play in this regard and it was felt that consideration should be given by both Members to adopt an appropriate Design Policy and the Partnership to develop closer working relationships with the Council's Planning and Enforcement Officers;

- (d) The representative informed that the overwhelming majority of customer feedback received by the service was positive. This was felt to be mainly as a result of the Partnership operating in a very competitive market and the consequent emphasis that was given to delivering good customer service;
- (e) Whilst the adoption of the Joint Local Plan could present a number of business opportunities to the Partnership, a further barrier was that national large scale developers tended to choose their Building Inspectors at a national level thereby overlooking the local service providers.

In conclusion, the Committee was of the view that the Partnership delivered an excellent service and the representative was thanked for his agenda report and informative responses to Member questions.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Committee:

1. welcomes the report and is of the view that the Partnership provides a very good service;
2. requests that the Partnership look at developing closer working relationships with other neighbouring local authorities; and

3. requests that the Partnership look at developing closer working relationships with the Development Management Community of Practice.

81. **Budget Proposals 2019-20 Onwards Update**

* O&S 81

Members were presented with a report that asked for consideration of the draft Budget proposals for 2019-20 and onwards.

The Leader of Council introduced the report and specifically highlighted the updates to the Budget position since the Hub Committee meeting had considered the matter at its meeting on 4 December 2018 (Minute HC *49 refers).

In the ensuing debate, particular reference was made to:-

- (a) confirmation that the monies allocated from the Better Care Fund were sufficient to finance Disabled Facilities Grants;
- (b) income from investments in Commercial Property. In response to a question, officers advised that the proposed £120,000 Year 4 (2022/23) income could consist of a combination of potential commercial development in the Borough and property acquisitions outside of West Devon;
- (c) delivery of rural services. The Leader informed that the Rural Services Network and Local Government Association continued to rigorously lobby Central Government to point out the distinct differences between rural and urban service delivery;
- (d) the waste collection service. The Section 151 Officer confirmed that trials would be needed to inform the level of savings achievable from a three weekly waste collection and a report would be presented to the Hub Committee by the end of June 2019;
- (e) the future Budget gap. Whilst the Council was facing severe challenges to fill its Budget gap, Members made reference to a number of the measures that had already been implemented. These, coupled with some of the future proposals and the findings of the recent Peer Review, left some Members confident that the Council would have options and the ability to close its future Budget gap;
- (f) the proposed Community Grant reductions. Whilst he would reluctantly support the recommendation, a Member did express his disappointment over the proposed grant reductions to some Community Groups. For clarity, it was confirmed that there was currently no intention to recommend a reduction in grant awarded to Citizens' Advice.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That, as part of the 2019/20 Budget Setting process, the Hub Committee take into account that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee support:

1. the proposed increase in Council Tax for 2019/20 of 2.99% (Band D of £231.63 for 2019/20 – an increase of 13 pence per week or £6.72 per year);
2. the proposed financial pressures of £420,000 (as shown in Appendix A of the presented agenda report);
3. the proposed contributions to Earmarked Reserves of £120,000 and transfer of the one-off 2019/20 Budget Surplus of £73,135 into the Future Financial Stability Earmarked Reserve to assist in meeting the predicted Budget gap of £504,242 in 2020/21;
4. the proposed savings of £684,700 (as shown in Appendix A of the presented agenda report);
5. the proposed use of £375,000 of New Homes Bonus funding to fund the 2019/20 Revenue Budget (as set out in Section 4.6 of the presented agenda report); and
6. the recommendations of the Financial Stability Review Group on Earmarked Reserves (as set out in paragraphs 10.2 and 10.3 of the presented agenda report) and agree that these should be recommended in the final Budget Proposals report for 2019/20 (to be presented to the Council meeting on 12 February 2019).

82.

Corporate Strategy Key Performance Indicators

O&S 82

The Committee was presented with a report that detailed progress made to date in developing Key Performance Indicators. In addition, the report recommended next steps to improve reporting mechanisms on the Corporate Strategy.

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) Hub Committee Member feedback. A Member reiterated her previous concerns that there were still some Hub Committee Members who were not providing any feedback to the wider membership on their areas of responsibility;
- (b) resources required to deliver the Strategy. Members highlighted the capacity issues being experienced across the Council and therefore emphasised the importance of managing expectations in honing the Strategy. This view was acknowledged by officers and it was felt that this should be borne in mind throughout the Member Workshop that had been scheduled for 5 February 2019.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Hub Committee be **RECOMMENDED** to endorse the proposed actions as detailed in Section 5 of the presented agenda report.

83. **Customer Satisfaction Progress Update: Standing Agenda Item**

O&S 83

In line with the request for 'Customer Satisfaction Progress Updates' to become a standing agenda item for the Committee (Minute *HC 50 refers), the lead Hub Committee Member for Customer First made reference to:-

- officers having begun implementing the actions arising from the recently approved Improvement Plan;
- overall call volumes continuing to reduce. As a result, the Member informed that call answering performance had improved. To expand upon the point, the Contact Centre had received 7,500 calls last month (2,000 less than the same period last year) and this was the lowest monthly figure ever recorded. Of these calls, 91% were answered (with 85% of these in less than 5 minutes). The Member advised that historical trend analysis illustrated that for the year to date (April to December 2018), the Contact Centre had received 20,000 less calls in comparison to April to December 2017 and an astonishing 72,000 less than April to December 2016;
- the creation of a customer feedback button on the Council website. Within the next month, the Member advised that the Council would be rolling out the feedback part as part of online forms and processes. As a consequence, users completing a request for service online would be able to advise whether or not it had worked for them and/or was easy to complete;
- work was ongoing to investigate solutions to contact customers after a service had been delivered in order to measure their satisfaction;
- Specialists and Managers had been allocated to focus on improving the Council's high volume priority areas: Waste and Planning;
- in Waste, officers had been working with the Communications Team to simplify messaging which had reduced demand on Garden Waste and Christmas Collections. Whilst the statistics were not yet available, the Member advised that volumes of customer reports and calls appeared to have been significantly reduced in comparison to previous years;
- officers had started work on reviewing and improving the Council's missed collection process. The lead Member informed that she would report back on this work at the next meeting of the Committee;
- in Development Management, officers were working on introducing more communication with the customer so that (s)he was kept informed at every step of the planning process. The IT was currently being configured and testing was expected to commence during the week commencing Monday, 21 January 2019. If this

testing went to plan, it was intended that it would go live before the end of January 2019. The next step with the Development Management service was to provide more detail and status updates within the online search function and the target was to achieve this in March 2019;

- objectives had been rolled out for the Case Management teams. By the end of January 2019, teams would be reviewing all complaints received within their work areas and would be focusing on fixing the issues that had generated the complaints in the first place. The Member proceeded to advise of her intention to show the complaints received (and the fixes that had been implemented) to the Committee in the upcoming months; and
- the Council had successfully rolled out a pilot to the Council Tax Case Management team that automatically prioritised work against the resources available. Members were advised that this had reduced the workload significantly and, by the end of January, this pilot would be extended into the Housing Benefits service area and officers were working on a roll-out plan for all service areas.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised:

- (a) In light of the current senior officer absences in Development Management, remedial measures were being put in place to mitigate the impact as far as was practically possible. Furthermore, officers informed that they were monitoring the impact of these absences on a daily basis;
- (b) It was noted that the draft Members Code of Planning Practice was to be presented, in the first instance, to the Audit Committee at its meeting on 22 January 2019;
- (c) Some Members commented that the reductions in call volume suggested that the onus that was being placed on Channel Shift was starting to reap benefits.

84. **Joint Local Plan: Standing Agenda Item**

* O&S 84

By way of an update, the lead Hub Committee Member advised that:

- the Council was still working towards the Joint Local Plan being presented to the Council meeting on 26 March 2019 for adoption;
- the Joint Steering Group was hoping that the draft version of the Development Planning Document (DPD) on Settlement Boundaries would be presented to the Hub Committee meeting on 19 March 2019. In referring to the importance of this DPD to Neighbourhood Planning Groups, Members welcomed this target date;
- the proposed Design Guide would be prepared during the 2019/20 Municipal Year. In light of the comments made earlier in the meeting during consideration of the Devon Building Control Partnership agenda item (Minute *O&S 80 above refers), some

Members felt that greater priority and emphasis should be given to adoption of this Guide.

85. **Task and Finish Group Updates:**

* O&S 85

(a) Northern Link Area Outreach Services

The Committee was presented with the concluding report of the Northern Link Area Outreach Services Task and Finish Group.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:-

(i) In light of some concerns being raised at the lack of evidence based recommendations that were contained within the Group report, it was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and on being put to the vote declared **CARRIED** that:

'That the Task and Finish Group be reconvened to produce a number of evidence based recommendations that will then be reported back to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.'

(ii) When considering that there were not many visitors to the Ockment Centre and the recent Peer Review had concluded that the Council should look at switching off some of its contact channels, some Members questioned whether the Outreach Service was in fact providing value for money for the Council and its services.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Task and Finish Group be reconvened to produce a number of evidence based recommendations that will then be reported back to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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

* O&S 86

The Chairman introduced the latest version of the Work Programme for the next 12 months and noted its content without any further debate.

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

* O&S 87

In discussion, the Committee was reminded that the Corporate Strategy Member Workshop had been arranged to take place at 2.00pm on Tuesday, 5 February 2019.

The Meeting concluded at 4.25 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
