

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, 3rd September, 2019** at **2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Ewings
Vice Chairman Cllr Kimber

Cllr Ball
Cllr Daniel
Cllr Moyse
Cllr Ratcliffe
Cllr Southcott
Cllr Wood

Cllr Coulson
Cllr Kemp
Cllr Musgrave
Cllr Ridgers
Cllr Spettigue

In attendance:
Councillors:

Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Jory
Cllr Moody
Cllr Pearce
Cllr Yelland

Cllr Crozier
Cllr Hipsey
Cllr Leech
Cllr Mott
Cllr Renders

Officers:
Chief Executive
Group Manager Customer First & Support Services
Head of Place Making Practice
Specialist Assets
Commissioning Manager
Planning Enforcement Officer
Senior Specialist – Democratic Services

22. **Apologies for Absence**

*O&S 22

Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllrs T Bolton and N Heyworth.

23. **Confirmation of Minutes**
*O&S 23
The minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 July 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.
24. **Declarations of Interest**
*O&S 24
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 was none made.

Whilst not wishing to declare an interest, Cllr K Ball did wish for it to be noted that, in respect of agenda item 6: 'Tavistock – Bere Alston Update: Presentation' (Minute *O&S 26 below refers), he was a Devon County Councillor (DCC) who knew both of the DCC Transport Planning Officers in attendance.
25. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**
*O&S 25
The Chairman informed that no prior requests had been received for updates on any future Hub Committee agenda items at this meeting.
26. **Tavistock-Bere Alston Update: Presentation**
*O&S 26
Representatives from Devon County Council Transport Planning conducted a presentation to the Committee that provided an update on potential infrastructure improvements in the Tavistock area.

In the ensuing debate, reference was made to:-
- (a) the cost breakdown of the reinstatement of a railway from Tavistock to Bere Alston. In response to a number of Members expressing their concerns that the cost projections of reinstatement had now risen to £93 million, it was agreed that a breakdown of these figures would be provided to all Members;
 - (b) accessing funding from Central Government. The representatives highlighted some of the potential solutions (e.g. the use of autonomous or electric buses) and advised the meeting that Central Government funding tended to be more readily available for innovative and original infrastructure concepts;
 - (c) a report that considered the benefits between a light and heavy rail solution in the area. In response to a request, the representatives agreed to circulate a copy of the report that had been produced;
 - (d) the Okehampton to Exeter rail route. It was confirmed that the progress of the rail route would have a positive impact on the

Tavistock to Bere Alston proposals and a number of lessons learned could be taken forward;

- (e) the opportunity for a segregated cycle route to be created adjacent to the busy A386. Members expressed their support for feasibility options (including the segregated cycle route proposals) to be further investigated;
- (f) the data source. When questioned, it was confirmed that the 2011 Census was the data source that was applied for a number of the projections. In reply, some Members wished to make the point that data such as population figures and commuter trends and statistics had significantly changed since 2011;
- (g) the Dawlish to Teignmouth rail line. The representatives emphasised that the clear steer from Central Government was that its focus was on improving the resilience of the existing Dawlish to Teignmouth rail line. As a consequence, it was recognised that there was no Central Government appetite to establish an alternative rail route across Dartmoor and DCC was therefore focusing its efforts on progressing local routes such as Okehampton to Exeter.

DCC representatives confirmed that, at present, they were not actively lobbying Central Government to reinstate the Tavistock to Bere Alston rail line and their top priorities were currently:

1. funding the remainder of the Dawlish to Teignmouth rail line;
2. improving mobile connectivity was travelling by rail; and
3. creating a diversionary route around the Exeter Waterloo line;

In response, some Members highlighted the constant changes at Central Government and requested that DCC increase its lobbying efforts to ensure that funding was made available for the Tavistock to Bere Alston line;

In conclusion, the Committee thanked the representatives for their presentation and informative responses. Such was the importance of this matter that Members requested that a further update be given to the Committee meeting on 7 April 2020. In the meantime, it was felt that Member Workshops should be convened to consider the infrastructure requirements across the whole of the Borough with the views of the Council then being forwarded to DCC before the next update was considered.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the DCC representatives be invited to provide a further update to the Committee at its meeting on 7 April 2020; and

2. That Member Workshops be convened to consider the infrastructure requirements across the whole of the Borough with the views of the Council then being forwarded to DCC before the next update was considered.

27. **Public Forum**

*O&S 27

Whilst no formal requests had been received in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, the Chairman exercised her discretion to permit a member of the public to make a brief statement.

In so doing, Mr Paul Richardson advised that:-

- he considered it unwise to believe that all of the Section 106 monies would be forthcoming for the Callington Road, Tavistock site;
- he felt that there was a need for an Autonomous Guided Vehicle Strategy to be adopted. In reinforcing the point made by the DCC representatives, Mr Richardson advised that such initiatives could attract innovation funding and tap into new funding sources.

The Committee concluded that the points raised by Mr Richardson should be given consideration during the Member Workshops that had just been approved (Minute *O&S 26 above refers).

28. **Fusion Update and Feedback on their Cashless Project**

*O&S 28

Representatives from Fusion Leisure conducted a presentation that outlined their cashless project proposals that were to come into effect on 1 October 2019. During their presentation, the representatives expressed their apologies to Members for the late notification and poor communication strategy that had prompted this agenda item.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) It was confirmed that these proposals included the on-site café facilities becoming cashless;
- (b) With regard to the established Customer Forums at Meadowlands and Parklands, representatives confirmed that they would check outside the meeting whether or not these proposals were considered. A local Ward Member stated that, since the Parklands Forum had not met for a long term, he could confirm that these proposals had not been presented to this Body;
- (c) As part of the next phase, the representatives confirmed that they would be reviewing the management of the reception areas within the leisure centres and the merits of centre vending machines also becoming cashless;
- (d) Whilst reward cards were very user friendly, some Members did wish to point out there would still be a detrimental impact on some of the most vulnerable groups in the Borough. In response to a specific

question, the representatives assured the meeting that it was possible for a single activity to be purchased and added to a reward card;

- (e) The Committee endorsed the suggestion that a Task and Finish Group should be established to undertake a review of the relationship between Fusion and our local communities.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That a Task and Finish Group (comprising of Cllrs Daniel, Ewings, Musgrave, Spettigue and Wood) be established to undertake a review of the relationship between Fusion and our local communities, with a concluding report being presented to the Committee meeting on 14 January 2020 before Fusion representatives present their annual report to the Committee meeting on 25 February 2020.

29. **Call-in of the Hub Committee Resolution on Minute *15: Northern Outreach**

*O&S 29

The Chairman introduced this agenda item and highlighted that, in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, three Members of the Committee had invoked a Call-in on Hub Committee Minute HC 15 'Northern Outreach'.

Upon the conclusion of the debate on the Call-in, the Chairman advised that there would be three options available to the Committee. These were:

1. that the Committee was content with the original Hub Committee resolution and the decision would therefore take immediate effect;
2. that the Committee refer the decision back to the next Hub Committee meeting (on 10 September 2019) for further consideration; and
3. that the Committee opt to refer the decision to the next full Council meeting (on 17 September 2019).

At this point, the Chairman invited the Member who was representing the three signatories of the Call-in to explain their reasoning behind this decision. In so doing, the Member made particular reference to:-

- the main concerns relating to the ability of local communities in the north of the Borough to access the Council and its services. As a result, the Members were strongly of the view that the withdrawal of the northern outreach service should be considered at the same time as the proposed option appraisal on the future of Tavistock Reception. Whilst not his own personal belief, the Member stressed that there was a widespread view amongst residents living in the north of the Borough that the Council was too Tavistock orientated and he requested that the need for the Council to take steps to overcome this perception be noted;

- the Hub Committee being divided when making its original decision;
- a number of residents were not digitally enabled and, whilst improvements had been made, there did remain some issues with call waiting times in the Contact Centre;
- it was the wish of the signatories for the original Hub Committee decision to be referred to the Council for further consideration at its meeting on 17 September 2019.

The Chairman then proceeded to invite the lead Hub Committee Member for Customer First to respond to the points raised. During which, the lead Member informed that:-

- great strides had been made to Contact Centre performance and the Council website;
- Mobile Locality Officers would continue to offer to carry out personal visits to vulnerable residents;
- the current Northern Outreach service did not represent good value for money. In support of this statement, the lead Member advised that it was costing £8,000 per year to resource the outreach office one day each week and, as a guide in August 2019, there had been only 11 visits, with the majority of the enquiries raised not relevant to the Borough Council;
- he had recently attended a meeting with the Vice-Chairman of the Committee and the lead officer at Okehampton Library to discuss the possibility of the facility providing a signposting service for the Borough Council. Upon the conclusion of this meeting, the Library representatives had confirmed that they would be happy to provide a signposting service.

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

- (a) Some Members were of the view that there was a general lack of awareness that the current outreach service was in existence. In addition, the local ward Members stated that they had previously been discouraged from promoting the service. To counter these comments, the lead Hub Committee Member stated that, in his opinion, the outreach service had been well publicised via Council press releases (that had subsequently been picked up by both the Okehampton Times and Devon Live) and a poster being on prominent display in the previous office window at James' Street, Okehampton;
- (b) Local Ward Members expressed their disappointment that they had not been made aware of the meeting that had recently been held at Okehampton Library;
- (c) Support was expressed for the point made by the call-in signatories whereby the withdrawal of the northern outreach service should be considered at the same time as the proposed option appraisal on the future of Tavistock Reception. Moreover, a number of Members felt that the decision should be referred to the Council meeting on 17 September 2019 for further consideration.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Committee has debated the Call-in on Hub Committee Minute HC 15 'Northern Outreach' and requests that it be considered at the next Council meeting on 17 September 2019.

30. **Planning Enforcement Plan**

O&S 30

The Committee considered a report that recommended that the Hub Committee approve:

- an updated Enforcement Plan;
- a Harm Assessment Matrix;
- a draft Enforcement Plan.

In addition, the report also requested that the Council ultimately approve a proposal to recruit an additional two permanent members of staff for Planning Enforcement.

During the debate, the following points were raised:-

- (a) The Committee was reminded that performance measures related to Planning Enforcement were formally presented to the Development Management and Licensing Committee and published with the relevant agenda papers;
- (b) Such was the reputational importance of the planning enforcement service that Members emphasised their support for the proposal to increase staffing levels in this area;
- (c) To help the service, the lead Hub Committee advised fellow Members that it was vitally important for them (and their local town and parish councils) to provide Enforcement Officers with as much accurate detail as was practically possible on cases within their wards.

It was then:

RECOMMENDED

That the Hub Committee be **RECOMMENDED** that:-

1. the updated Enforcement Plan; the Harm Assessment Matrix; and the proposed Enforcement Action Plan each be approved; and
2. Council be **RECOMMENDED** that the additional two permanent staff for Planning Enforcement be approved to be funded from the Planning Earmarked Reserve in 2019/20 and to be built into the Budget Setting process as a cost pressure for 2020/21 onwards

31. **Customer Satisfaction Progress: Quarterly Update**

*O&S 31

The lead Hub Committee Member for Customer First introduced a report that detailed the progress that had been made since June 2019 on improving customer satisfaction levels.

During his introduction, the lead Member asked that colleagues critically evaluate all aspects of the Council website before making their views known to him or the Commissioning Manager. To increase awareness, it was also requested that an article be included to this effect in a future edition of the Members' Bulletin.

With no further questions or issues being raised, it was then:

RESOLVED

That the Committee notes:

1. the progress made to date in improving customer satisfaction (as set out in section 3 of the presented agenda report); and
2. the next steps (as outlined in section 5 of the presented agenda report).

32. **Financial Stability Review Group (standing agenda item)**

*O&S 32

The Chairman informed that monthly meetings had now been arranged for the remainder of the 2019/20 Municipal Year, with the first meeting scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 24 September 2019 at 1.30pm.

33. **Task and Finish Group Updates (if any)**

*O&S 33

Members noted that there were no active Task and Finish Groups at this present time.

34. **Annual Work Programme 2019/20**

*O&S 34

The Committee considered the latest version of its Work Programme for the 2019/20 Municipal Year. In discussion, it was confirmed that the Work Programme would be amended to reflect the decisions to request an update from Devon County Council Transport Planning representatives (Minute *O&S 26 above refers) and to establish a Leisure Task and Finish Group (Minute *O&S 28 above refers) at future Committee meetings.

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

*O&S 21

The Committee was reminded of the request for Member Workshops to be convened to consider the infrastructure requirements across the whole of the Borough (Minute *O&S 26 above refers).

In addition, the Chairman of the Member Development Steering Group informed that the first meeting of the Group was to be arranged in the next few months to give consideration to the review of the 2019 Member Induction Programme and the future Member Learning and Development Programme.

In reply to a question, it was noted that the issue of meeting and briefing start times would be considered, in the first instance, at the next meeting of the Political Structures Working Group.

The Meeting concluded at 5.30 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
