

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, 1st September, 2020 at 2.00 pm** at the **Remote Meeting -Skype**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Ewings
Vice Chairman Cllr Kimber

Cllr Coulson
Cllr Daniel
Cllr Hipsey
Cllr Moyse
Cllr Ratcliffe
Cllr Spettigue

Cllr Crozier
Cllr Heyworth
Cllr Kemp
Cllr Musgrave
Cllr Southcott

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Leech
Cllr Pearce

Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Mott
Cllr Jory

Officers:
Strategic Leadership Team
Democratic Services Manager

13. **Apologies for Absence**
*O&S 13
Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllrs T Bolton and L Wood.
14. **Confirmation of Minutes**
*O&S 14
The minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4 August 2020 were confirmed by the Meeting as a true and correct record.

15. **Declarations of Interest**

*O&S 15

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.

16. **Public Forum**

*O&S 16

The Chairman informed that no formal requests had been received in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

17. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**

*O&S 17

Whilst no prior requests had been received for updates on any future Hub Committee agenda items at this meeting, the Chairman asked whether the Hub Committee would be monitoring any trends relating to write-offs as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be realised. In reply, the lead Hub Committee Member advised that write-off reports would continue to be presented on a quarterly basis at the moment and he gave an assurance that he was closely analysing any upward trends.

18. **Amended Draft Budget 2020/21**

O&S 18

A report was considered that sought to recommend to the Hub Committee five options (as set out below) in order to produce an Amended Revenue Budget for 2020-21:

- To use the 3rd tranche of COVID-19 funding that had been received from Central Government (£89,000);
- To use the New Burdens Government Grant funding received for the administration of the Business Rates Grants (£130,000);
- To utilise the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts underspend (£133,000);
- To allocate the uncommitted New Homes Bonus from 2020/21 to further fund the Revenue Base Budget (£69,000); and
- To reduce the Capital Budget for the remedial works to the Tavistock Viaduct from £100,000 to £20,000 (£80,000).

In discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- (a) the effectiveness of the recent Member Budget Setting Workshop. A number of Members thanked officers for arranging the recent Workshop and felt that it had been an excellent session;
- (b) the remedial works to the Tavistock Viaduct. When questioned, the Section 151 Officer confirmed that, following a Condition Survey being undertaken on the Viaduct, the initially proposed extensive repair works would not now be required during 2020/21

and the capital budget can be limited to further vegetation clearance and some drainage improvements;

- (c) the Town Centre support initiative. With regard to the initiative, the meeting acknowledged that there was a need to consult with all of the town councils (including Chagford) that were located within the Borough.

It was then:

RECOMMENDED

That the Committee **RECOMMEND** that the Hub Committee **RECOMMEND** to Council that:

1. the five options totalling £501,000 (as summarised in the detailed minutes above) be approved in order to produce an Amended Revenue Budget for 2020-21;
2. it be noted that the future capacity of Reserves (as set out in Sections 5.8 and 5.9 of the presented agenda report) may have to be called upon to meet any future financial challenges and/or additional requirements; and
3. £70,000 be used from the Business Rates Retention Earmarked Reserve to fund the Town Centre Support Initiative that is set out in Section 6 of the presented agenda report.

19.

Draft Recovery Plan

O&S 19

The Committee considered a report that summarised what continued to be a highly effective response to the challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The report also detailed key recovery actions that had already been completed or underway and proposals to develop and implement the first iteration of the Council's medium and long term recovery and renewal plans.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) In thanking the lead officers, Members acknowledged that the outcomes arising from the recent Workshops had been reflected in the latest version of the Recovery and Renewal Action Plan; and
- (b) The meeting emphasised the importance of local residents and businesses in the Borough having appropriate access to Superfast Broadband provision. In acknowledging the community leadership role to be played by the Council in this respect, it was felt that this should be a key objective in the Recovery and Renewal Action Plan.

It was then:

RECOMMENDED

That the Committee **RECOMMEND** to the Hub Committee to:

1. note the Council's continuing response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic;
2. note the outputs arising from the recent Member Workshops (as set out in Appendix 1 of the presented agenda report);
3. note the progress on the development of the Recovery and Renewal Action Plan ('the Plan') as detailed in Appendix 1 of the presented agenda report;
4. delegate authority to the Group Leaders, in consultation with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to nominate Members to serve on the Task and Finish Groups (as outlined at Section 8.4 of the presented agenda report);
5. take into account the conclusions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Plan; and
6. request that a further update on progress against the development and delivery of the Plan be brought back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting to be held on 10 November 2020.

20.

Task & Finish Group Updates (if any)

*O&S 20

The Chairman reminded the Committee that they were currently no Task and Finish Group reviews being carried out. However, a meeting of the Rural Broadband Working Group had recently been held and the lead Hub Committee Member was invited to provide an update.

(i) Rural Broadband Working Group

The lead Hub Committee Member highlighted that there was now a Central Government grant available (£1,500 per property) towards enabling Superfast provision for any homes and businesses that were currently not planned to be in receipt of such connectivity (amounting to 2,378 in the Borough). In addition, neighbouring properties were able to pool their monies together to enable for clusters of currently excluded homes and businesses to be in receipt of Superfast provision.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised:

- (a) Whilst it was recognised that this would still not fully resolve the issue for all homes and businesses in the Borough (and community expectations should not be unduly raised), it should nonetheless be considered as a positive news story that could enable provision for a number of those highlighted 2,378 homes and businesses in the Borough;
- (b) The lead Hub Committee Member agreed to produce a Briefing Note that all Members could then disseminate to their local town and parish councils in order to raise awareness of the Grant;
- (c) It was noted that the Working Group and Connecting Devon and Somerset representatives were currently looking to identify

suitable clusters of properties before then working in partnership with them to facilitate their Grant applications.

21. **Annual Work Programme**

*O&S 21

The Committee considered the latest version of its draft Annual Work Programme for 2020/21 and, in discussion, the following update was made:

- In the event of the Hub Committee approving each of the recommendations arising from the draft Recovery and Renewal Plan (Minute O&S 19 above refers), it was acknowledged that the Work Programme would be updated to include a further Plan update at the Panel meeting to be held on 10 November 2020.

22. **Member Learning and Development opportunities arising from this meeting**

*O&S 22

The Chairman advised the Meeting that a 2021/22 Draft Budget Setting Workshop would be arranged to be held in the upcoming months. Once the details had been confirmed, all Members would be encouraged to attend this important session.

The Meeting concluded at 3.00 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
