

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, 26th April, 2022 at 2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Ewings
Vice Chairman Cllr Kimber

Cllr Blackman
Cllr Heyworth
Cllr Moyse
Cllr Southcott
Cllr Turnbull

Cllr Coulson
Cllr Kemp
Cllr Sellis
Cllr Spettigue
Cllr Vachon

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Crozier
Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Leech (Via Teams)
Cllr Mott (via Teams)
Cllr Ratcliffe
Cllr Yelland

Cllr Daniel (via Teams)
Cllr Jory
Cllr Moody (via Teams)
Cllr Pearce (via Teams)
Cllr Samuel (Via Teams)

Officers:

Director of Place & Enterprise
Head of Housing
Senior Specialist – Place Making
Democratic Services Specialist
Democratic Services Manager (via Teams)
Senior Specialist – Environmental Health (via Teams)
Head of Strategy & Projects (via Teams)
IT Specialist

64. **Apologies for Absence**
*O&S 64
Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllrs J Moody, L Samuel, and L Wood.
65. **Confirmation of Minutes**
*O&S 65
The minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 March 2022 were confirmed by the Meeting as a true and correct record.
66. **Declarations of Interest**
*O&S 66
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.
67. **Public Forum**
*O&S 67
The Chairman confirmed that no formal requests had been received in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.
68. **Third Sector Partners - West Devon CVS**
*O&S 68
The Hub Lead Member with responsibility for Leisure, Health, and Wellbeing introduced the Chief Officer of West Devon CVS, Karen Nolan. Ms Nolan provided an update which included:
- Covid-19 response
 - Challenges faced by the CVS
 - CVS Infrastructure and how support and information was provided
 - Shared page with South Hams advertising volunteer opportunities and to make connections
 - Connecting groups and people and encouraging collaboration
 - Review of the 5 year plan
 - Recruiting more trustees in the Tavistock area
- The Chair thanked the CVS for the work they undertake in the Borough and for the interesting presentation.
69. **Third Sector Partners -LiveWest**
*O&S 69
The Hub Lead Member with responsibility for Housing introduced Mr Paul Crawford, Chief Executive, and Ms Suzanne Brown, Executive Director of Operations, LiveWest, who provided the Committee with a presentation which highlighted:
- Working with 20 local authorities, entirely in the South West;

- Built 800 affordable homes last year and current stock of 38,000
- Ambition to build 15,000 affordable homes over next 10 years;
- Employ 14,000 people and have high employee satisfaction;
- £420 million available funding to build new homes and further borrowing in excess of £1 billion largely through bonds. Also successful Homes England grant for £123.6 million to build 2,550 new homes by March 2028;
- New home delivery for West Devon planning 6,000 affordable homes. Delivery through two routes: Section 106 and land led, looking to secure land rather than rely on developer, built 250 shared ownership homes last year and plan to build 400 this year;
- Dispose of properties on those dwellings which had been identified as needing significant investment, with capital receipt recycled for more affordable homes. Last year, in West Devon, eight houses sold, with another six to be disposed of during 2022/23;
- High demand in West Devon with 1,127 applicants for a home;
- Anti-social behaviour instances had increased during the pandemic and the organisation had struggled to get engagement with the community mental health teams;
- Working through backlog of maintenance repairs;
- Increased rents to 4.1% in line with standard rent guidance but provide financial support if required;
- All new homes built to a high Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) A or high B standard, with build programme in place to update current stock;
- Disproportionate number of homes in Borough requiring investment of £2.7 million to get homes to EPC standard rating 'C';
- House building limited by land availability but LiveWest had the desire to build more often in rural areas;

The Chair thanked LiveWest for their presentation and wished them well with the delivery of their plans and for the support that they provided to the residents of West Devon and the good working relationship with Council officers.

70. **Thematic Update -Housing**

*O&S 70

The Lead Hub Member for Improving Homes introduced the aspect of the Plan for West Devon that focused on Improving Homes. It was highlighted that:

- The Council was on track on 5 of the 6 theme priorities, which included the numbers of affordable housing delivered;
- The delayed action being related to providing guidance and support to landlords of multiple occupation. This was delayed by the 5 year homeless strategy;
- The housing crisis would form part of the Housing Strategy;
- They had received 20 questions from towns and parishes and responses would be published as an appendix to these minutes;

The Chair gave thanks to the Towns and Parishes for taking the time to discuss the housing issue and provide questions. In discussion, it was clarified that:

- The Housing Needs Survey undertaken in Brentor had concluded in December 2021, and would now be reviewed with a report back to the Parish Council within two weeks;
- The Lamerton initiative was confirmed as being closed;
- It was confirmed that the Hub Committee would soon be provided with a report aligning resources within housing to the long term aim of the Council.

One Member raised the issue of the integrity of the materials used to make photovoltaic cells and that it would be essential to ensure sourcing of the raw materials did not impact on the environment.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the progress in delivering against the Plan for West Devon "Improving Homes Thematic Delivery Plan".

Responses to the questions received from the Town and Parish Councils to be appended to the published minutes.

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

*O&S 71

There were no updates.

72. **Draft O&S Annual Work Programme 2022/23,inc. prep for next meeting**

*O&S 72

The draft proposal for the work programme was reviewed.

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

*O&S 73

There were no learning and development opportunities identified from this meeting.

74. **Chairman's Concluding Remarks**

*O&S 74

Being the last Committee meeting of the 2021/22 Municipal Year, the Chair gave thanks to the Committee for their attendance over the last year.

The Meeting concluded at 3.58 pm

Signed by:

Chairman

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Questions for WD O&S on 26 April 2022

TAP	Question	Email contact
Belstone PC	Belstone Parish Council are concerned about second homes in the parish preventing homes being available for people to live in. Are the council doing anything about making second home ownership less attractive? The majority of owners seem to claim it is a business and so get round paying council tax, and we have lots of homes left empty for most of the year.	Sally Fullwood parishclerk@belstonevillage.net
Answer:	<p>The Government has recently tightened this loophole and from 2023, second home owners benefiting from small business rate relief will have to provide evidence that their property was not only available for 140 days a year but actually let for 70 nights. We welcome these changes and will be working closely with the Valuation Office Agency to ensure second home owners pay their fair share.</p> <p>Through our political lobbying and as part of our declaration of a housing crisis we are looking for extensions to the legislation that governs short term lets in London to less than 90 days to cover areas such as ours and also to consider a separate planning class for short term lets and a proper licensing class to cater for them</p>	
Okehampton TC	Are West Devon monitoring the number of properties becoming holiday lets and Air Bnb?	Emma James <townclerk@okehampton.gov.uk>
Answer:	<p>Yes, we do maintain through our revenues database information regarding businesses operating as holiday lets and second homes which are paying council tax. Specific Air BNB data will be part of this picture but is not monitored independently. We are looking at capacity within the organisation as to how we can find resource to do more work on this very important subject. Separately AirBnB are starting to take their responsibilities more seriously and are proposing to start to work more closely with local authorities.</p>	
Okehampton TC	Have WDBC considered using brownfield sites (with services already installed) as suitable for some form of modular or temporary housing as Bristol City has done?	Emma James <townclerk@okehampton.gov.uk>
Answer:	<p>Yes – we would welcome any discussion to support owners of brownfield sites who wish to bring them forward for affordable housing. We have also been exploring modular methods of construction as part of our response to the housing crisis. With regards temporary accommodation the Council is redeveloping its homeless accommodation at Springhill Tavistock which we are hoping to be exemplar accommodation for homeless people in the Borough.</p>	
Okehampton TC	What response has there been to the initiative for householders to downsize and release family homes?	Emma James <townclerk@okehampton.gov.uk>
Answer:	<p>As part of our efforts to make best use of stock, we increased the incentive payment to tenants downsizing to £5k. We have had a good response to people joining the register wishing to downsize and have had 1 property released since the enhanced scheme was adopted in December. There has been a lack of suitable smaller properties at this time which has hampered moves.</p>	
Okehampton TC	Would the borough councils consider building Alms Houses which come under Charity rules and cannot be sold on under	Emma James <townclerk@okehampton.gov.uk>

	the Right to Buy legislation? (or funding same under existing charities?)	
Answer:	Yes. We have had discussions with almshouses about how we might support them, including support with Homes England, as the Council is a strategic partner. We also will support community land trusts and any other organisation to bring forward affordable housing in the Borough where a housing need can be demonstrated – although the tenure will be defined by the need rather than being the driver for development.	
Bere Ferrers PC	A question from the Bere Ferrers Parish Council is we have a further allocation of 20 houses, as stated in our Neighbourhood plan, do you want us to ascertain what land might be for development of social housing?	Caroline Metcalf Bereferrersparishcouncil @btconnect
Answer:	A community led approach to the delivery of new homes is often the most successful. Understanding your local area and what land owners are interested in facilitating delivery is a very constructive step.	
Bere Ferrers PC	Are you considering building social houses (council housing,) to overcome the lack of affordable homes?	Caroline Metcalf Bereferrersparishcouncil @btconnect
Answer:	We want to see delivery of housing that meets the needs of the area. To do that, the Council will use all of the levers it has available including; planning policy, viability tests, strategic partners (RPs), and in some limited locations and situations, direct delivery.	
Bere Ferrers PC	Are you also considering any action over holiday homes that are only occupied for a very short period each year?	Caroline Metcalf Bereferrersparishcouncil @btconnect
Answer:	The Council has no powers to take action against those who choose to occupy their second home for short periods of time. However, it has and will continue to lobby central government to allow Councils to put in place stimulus to encourage houses into use such as: increasing Council tax on second homes, preventing short term lets for more than 90 days a year, preventing 2 nd homes from being able to become business rated and then benefit from small business rate relief.	

Tavistock TC	The Action plan provides that WDBC will develop a mechanism to clearly justify the need for the following tenures: affordable rent, social rent, discount market sale, shared ownership private rent, and self- build. This was to be completed by March 2021 for smaller areas. Is this now available for larger areas like Tavistock parish? Can this mechanism be made available to the Tavistock Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (TNPSG)?	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	This work is currently in progress. Our housing analyst is providing a robust set of maps which includes data sets collected from various sources such as ONS. This will inform the picture of need against supply within the main towns and the local centres. In the 2 towns in West Devon the SHMNA document, produced for the Joint Local Plan is used to inform need. There are supplementary sources of information that are used such as the housing registers for rent and intermediate home ownership, the self-build register and bidding trends from the housing register. The Year 2 action in the Housing Strategy identifies that this work will commence this year.	
Tavistock TC	The Action plan states that WDBC will work creatively with Devon County Council to provide specialist adapted housing for people requiring support to live independently and that the council will have a local needs profile by March 2022. Can this local needs profile be shared with TNPSG?	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk

Answer:	WD & SH councils have a disabled adapted panel which meets bi-monthly. This panel ensures that we are proactive and creative to resolve housing solutions. We will seek to adapt current stock where a resident has a need. This information also feeds in to data that DCC collects. DCC have previously indicated that they are in the process of updating the older persons housing need documents and work is ongoing to look at other options of accommodation with support needs for other groups requiring specialist accommodation.	
Tavistock TC	The Action plan states that WDBC will support an appropriately located planning application for an extra care housing scheme in West Devon, assuming this is the extra care facility on Plymouth rd, when can we expect to see the negotiated Section 106 for that extra care facility?	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	This is in negotiation and will be publically available when that has been concluded.	
Tavistock TC	In accordance with the Action plan, has WDBC developed an intermediate housing register specifically for key workers with supply from the private rented sector through Seamoor lettings? How many of these properties are in Tavistock?	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	Action not completed. However we have launched our SeaMoor Homes website www.seamoorhomes.co.uk (where private landlords can use the council to manage and place people in properties. This has also been extended to advertise properties that are a) not government funded shared ownership or are being sold as Discounted Market properties.	
Tavistock TC	With regard to future housing trends and needs, as described in the Action plan, are there any areas of significant interest in Tavistock and can this data be shared with TNPSG?	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	This work is in progress but can be shared with the TNPSG. Alex Rehaag is in contact with Ursula – co-ordinator of TNPSG	
Tavistock TC	The housing strategy has identified that Average rental per month has been exceeding the local housing allowance for some time, what does WDBC propose to do to rectify this situation? Will WDBC lobby for an increase in the amount of Local Housing Allowance for the district? Can WDBC and South Hams be removed from the Plymouth Broad Rental Market Area?	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	The Council has been lobbying central government specifically on this point. It has asked for a review of the broad market area to better reflect the granularity of house prices and for the thresholds to be raised.	
Tavistock TC	More Specific Questions: <i>1. How many households in Tavistock are on the social housing list (Devon Home Choice) for WDBC?</i>	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	227. Please note this figure will not include people that have a local connection to Tavistock through employment, immediate family, former residence	
Tavistock TC	<i>2. In the last two years, how many households from Tavistock on the housing list have been able to secure social housing in Tavistock?</i>	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	47. Please note this figure is for people whose last address was in Tavistock. It will not include those people that have a local connection through the adopted allocations policy. Attached to this email response.	
Tavistock TC	<i>3. In the last two years, how many households from Tavistock on the housing list have secured social housing elsewhere in the district?</i>	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	19 . Please note this figure will not include those people that may have wanted to reside in Tavistock but a lack of Affordable Housing at the time it was required has forced them to have to move elsewhere.	

Tavistock TC	<i>4. In the last two years, how many households from elsewhere in the district on the housing list have been able to secure social housing in Tavistock?</i>	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	<p>64 - Please note this will not include people that have connections to Tavistock through employment, work or family as per our local allocations policy. There may also have been families included in this figure that have been placed in temporary accommodation elsewhere in the Borough. There is also primary legislation that needs to be considered in the form of homelessness legislation and the reasonable preference categories that has to be considered. Failure to consider this very important information will result in legal challenge.</p> <p>SUPPLEMENTARY RESPONSE</p> <p>It is difficult to interrogate our systems to get an accurate figure on how many people have an immediate link to the town of Tavistock. Given that it is one of the two towns in the Borough, there will be many people that have a local connection through the family, employment and former residence connection, please refer to the Local Allocations Policy document. In Tavistock, any new developments should be allocated 50% to people with local connection to the town and 50% that have a Borough wide connection.</p>	
Tavistock TC	<i>5. How many homeless applications has WDBC received from households in Tavistock in the last two years?</i>	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	165 from April 2020 to present.	
Tavistock TC	<i>6. How many households from Tavistock has WDBC placed into temporary accommodation in the last two years?</i>	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	We are only able to give the data on people whose last address was Tavistock so the figure of people "from Tavistock" is likely to be significantly higher. 8 households from April 2020 to present have required temporary accommodation. Please also note that due to Covid there was an eviction ban from 17 th November 2020 until 31 May 2021 which lessened the amount of people requiring temporary accommodation	
Tavistock TC	<i>7. How many households from Tavistock has WDBC placed into temporary accommodation elsewhere in the district in the last two years?</i>	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	As above we are only able to give data on people whose last address was Tavistock so the figure of people "from Tavistock" is likely to be higher. 5 of the 8 households were placed elsewhere in the Borough.	
Tavistock TC	<i>8. What is the average length of time that a household from Tavistock remained in temporary accommodation in the last two years?</i>	Jan Smallacombe Janet.smallacombe@tavistock.gov.uk
Answer:	Over the last 12 months the average length of time in temporary accommodation across West Devon was 65 days. We do not record the data individually	

In terms of questions 6,7 and 8 from Tavistock Town Council, it is impossible to give the exact figures without going in to the individual cases for each case on the system which would require significant resource.