

SOUTH HAMS EXECUTIVE



**Minutes of a meeting of the South Hams Executive held on
Thursday, 1st December, 2022 at 10.00 am at the Council Chamber - Follaton
House**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Pearce
Vice Chairman

Cllr Baldry

Cllr Hawkins

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Abbott

Cllr Birch

Cllr Brazil

Cllr Long

Cllr McKay

Cllr O'Callaghan

Cllr Pringle

Cllr Spencer

Cllr Sweett

Cllr Taylor

Cllr Thomas

Officers:

Senior Leadership Team

Monitoring Officer

Democratic Services Manager

Assistant Director - Planning

Deputy Section 151 Officer

Head of Housing

Head of Revenue & Benefits

Senior Specialist – Benefits

Head of Strategy, Corporate Projects & Partnerships

Customer Service Improvement Manager

Head of Waste and Environmental Services

Senior Specialist – Parking

Specialist – Climate Change

Head of Organisational Development

Head of Assets

Senior Specialist - Engineering

51. **Minutes**
E.51/22
The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 13 October 2022 were confirmed as a true and correct record.
52. **Declarations of Interest**
E.52/22
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.
53. **Public Question Time**
E.53/22
The Leader informed that no public questions had been received in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules.
54. **Executive Forward Plan**
E.54/22
Members were presented with the most recently published version of the Executive Forward Plan that set out items on the agenda for Executive meetings for the next four months and duly noted its contents.
- In discussion, the following points were raised:
- (a) Members noted that the Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 Write Off Report for 2022/23 had since been deferred for consideration to the next Executive meeting (to be held on 31 January 2023);
 - (b) The Executive expressed its wish for the 'Planning Improvement Plan – Six Month Progress Review' to be considered before the May 2023 local elections.
55. **Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals 2023/24**
E.55/22
Consideration was given to a report that outlined the draft revenue and capital budget proposals for 2023/24 to 2025/26.
- In discussion, particular reference was made to:
- (a) the current capital bidding process. At the request of the Executive, officers set out the current capital bidding process and advised that, in future years, it would be amended to enable greater Member input at an earlier stage. This point was welcomed and the Leader asked that, if any Members had any requests that they wished to be considered for inclusion for the 2023/24 Financial Year, then they must let either Members of the Executive or their Group Leader know at the earliest possible opportunity;
 - (b) the increases in external audit fees. Despite receiving an explanation from the Section 151 Officer regarding the increases in external audit fees, some Members were of the view that audit process for all local authorities were no longer fit for purpose or represented good value for money;

- (c) recommendation 5. In reply to a question, the Chief Executive wished to firstly apologise to the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that he had not been made aware of the proposal for an Advisory Committee to be established to consider the draft Budget Proposals for 2023/24 prior to the agenda papers having been published. For clarity, the intention of this recommendation was to enable for all non-Executive Members to have an opportunity to consider the draft Budget for 2023/24 which, in light of the recent changes in Committee membership, would not now have been possible via a joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny and Development Management Committees.

It was then:

RESOLVED

- i) That the forecast budget gap for 2023/24 of £195,616 (1.7% of the Projected Net Budget for 23/24 of £11.43million) and the position for future years be noted;
- ii) That the timescales for closing the budget gap in 2023/24 and future years to achieve long term financial sustainability be noted;
- iii) That the current level of Unearmarked and Earmarked Reserves (as set out in Appendix C of the published agenda report) be noted, as well as the net contributions to Earmarked Reserves modelled for 2023/24 (as set out in Appendix D of the published agenda report);
- iv) That the outline initial proposals for the Capital Programme for 2023/24 of £2.070 million (as set out in Appendix E of the presented agenda report) be noted (with Full Business Cases to be presented to Members as part of the January 2023 budget cycle of meetings).

And that Council be **RECOMMENDED**:

- v) to set up an advisory Committee comprising of all Non-Executive Members to meet in January 2023, to consider the 2023/24 Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals and make recommendations to the Executive on the Budget Proposals (meeting date proposed of Thursday 19 January 2023); and
- vi) that South Hams District Council continues to be part of the Devon Business Rates Pool for 2023/24, subject to there being no announcements within the Finance Settlement (expected to be announced in mid-December), which in the opinion of the Section 151 Officer (in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Finance), would change this recommendation.

56.

Better Lives for All - Quarter 2 Integrated Performance Management Report

E.56/22

Members considered a report that set out the Integrated Performance Management report covering the Quarter 2 period. The report also highlighted the strategic risk profile of the Council, performance against key indicators and an overview of the capital

programme

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- (a) A local Ward Member drew attention to the comments regarding the Caravan Club at Steamer Quay, Totnes. In so doing, the Member expressed his disappointment at the apparent lack of progress being made in respect of the validation of the planning application and the agreement of the lease on this site. In reply, officers committed to providing a progress update to local Ward Members outside of this meeting;
- (b) A Member recognised the reliance on agreed time extensions in determining planning applications and welcomed the earlier comment that the Planning Improvement Plan would be brought back to the Executive during the early months of 2023 (Minute E.54/22 above refers).

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the progress in delivery of the Better Lives for All thematic delivery plan and the overall strategic performance of the Council be noted.

57. Customer Access Strategy & Contact Centre Update

E.57/22

Consideration was given to a report that provided a progress update on the Council's Customer Access Strategy

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- (a) Although not forcing all residents to interact with the Council digitally, the improved effectiveness of the online service would encourage those who preferred to conduct their business with the Council online to do so, thereby releasing capacity and improving effectiveness for those residents who preferred to contact the Council by telephone or book an appointment to visit in person;
- (b) It was noted that the proposal to offer a Home Visiting service was to be launched imminently and would offer the most vulnerable amongst the Council's residents the opportunity to meet with Council staff in their own homes. Visiting Officers had been trained in a number of different subject areas and had developed the expertise to offer assistance and signposting on a wide range of matters. The Home Visiting Service was widely welcomed by Members;
- (c) With regard to partnership working, it was confirmed that the Council had increased its work with local partners (for example Citizens Advice and the Community Voluntary Service), with a view to offering vulnerable residents a more expansive and joined up service;
- (d) Concerns were raised regarding how the Council could ensure that its message would reach those most in need. In response it was confirmed that a new text messaging service was to be introduced and that Local Ward Members were key in advising their local residents and Town and Parish Councils of the services available and how these could be accessed. In expanding upon the point, a Member

highlighted that Town Council offices were open during the week and there was scope for the District Council to access its residents through this means. Finally, all Members recognised that the Strategy currently omitted to make reference to the fact that residents should contact their local Ward Member(s) if they were unable to gain a response from the Council;

- (e) Some Members raised their concerns about the lack of a fully operational Reception facility at Follaton House. In reply, it was confirmed that a Virtual Reception was proposed to be introduced in the New Year whereby members of the public could access the building to use telephones and computers to initiate contact with Council staff. In addressing concerns that an unmanned reception was unsatisfactory for many residents and the consequent detrimental impact on tenants, a Member stated that travel to Follaton House was not easy or convenient for many of those living outside the Totnes area. As a result, improving other methods of contacting the Council benefitted many residents and released resource to help support residents in other ways;
- (f) A Member queried whether the new digital service had specifically taken account of those residents with partial or total hearing loss. In response, it was confirmed that, although the Council's telephony system was voice only, Council staff had access to video calling and that once initial contact had been made, staff could arrange to contact the resident via a video call which would assist hearing impaired residents who were able to lip read. It was agreed that this service should be advertised as being available;
- (g) As a general point, a number of Members regretted the reference to 'customers' and not 'residents'. Given that residents had no choice as to the local authority that they were served by, it was felt that the corporate emphasis should be on 'residents' as opposed to 'customers'.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the Customer Access Strategy principles and approach (as set out in section 3 of the presented agenda report) be approved;
2. That the approach and actions to implement the Customer Access Strategy (as set out in section 4 of the presented agenda report) be endorsed; and
3. That the actions taken to improve the performance of the Contact Centre (as highlighted in Appendix A of the presented agenda report) be noted.

58.

Cost of Living Crisis: Plans for Household Support Allocation

E.58/22

The Executive was presented with a report that provided information on the latest round of Government funding and set out a range of options for how the fund could be administered to best help those in the most need.

In the ensuing debate, it was stated that:

- (a) The Household Support Fund was to open today (1 December 2022) and would close on 31 March 2023, with all Funds needing to be administered by that time. Members highlighted that the Council had an excellent track record with regard to the efficient distribution of Grant funding;
- (b) A Member queried the possibility that some payments could be made before Christmas. Officers replied that, whilst they would not wish to over commit, it was hoped that, in some cases where the Council held all necessary details, some payments could be administered later in the month;
- (c) Clarity was sought on how eligibility for payments would be decided and whether or not any funds would be held in reserve for any residents with a sudden and desperate need for help. By way of a comfort, officers confirmed that there were funds in reserve for any such residents in desperate need;
- (d) Members welcomed the discretionary element of the Scheme which afforded the Council the opportunity and discretion to develop its own eligibility criteria but it was requested that further clarity be added to part 1 of the recommendation set out in the presented agenda report.

As a result, an amendment to recommendation 1 was **PROPOSED, SECONDED** and, when put to the vote, declared **CARRIED** that the Executive:

*'Instructs officers to take immediate steps to progress support payments of £650 to working age households who are not receiving **Passported Benefits but are receiving Council Tax Reduction** on 1 December 2022;'*

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That officers be instructed to take immediate steps to progress support payments of £650 to working age households who are not receiving Passported Benefits, but are receiving Council Tax Reduction on 1 December 2022;
2. That officers be instructed to take immediate steps to progress support payments of £300 to households in receipt of council tax disabled band reduction on 1 December 2022;
3. That officers be instructed to work with partners to distribute slow cookers and cookbooks, electric blankets, warm clothing and sleeping bags to households based on need and that £10,000 from the Fund is ring-fenced for this purpose; and
4. That the use of the balance of the funding for an open application process from low-income households most in need of support be approved.

The Executive considered a report that provided an update on the progress made against the Council's Housing Crisis Declaration. The report also sought approval of a Section 106 offsite affordable housing contribution for a development in St Anns Chapel.

In the ensuing discussion, reference was made to:

- (a) the progress that was being made following the Housing Crisis Declaration. Members wished to put on record their thanks to the Head of Housing and her Housing Team for the progress that was being made;
- (b) the challenges and negative impact arising from the increased provision of short-term lets in the South Hams. In providing an update to the meeting, the Leader advised that there was an increased recognition at Central Government level over the challenges associated with high numbers of short-term lets in the South Hams. Furthermore, there was also national recognition that the Local Housing Allowance was no longer fit for purpose;
- (c) the Ropewalk site at Kingsbridge. Members confirmed that they were committed to working in partnership with the Town Council to bring forward a suitable scheme and that no views had yet been reached with regard to the most appropriate delivery option for this site;
- (d) the St Anns Chapel development. The pace of the development at St Anns Chapel was commended and its local benefits were recognised. Nonetheless, a Member expressed his concerns over the cost of the development and his hope that, upon its completion, a project review would be undertaken;
- (e) a second homes premium on Council Tax. A number of Members welcomed the pending Central Government legislation to enable for local authorities to charge a premium on Council Tax for second homeowners.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the progress against the Housing Crisis Declaration be noted; and
2. That the allocation of Section 106 funding for affordable housing at St Anns Chapel be approved.

60. Waste and Recycling Services Update

E.60/22

The Executive was presented with a report which set out the progress made to date with the transfer of the Waste and Recycling Service and the costs incurred to date on the service transfer.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- (a) The lead Executive Member for Environment highlighted the overall success of the transfer and stated that performance had been far better than had been expected. When questioned on why this had been the case, the Member stated that this was

largely attributed to hard work and open and regular communication; collaborative working and use of local knowledge and experience of all members of staff;

- (b) Whilst acknowledging the reasons for the delay, the lead Member expressed some disappointment that a Food Waste collection service could not be offered yet. Officers informed that it was hoped that such a service could be provided by June 2023;
- (c) In response to a query around current take up of the new Garden Waste Service, it was confirmed that 4,122 subscriptions had so far been secured with a target of 11,500 needed for the service to break-even. A Member proceeded to question how members of the public who were not able to subscribe via the Council website could sign up to the Scheme.

In reply, it was confirmed that the subscriptions could be taken over the phone by means of the Council's main switchboard number and that all Contact Centre staff were able to manage such requests. Finally, the need for a communications campaign to be undertaken to increase take up was recognised;

- (d) In light of recent staff recruitment and retention issues, officers provided an update to the meeting. In so doing, officers stated that a successful recruitment exercise had been recently undertaken and, as a result, it was likely that the reliance upon Agency staff to fill positions would fall from around 30% to nearer the national average of 10-15%.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the successful transfer of the service, the improvement in service performance and the key operational risks that the service is operating under be noted;
2. That the approach to improving the service throughout the transitional period (as set out in Section 4 of the presented agenda report) be endorsed; and
3. That the work underway to build a comprehensive budget forecast for the current operating phase and prepare financial projections of the service beyond the transition phase be noted.

61.

Motorhomes Policy Review

E.61/22

Members considered a report that set out the findings of the Pilot Motorhome Home Policy that had been in operation for the past year.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- (a) Whilst the site at Longmarsh Car Park had proven to be the most successful during the Pilot, it had also received the most number of complaints. The lead officer summarised the headline areas for which complaints had been received and

emphasised that the Council had taken enforcement action against anti-social behaviour and had issued a number of penalty charge notices;

- (b) Specifically regarding the Caravan Club at Totnes, local Ward Members had received concerns from the site owners in respect of the competition being generated from the Longmarsh Car Park site. In countering these concerns, other Members stated that the Council was offering a different service to that being operated by the Caravan Club and indeed other campsites;
- (c) A Member asked that additional signage be placed in some locations as the site in Kingsbridge was not clearly signposted and as a result some Motorhomes had stopped in an incorrect nearby car park;
- (d) When questioned, officers stated that the policy would continue to evolve and the ability remained for additional sites to come forward.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the permanent adoption of the Motorhome Policy be approved for the following car parks only:

- Longmarsh Car Park, Totnes;
- Leonards Road Car Park, Ivybridge;
- Poundwell Meadow Car Park, Modbury;
- Park & Ride Car Park, Dartmouth; and
- Cattlemarket Car Park, Kingsbridge

62.

Devon Carbon Plan

E.62/22

Members were presented with a report which provided details of the Devon Carbon Plan and also provided an update on the progress made against the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

In debate, it was confirmed that much of the Council's work to date on its own Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan had been aligned with the work undertaken by Devon County Council and it was hoped that this approach would continue.

It was then:

RECOMMENDATION

That Council be **RECOMMENDED** to:

1. endorse the ambition and objectives set out within the Devon Carbon Plan; and
2. revise its Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan to show how it will contribute to delivering the Devon Carbon Plan.

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MINUTES E.55/22 (PARTS V and VI) & E.62/22 WHICH ARE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL MEETING TO BE HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2022) WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM 5.00PM ON MONDAY, 12 DECEMBER 2022 UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES

The Meeting concluded at 1.00 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
