

SOUTH HAMS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL



Minutes of a meeting of the **South Hams Overview and Scrutiny Panel** held on **Thursday, 25th February, 2016 at 11.00 am** at the **Cary Room - Follaton House**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Saltern
Vice Chairman Wingate

Baldry	Hopwood
Blackler	Brown
Green	Hawkins
Horsburgh	May
Pennington	Pringle
Smerdon	

In attendance:

Councillors:

Bastone	Bramble
Brazil	Foss
Gilbert	Hicks
Hitchins	Hodgson
Pearce	Steer
Ward	Wright

Officers:

Sophie Hosking	Executive Director
Steve Jordan	Executive Director Head of Paid Service

75. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 14 January 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

76. **Declarations of Interest**

Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting. These were recorded as follows:-

Cllr M F Saltern declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Item 8: 'Annual Devon and Cornwall Housing Update' (Minute O&S.79/15 below refers) by virtue of being a non-Executive Director of Devon and Cornwall Housing and left the meeting during consideration of this agenda item.

77. Public Forum

In accordance with the Public Forum Procedure Rules, no items were raised at this meeting.

78. Executive Forward Plan

Members were presented with the most recently published Executive Forward Plan.

In discussion, the Chairman advised that he was exercising his discretion to schedule updates on the following future Executive agenda items to be made to the next Panel meeting on 17 March 2016:-

- Homeless Strategy; and
- Complaints Policy.

79. Annual Devon & Cornwall Housing (DCH) Presentation from Paul Crawford (DCH Chief Executive)

The Vice-Chairman welcomed Messrs Paul Crawford (Devon and Cornwall Housing (DCH) Group Chief Executive) and Doug Stein (DCH Group Director of Asset Management) to the Panel meeting.

With particular reference made to the South Hams area, Mr Crawford proceeded to undertake a presentation that covered the following specific areas:-

- The context of DCH, its activity, operating performance and development activity;
- The context of legislative changes taking place in the housing sector, particularly in relation to the Welfare Reform and Work Bill and Housing and Planning Bill;
- The impact that these legislative changes are having on housing associations and, in particular, DCH and how the organisation was responding in terms of its efficiency programme and revised development aspirations; and
- How the Council and DCH could work more collaboratively with one another.

In concluding his presentation, Mr Crawford highlighted:-

- DCH's record of delivery and excellent performance had placed the organisation in a strong position;
- Difficult decisions were having to be made to manage our risks and maintain financial strength; and
- DCH was felt to be well prepared for an uncertain future.

During the ensuing debate, reference was made to:-

- (a) contractor failure. In reply to a question submitted in advance, Mr Crawford informed that, from the examples cited, a series of lessons had now been learned in respect of the level of risk that DCH exposed itself to in its relationships with contractors;
- (b) the age profile of South Hams residents living in DCH properties. Mr Crawford confirmed that, whilst the average age of South Hams residents was older in comparison to the remainder of Devon and Cornwall, he would provide a breakdown of the profile figures to Members after the meeting;
- (c) the Repairs and Maintenance programme. The Panel was advised that DCH continued to invest in its programme. Whilst the average time taken for all emergency repairs (nearly 100%) was an admirable performance for DCH, Mr Crawford did advise that there was still a need to improve upon the time taken for longer term repair works;
- (d) the relationship with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). In reply to a question, Mr Crawford informed that, as the largest landlord in the South West region, DCH had developed a good working relationship with DCLG and he was heartened that the Secretary of State was listening and sympathetic to the issues faced by DCH;
- (e) innovative and passive housing solutions. Mr Crawford confirmed that DCH was aware of these solutions. However, the organisation was not actively pursuing these at the moment because the capital costs did not currently represent good value for money;
- (f) senior officer pay awards. A Member wished to put on record his concerns at the level of pay award increases which had been granted to senior DCH officers in recent years;
- (g) the DCH Community Interest Company (CIC). Following a governance review, it was noted that the decision had been made to dissolve the CIC during early 2016/17. Whilst it was

acknowledged that this would result in the Council losing its nominated representative on the Company, it was equally recognised that conflicts of interest had made the role incredibly difficult for nominated Members;

- (h) the future working relationship between the Council and DCH. The Panel expressed a general wish for the two organisations to work more closely together and to improve communication links between DCH and Council local ward Members.

In conclusion, Members were of the view that:-

- DCH representatives should be invited to report back annually to the Panel;
- DCH should review its operational contact points and ensure that Members are informed of their relevant local contact officer(s) details; and
- DCH should give consideration to how it could best ensure that local Ward Member(s) were kept informed of relevant issues within their local areas.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That DCH representatives should be invited to report back annually to the Panel;
2. That DCH should review its operational contact points and ensure that Members be informed of their relevant local contact officer(s) details; and
3. That DCH should give consideration to how it could best ensure that local Ward Member(s) were kept informed of relevant issues within their local areas.

80. **T18 - ICT Update**

A report was considered that provided the Panel with an overview of the ICT elements of the T18 Programme. In particular, the report covered the following key areas:-

- Background of ICT projects;
- Civica relationship and performance;
- Current ICT project plan; and
- Current issues and key risks.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) A Member expressed his disappointment that the Contact Centre telephony was not anticipated to be complete until the end of July 2016 and highlighted the detrimental impact of this delay on the Customer Services team. In reply, the lead Executive Member for Support Services informed that this timescale was largely as a consequence of budget and procurement reasons;
- (b) The view was expressed that the length of the automated telephony message was far too long and should therefore be shortened;
- (c) With regard to the In-Cab technology, it was noted that the delay in go-live for this project had been attributed to the need to ensure that the product purchased was required to be compatible to the Civica software platform;
- (d) In respect of the graphs illustrating the number of web based transactions completed and the number of online accounts that had been requested by customers, the Group Manager – Support Services confirmed that he would find out the reasoning behind the spike in the early January 2016 figures and would advise Members accordingly;
- (e) A Member was of the view that, when considering the launch had been light touch to date, it was commendable that over 1,800 online accounts had been requested by customers;
- (f) It was noted that, on the rising of the next Panel meeting on 17 March 2016, a demonstration for all interested Members would be undertaken on the planning portal and some online processes. Once this demonstration had been conducted, it was then intended to carry out a similar presentation for town and parish councils;
- (g) The difficulties of broadband provision in very rural parishes was recognised by all present and it was accepted that the potential for all areas in the South Hams to increase their digital capability may not always be possible. As a potential solution, a Member proceeded to encourage colleagues who were aware of parishes that were struggling in this regard to speak to their local Devon County Council (DCC) Member in an attempt to see if they were willing to use a proportion of their Member Locality Fund to improve connectivity.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the progress to date on the T18 ICT Transformation Programme be noted.

81. **Health and Wellbeing Update**

In introducing the annual update on the Health and Wellbeing agenda, the lead Executive Member made particular reference to:-

- the close linkages between the Health and Wellbeing agenda and Our Plan: South Hams; and
- the Devon County Council (DCC) grant funding for district councils in Devon towards supporting Health and Wellbeing projects having now ceased.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) A Member was of the view that, whilst large sums of monies were being spent in this regard, there was a distinct lack of effective measures demonstrated in the paper presented to the Panel;
- (b) Specifically with regard to the 'Big Community Switch' intervention, it was confirmed that iChooser electricity contract switching provider did not receive a fee from the applicant. However, whilst iChooser did receive a finder's fee from the successful energy company, this fee was split with the Council on a 50:50 basis and the Council intended to recycle its proportion of the fee into further marketing of the scheme;
- (c) When looking to the future, the Panel was of the view that Health and Wellbeing must be a key theme within the Our Plan: South Hams document. Moreover, the relevant actions related to Health and Wellbeing should sit within the auspices of the wider corporate Our Plan: South Hams action plan. In respect of Member involvement, the Panel tasked officers in the first instance with assessing both what the Council could realistically do to progress the Health and Wellbeing agenda and the practicalities of how Members could be engaged in this process.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the update paper and the work carried out on the Health and Wellbeing agenda be noted; and
2. That officers be tasked with assessing both what the Council can realistically do to progress the

Health and Wellbeing agenda and the practicalities of how Members can be engaged in this process.

82. **Complaints Update**

The Executive Director (Service Delivery and Commercial Development) introduced a presentation that provided the Panel with an update on the Council's approach to complaints.

During her introduction, specific reference was made to:-

- the Council's approach to complaints now being to consider them as 'a problem to be solved and not a position to be defended';
- there now being more emphasis placed upon communicating with the complainant to identify the specific concerns and outcome required;
- staff training. The Panel was advised that over 90 members of staff had recently been in receipt of Ombudsman training, which had been very well received by those who had attended;
- the new corporate complaints policy. Whilst still in the drafting phase, it was noted that the key headlines from the new policy were that greater emphasis would be placed upon early informal resolution of complaints and proactive resolution of complaints, as opposed to defensive actions;
- the cultural shift. Members were informed that staff were now taking greater ownership and responsibility for their own mistakes and there was more onus being given to seeking satisfactory resolution to complaints and then learning lessons from them.

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

- (a) A number of Members wished to commend the Executive Director for the considerable corporate effort (and steps that had been taken) to improve the Council's approach to complaints;
- (b) In response to a request for a breakdown of complaint numbers, it was noted that these would be included in the Performance Measures report that would be presented to the next Panel meeting on 17 March 2016;

83.

Draft Annual Work Programme 2015/16

The Panel considered its draft 2015/16 Work Programme and made particular reference to:-

- the agenda for the next Panel meeting on 17 March 2016. In light of the likely length of the agenda, it was agreed that the following items should be removed from the Work Programme for this meeting:-
 - T18 Programme Update;
 - Food Safety Service Plan;
 - Task and Finish Group Updates; and
 - O+S Annual Report – Final Draft;

In light of the length of the agenda, the Panel agreed that this meeting should commence at the earlier start time of 9.30am.

- the Homeless Strategy and Complaints Policy. The Panel was reminded of its earlier decision (O&S.78/15 above refers) to be in receipt of updates on the Council's draft Homeless Strategy and Complaints Policy at its next meeting before these matters were then considered by the Executive;
- a provisional additional special Panel meeting date. Members endorsed the proposal to invite Local Enterprise Partnership and Clinical Commissioning Group representatives to attend a special Panel meeting at 10.00am on Thursday, 21 April 2016.

The Meeting concluded at 1.10 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
