

SOUTH HAMS EXECUTIVE



Minutes of a meeting of the **South Hams Executive** held on **Thursday, 16th June, 2016** at **10.00 am** at the **Repton Room** **- Follaton House**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Tucker
Vice Chairman Cllr Ward

Cllr Bastone
Cllr Wright

Cllr Hicks

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Blackler
Cllr Brown
Cllr Green
Cllr Holway
Cllr May
Cllr Pennington
Cllr Saltern
Cllr Vint

Cllr Bramble
Cllr Cuthbert
Cllr Hodgson
Cllr Hopwood
Cllr Pearce
Cllr Rowe
Cllr Steer
Cllr Wingate

Officers:

Sophie Hosking
Steve Jordan

Steve Mullineaux
Patrick Whymer

Executive Director
Executive Director Head of Paid
Service
Group Manager Support Services
Lead Specialist DM

1. **Minutes**

E.01/16

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 7 April 2016 were confirmed as a true record and signed off by the Chairman.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

E.02/16

Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of this meeting but none were made.

However, Cllr Bastone advised that he would abstain from the vote on Item 8: 'Admiral Court, Dartmouth Phase 4 Business Case' (Minute E.05/16 below refers) by virtue of being a local Ward Member. He remained in the meeting for the duration of the discussion on this item.

3. **Public Question Time**

E.03/16

It was noted that the following question had been tabled in line with Executive Procedure Rules:

Question from Cllr Judy Pearce:

The coastal footpath is an essential economic driver in the South Hams. The news that Natural England intends to cut funding by 50% in six months' time will mean that it will be impossible to maintain the path and signage to expected standards. Substantial efforts at rationalization and cost savings have already been put into place with the 'New Deal' arrangements three years ago and it will be very difficult to absorb any further cuts at short notice.

The AONB unit will discuss this on Friday, and the Coast Path Partnership is holding a crisis meeting. It is to be hoped that both will feed through their deliberations so that any action can be effectively coordinated.

Since the action by Natural England to reduce funding of the coastal path by 50% threatens an essential tourist attraction in all Devon and Cornwall coastal local authorities, please can the Executive take immediate action to contact these authorities to ask them to lobby their MPs urgently for a reversal of this decision, and, in the case of the Devon authorities, to give full support to the County Council as the highway authority in its attempts to negotiate improved alternative arrangements?

In response, the Leader thanked Cllr Pearce for raising this question and stated that it was well timed and a very important issue. He proposed that a letter be sent to all Devon authorities and Cornwall Council to ask that they lobby local MPs. He also proposed that a copy of the letter be sent to all Town and Parish Councils as it would impact their areas. The Interim AONB Manager should prepare the letter and also send it to Natural England, DEFRA and the Minister. Members agreed this way forward, and one Member asked that Devon Countryside Alliance also be lobbied.

4. **Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme**

E.04/16

Members were asked to consider a report that sought approval to participate in the national Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme (SVPRS).

The Leader introduced the report and advised that the Council was working with Devon County Council on this matter. A number of Members supported the initiative as set out in the report. Members did question the level of ongoing support, in terms of security and wider wellbeing for the families involved. The COP Lead confirmed that there was a robust process in place and the Council would work with third sector organisations to support the families. One Member queried the statement within the report that there was widespread support for the initiative across the South Hams. The COP Lead accepted that whilst there was support across the District and no negativity had been expressed, it was fair to say that the majority of the support was centred around the Totnes area.

Finally, the Leader confirmed that the properties identified for this initiative were not properties that were available to residents but were normally for emergency use and were currently surplus to requirements.

It was then:

RESOLVED:

That the Council be **RECOMMENDED** to:

1. Agree to participate in the national Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme (SVPRS);
2. Agree to use the existing Private Sector Lease scheme and the existing Council Direct Lets Scheme to be used for purposes of resettlement in accordance with the SVPRS; and
3. That any specific details of the scheme are delegated to the COP Lead for Housing, Revenues and Benefits, in consultation with the Leader of Council and the Customer First Portfolio Holder.

5. **Admiral Court, Dartmouth Phase 4 - Business Case**

E.05/16

Members were asked to consider a report that sought approval of expenditure of up to £600,000 to develop commercial units at Admiral Court, Dartmouth.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer First introduced the report and set out the detail.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- The Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Commissioning confirmed that this report had arisen from the Council's 'Invest to Earn' Policy;
- A number of Members supported the proposal, particularly the inclusion of 'starter units';
- The COP Lead Assets confirmed that the proposal represented good value for money and the yields used in the business case were conservative. He also confirmed that the development would not adversely impact on the existing units as the appropriate infrastructure was put in at the beginning;
- In response to questions from the Leader, the COP Lead Assets advised that he had considered whether the report should be wholly exempt, but that the process would be open and would include a score for value for money and quality so the market would still determine the price.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That Council be **RECOMMENDED** to approve the expenditure of up to £600,000 as detailed in the presented report, so as to develop commercial units at Admiral Court, Dartmouth.

6. **K2 Masterplan, Kingsbridge**

E.06/16

Members were asked to consider a report that sought approval of expenditure of £76,000 from the Land and Development Earmarked Reserve, to enable the appointment of a Lead Consultant to develop a comprehensive masterplan for Kingsbridge Quay and environs (known as K2).

The Portfolio Holder for Customer First introduced the report. A local Ward Member expressed concern at the level of expenditure. In response, the COP Lead Assets advised that the price included undertaking a full consultation exercise, which was expensive. It would also ensure a detailed picture for a coherent development. Another Member asked that, if a developer was going to benefit at the end of this then the costs be passed on. Finally, in terms of timing, the COP Lead Assets advised that a further report would be presented back to the Executive in 6 to 12 months.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Council be **RECOMMENDED** to approve the expenditure of £76,000, from the Land and Development Earmarked Reserve, to enable the appointment of a Lead Consultant to develop a comprehensive masterplan for Kingsbridge Quay and environs (known as K2).

7. **Consultation of proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2017/18**

E.07/16

Members were asked to consider a report that sought approval of the proposed public consultation document on the changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, aligning the current scheme with the Housing Benefit & Universal Credit.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer First introduced the report. Following the introduction, a number of Members raised concerns with the consultation document as it included a significant amount of complex detail and was not easy to understand. Officers accepted that it contained complex information, but this was a result of the Housing Benefit legislation and had to be included in order to set out the options available. Officers agreed to look at the document and check for plain English prior to it being sent out for consultation.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the proposed public consultation document (as presented at Appendix A of the agenda report) on the changes to the Council Tax Resolution Scheme, aligning the current scheme with Housing Benefit & Universal Credit be approved.

8. **Transitional Resources**

E.08/16

Members were asked to consider a report that provided Members with the rationale for temporary fixed term transitional resources to improve customer satisfaction and public perception of the Council. This could be achieved by eliminating backlogs and failure demand to reduce call volumes and call answering times. The report explained how the resources could be funded

through the New Homes Bonus money originally allocated to Disabled Facilities Grant funding in 2015/16 and 2016/17 and from a re-investment of previous T18 savings back into the Programme.

The Portfolio Holder set out a detailed introduction to the report and explained how the T18 Programme had been designed to meet the challenges of reduced budgets without cutting frontline services. Whilst the budget reductions were being achieved, Members would be aware that the transition to the new model had resulted in increased call volumes, increased call waiting times and service backlogs. He also explained how the Resource Model was based on the end of programme state, that was, the calculation of staff resource assumed that technology would have been fully delivered and embedded across the authority. The technology had been delayed and in some cases required significant development to meet the requirements of the Council and the availability of staff for testing and training had been limited due to the constant need to carry out the day job. Concerns had been expressed and something needed to change to bring service levels back to an acceptable standard to ensure staff felt comfortable with the workloads and to raise staff morale across the Authority. This proposal was the result of a significant piece of work by officers that set out a short term strategy to assist with the successful delivery and completion of the T18 Programme.

During discussion, the following points were made:

- (a) A number of Members expressed concerns over the reported staff survey results. The Executive Director (SD & CD) and the Group Manager Customer First confirmed that the report only included specific questions from the survey that related to capacity and plans were in place to address the issues that had arisen. The staff survey results had been one of the drivers to bring the report to Members;
- (b) Officers confirmed that this report was the conclusion of a significant and detailed piece of work to ascertain the resource needed and would prevent the need for a piecemeal approach to Members to request additional support. Members accepted and welcomed this approach. The Executive Director (S&C) confirmed that no further resource should be required, however, that did not include any further work pressures that may arise from as yet unforeseen changes in legislation;
- (c) Members asked if, once the IT systems were fully operational, that the organisation could fall back to the original numbers of staff as set out in the blueprint. Officers responded that, for the most part, the blueprint numbers were expected to be correct, however there may be minor differences in order to ensure customer satisfaction;
- (d) The majority of Members fully supported the report, despite concerns over the sums involved. Some Members felt that the report could have been presented earlier and this may have resulted in a less adverse impact on the reputation of the Council. Officers accepted this point, however, it had taken this time for the detailed evidence to support the precise figures in the report to be finalised;

- (e) Some Members raised the issue of failure demand, and stated that this issue had to be addressed. The Group Manager Customer First advised that the additional resources would help to buy time to get the systems right to address failure demand;
- (f) The COP Lead Development Management responded to questions regarding planning enforcement and explained that the funding to address the backlog had been the subject of a previous report to Members;
- (g) Finally, in response to questions regarding the number of additional staff that would be involved, the Group Manager Customer First advised that whilst the number of additional staff would be approximately 41, it was difficult to be specific in terms of numbers by work area as the intention would be to move the staff from one work area to another, to ensure that each work area where a problem existed was completed in turn.

It was then:

RESOLVED:

That the Council be **RECOMMENDED** to:

1. Approve the use of transitional resources to improve service levels and customer satisfaction;
2. Approve the use of funding of £267,000 (as per para 5.4 of the presented report) from the New Homes Bonus funding which was originally earmarked for Disabled Facilities Grants, to fund the transitional resources set out in presented Appendix A;
3. Approve the re-investment of £278,972 from the 2016/17 Budget Surplus contingency Earmarked Reserve of £767,995 (the 16/17 budget surplus was generated by T18 savings), to fund the transitional resources set out in Appendix A;
4. Revise the capital budget allocation for 2016/17 for Disabled Facilities Grants to £750,000 as set out in para 5.3 of the presented report, to be funded by £552,000 allocation from the Better Care Fund and £198,000 from New Homes Bonus funding.

9. **Reports of Other Bodies**

E.09/16

RESOLVED

That the following be received and that any recommendations contained therein be approved:

a)

Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 2 June

2016

During discussion on this item, the Executive Director (SD&CD) provided clarity on a response given by an officer at the meeting of the Panel in respect of the presentation on the Case Management function (Minute O&S.5/16 refers). The Case Management Manager had stated that no backlogs existed within Case Management, however the Executive Director clarified that the answer given reflected the position within the Council Tax function rather than the whole of Case Management.

i. O&S.6/16 DARTMOUTH LOWER FERRY – TARIFF REVIEW

Prior to the vote on this item, the Leader confirmed that he had received a request to retain one of the charges at 50p rather than increase it to 60p, as the staff had raised concerns over the ability to give change for the new charge. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel confirmed that he was supportive of the charge remaining at 50p.

It was then **RESOLVED**:

That Council be **RECOMMENDED** that the proposed charges as detailed in Appendix A as presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for Dartmouth Lower Ferry be approved with the following amendment:

That the child single tariff, proposed to increase to 60p, remain at 50p.

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF E.4/16, E.5/16, E.6/16, E.8/16 and E.9/16, WHICH ARE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING TO BE HELD ON 30 JUNE 2016, WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM 5.00PM ON MONDAY, 27 JUNE 2016 UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 18).

The Meeting concluded at 12.09 pm

Signed by:

Chairman

