

SOUTH HAMS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL



Minutes of a meeting of the **South Hams Overview and Scrutiny Panel** held on **Thursday, 4th August, 2016 at 10.00 am** at the **Cary Room - Follaton House**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Saltern
Vice Chairman Cllr Wingate

Cllr Baldry
Cllr Brown
Cllr Hopwood
Cllr Pringle

Cllr Blackler
Cllr Hawkins
Cllr Pennington
Cllr Smerdon

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Bastone
Cllr Gilbert
Cllr Hodgson
Cllr Rowe
Cllr Wright

Cllr Bramble
Cllr Hicks
Cllr Holway
Cllr Tucker

Officers:

Lisa Buckle
Helen Dobby
Sophie Hosking
Steve Jordan

Section 151 Officer
Group Manager Commercial Services
Executive Director
Executive Director Head of Paid
Service

Ross Kennerley
Steve Mullineaux

Group Manager Support Services

10. **Minutes**

O&S.10/16

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 2 June 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Whilst an accurate reflection of the meeting, the Chairman did wish for his disappointment to be recorded in respect of a response given by officers at this meeting whereby there was considered to be no backlog of work in Case Management (Minute O&S.5/16 refers). This response had proven to be incorrect and the backlog of Case Management had been a key reason why the Council had taken the decision to employ some additional transitional resources at its Special Meeting on 30 June 2016 (Minute 25/16 refers). In the future, the Chairman urged officers to adopt the practice whereby, in the event of being unsure of the answer to a question, they should seek clarification outside of the meeting before then advising Members accordingly.

11. **Declarations of Interest**

O&S.11/16

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

Cllr J D Hawkins declared a personal interest in agenda item 10(d): 'Task and Finish Group Updates – Events Policy' (Minute O&S.17/16(d) below refers) by virtue of being a member of the Dartmouth Regatta Committee and remained in the meeting during the debate on this agenda item;

Cllr P C Smerdon declared a personal interest in agenda item 10(b): 'Task and Finish Group Updates – Partnerships' (Minute O&S.17/16(b) below refers) by virtue of being a trustee of the South Hams Community and Voluntary Service and remained in the meeting during the debate and vote on this agenda item.

12. **Urgent Business**

O&S.12/16

The Chairman advised the Panel that he had agreed for one urgent item to be raised at this meeting that related to a verbal report from the Head of Paid Service entitled: '*Response to Member Concerns about Staff Morale*'. This urgent item had been brought forward to this meeting in light of a Scrutiny Proposal Form having been submitted by Cllr Green and it would be considered immediately.

(a) Response to Member Concerns about Staff Morale

The Head of Paid Service introduced this item and acknowledged the concerns of Members. In his introduction, particular reference was made to:

- a number of concerns being prompted by the recent letter that had been sent from Unison to all Members. In terms of the content of the letter, the Head of Paid Service informed that there were no

surprises. However, he was surprised at the manner in which the letter had been sent. For clarity, Members were informed that there was no correspondence received from any of the other three unions;

- the importance of staff welfare and staff morale to the organisation. It was noted that the findings of the recent staff survey had provided a sense check of staff morale;
- measures being implemented to improve staff morale. These measures included:
 - o the decision to employ additional transitional resources;
 - o the establishment of a Staff Forum. As the voice of the staff, the Forum had been tasked with tackling and improving staff morale;
 - o an action plan being developed by the Council's Extended Leadership Team;
 - o the consequent benefits of the new telephony system that was being rolled out;
 - o resilience workshops being held for staff;
 - o staff briefings being convened;
 - o the appraisal system being developed; and
 - o Human Resources officers arranging staff drop-in sessions.

The Head of Paid Service concluded by reassuring the Panel that the Senior Leadership Team recognised the importance of improving staff morale and was confident that it was now on top of the issue.

In the subsequent debate, the following points were raised:

- (a) When questioned, it was noted that Unison currently represented approximately 25% of office based staff and 15% of the total Council workforce;
- (b) To provide some balance, Member attention was drawn to some of the positive findings that had been concluded from the Staff Survey. For example, 76% of employees who had responded enjoyed their job and the agile working agenda was also deemed to be a popular initiative. However, it was also recognised that IT related issues continued to be a major barrier for staff and these problems required swift resolution;
- (c) With regard to the 'non-office based' staff, officers confirmed that a version of the staff survey was currently being developed for those employees;
- (d) Some Members lamented the loss of the Council's Personnel Panel and it was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** that:

'Consideration be given at the next Political Structures Working Group to the re-establishment of the Council's Personnel Panel.'

- (e) Some Members also felt that an informal open discussion with the Executive Directors outside of this meeting to discuss this

matter further would also be useful. This suggestion was also formally **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED**;

- (f) A Member was of the view that whilst the Council was still surrounded by highly capable and excellent staff, the Transformation Programme had cut too deep and the Council was now suffering as a consequence of its staffing numbers being too low.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the Political Structures Working Group consider at its next meeting the merits of re-establishing the Personnel Panel; and
2. That an informal meeting be convened between interested Members and the Executive Directors to further consider the issue of staff morale.

13. **Public Forum**

O&S.13/16

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

14. **Executive Forward Plan**

O&S.14/16

The Panel was presented with the most recently published Executive Forward Plan. In the general discussion on the Plan, the Head of Paid Service advised that the 'Sherford Delivery Team' agenda item, currently scheduled for the Executive meeting on 15 September 2016, was concerned with future funding options for the Delivery Team. However, the Panel was reminded that a generic Sherford Development update was already on its work programme for the next meeting on 6 October 2016.

(a) Medium Term Financial Strategy for the Five Year Period 2017/18 to 2021/22

A report was considered that set out the process and timetable for updating and reviewing the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The MTFS was to be drafted in the upcoming weeks and was scheduled for consideration by the Executive at its meeting on 15 September 2016.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (i) The Leader warned the meeting of the potentially severe impact on all tiers of local government that could arise from the upcoming Autumn Statement;
- (ii) With regard to the proposal to set up an Innovations Fund, Members were informed that this had been a suggestion that had come forward at a previous Member workshop. The Panel was assured that this proposal would be subject to further detailed consideration;
- (iii) A Member emphasised the importance of climate change and the consequent need to invest in renewable energy. The Member proceeded to request that this issue be given greater corporate emphasis when looking at future budget setting proposals;
- (iv) Whilst a date was still to be fixed, officers confirmed that the annual budget setting Member Workshop would take place before the end of September 2016.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the process and timetable for the annual review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted;
2. That the comments (as outlined in the contents of the minutes above) be taken into account when the Medium Term Financial Strategy is updated; and
3. That the process for the Four Year Settlement funding offer from the Government be noted.

(b) Homeless Strategy

Representatives of the Task and Finish Group advised that it was likely that there would be some slippage to the current timetable that would probably lead to the Strategy being considered by the Executive at its meeting in January 2017. This slippage had, in part, arisen due to the difficulties of establishing a date for the next Task and Finish Group meeting.

The Group had identified four key themes that should underpin the strategy. These were as follows:-

- Access to services;
- Access to housing;
- Health and wellbeing; and
- Affordability and understanding the cost of homelessness.

In response to a request to increase the size of the membership of the Task and Finish Group, the Chairman made reference to the previous Panel decision to agree its composition (which was cross party) and he therefore did not see the merits of revisiting this issue.

(c) Devon Home Choice and Allocations Policy

The Housing, Revenue and Benefits Community Of Practice Lead introduced this update and highlighted the number of national changes that were currently taking place that were likely to have a big impact on this future agenda item. In light of these anticipated changes, the officer advised that it was likely to be her recommendation to the Executive that the Council should remain in the Devon Home Choice partnership for a further twelve months.

In the subsequent discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) A number of Members stated that they had concerns with Devon Home Choice. These concerns could be summarised as:
 - the Devon Home Choice system being excessively bureaucratic;
 - there being a lack of public understanding of the current system; and
 - Devon Home Choice appearing to be a very distant and unaccountable organisation.

- (b) The overriding view amongst the Panel Members was that alternative options should be fully explored and a future options appraisal report would be welcomed in this respect.

15. **Planning Peer Challenge Review 2016/17**

O&S.15/16

The Panel considered a report that outlined the Action Plan that had been developed to implement the recommendations contained within the report arising from the Planning Improvement Peer Challenge visit conducted between 18 and 20 April 2016.

Following a brief introduction, the Chairman highlighted that this item had also been discussed at length by the Development Management Committee at its meeting on 3 August 2016 and it was his intention for the Panel to focus on the draft Action Plan.

In discussion, reference was made to:

- (a) the new Council website. The Panel noted the intention for the look and feel of the new Council website to resemble the current version whilst drastically condensing the number of pages and content held. A Member emphasised the importance of getting the new website right and urged that it be rigorously tested before it went live;

- (b) Development Forums. A Member requested that consideration be given to re-instigating the Development Forums for major planning applications;
- (c) engagement with town and parish councils. A Member asked for her concerns at the disrespect shown to the Woolwell community during the current Joint Local Plan consultation exercise to be formally recorded. In reply, officers acknowledged these concerns and gave assurances that this would not happen again;
- (d) the recent passing of Ms Bridget Green. The Panel endorsed the tributes paid by Members to Ms Green, who had sadly passed away recently;
- (e) the importance of planning training for Members. The Panel stressed the importance of planning training and welcomed adoption of this action;
- (f) the recommendations of the Economy Member Working Group. Members were informed that the findings of the Working Group would be presented to the next Panel meeting on 6 October 2016;
- (g) the current site inspection protocol. The Panel asked that the current Development Management Committee site inspection protocol be sent to all Members.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That it be noted that the Development Management Committee has accepted the Planning Peer Challenge report (as outlined at Appendix 2 of the presented agenda report);
2. That the content of the Action Plan 2016/17 (as outlined at Appendix 3 of the presented agenda report) be noted; and
3. That the Panel receive, on a quarterly basis, key performance data as part of the Performance Indicator report.

16. **Q1 2016/17 Performance Report**

O&S.16/16

Members were presented with a report that outlined the performance measures for Quarter 1 for 2016/17. The report highlighted that the measures during this quarter had stayed relatively consistent with previous quarters.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) a further Member drop-in session on the dashboard data. The Panel requested that a further drop-in session be convened for Members during September;
- (b) the turnaround time for issuing parking permits. Members noted that there had been an issue with the turnaround time, however assurances were given that these had since been resolved;
- (c) the improvements made in planning enforcement. A number of Members welcomed the vast improvements in planning enforcement and welcomed the news that the Council was on target to clear the historic backlog of cases before December 2016.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the performance levels against the target communicated in the Balanced Scorecard and the performance figures supplied in the background and the exception report be noted.

17. **Task and Finish Group Updates (if any):**

O&S.17/16

(a) Dartmouth Lower Ferry

In the update, particular reference was made to:-

- the new tariffs having been implemented in June 2016. It was noted that, as a budget snapshot, the service was predicting an additional income of £20,000;
- a meeting was due to take place with the relevant Trade Unions in mid-August 2016. Following this meeting, it was intended that the Task and Finish Group would be reconvened;
- the Group being very productive. In expanding upon this point, the lead officers were thanked for their input into the work of this Task and Finish Group.

(b) Partnerships – Update Report

A report was presented to the Panel that set out recommendations relating to:

- (i) classification of partnerships;
- (ii) adoption of an updated Partnership Policy and Guidance;
- (iii) adoption of, and arrangements for, the Register of Partnerships; and
- (iv) future management arrangements for Partnerships.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was acknowledged by the task and finish group that there were still some pieces of work related to the review that were outstanding. In addition, some Members advised that the remit of the group had soon escalated. In light of the extent of the work of the review, the view was expressed that the group had been hampered through being severely under resourced;
- Some Members expressed their disappointment at the number of small partnership arrangements and questioned how the partnership agenda would be managed and monitored in the future;
- With regard to the recommendation regarding the CVS and CAB being invited to submit a business plan, Members felt that the Task and Finish Group should be reconvened to consider their submissions before they were presented to the Panel;
- In respect of the current partnerships, individual Members advised that both the Devon Economic Partnership and the Totnes and Dartmouth Ring and Ride were now defunct and should therefore be removed from the latest version of the list.

It was then:

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive **RECOMMEND** to Council that:

1. the Partnership Policy (as outlined at Appendix 1 of the presented agenda report) and Guidance (as outlined at Appendix 2 of the presented agenda report) be adopted;
2. the Partnership Register (as outlined at Appendix 3 of the presented agenda report) be adopted;
3. the review and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group (as outlined at Appendix 4 of the presented agenda report) be agreed;
4. partnerships be retained at current financial levels for 2017/18, subject to any financial modifications (as set out in Appendix 4 of the presented agenda report) and/or any changes required pursuant to point 5 below.
5. That the Panel request those significant partners identified in paragraph 3.7 of the presented agenda report (CAB and CVS) be invited to submit a business plan by the end of September 2016 setting out:
 - o What they would spend the funding on;
 - o How it will benefit residents;
 - o Links to Council's Strategic Priorities;
 - o What value for money it would provide; and
 - o What success measures they would use

with these plans being considered, in the first instance by the Partnership Task and Finish Group.

6. new, or updated, Partnership agreements be established for 2017/18 onwards establishing clear outcomes relating to Our Plan themes and, where appropriate, the Locality work to ensure co-ordinated delivery for communities; and
7. alongside this, a further financial and governance review be undertaken to identify the most appropriate delivery options aligned to financial and procurement procedures once a decision on the LACC is confirmed.

(c) Waste and Recycling

In providing an update, the lead Executive Member for Commercial Services informed that:

- the Group was currently considering the merits of recommending an annual delivery/allocation of recycling sacks per household;
- the apportionment of savings between the Council and Devon County Council in respect of the proposal to reduce residual waste was currently being considered by the legal departments of both councils;
- the training and fitting of the in-cab technology had now been completed and would be operational before the end of August 2016;
- the four-day round review would not be recommended for approval.
- This recommendation had arisen from the findings of the consultants' report that had concluded that the geographical distance in travel from the depots would result in a four-day round being uneconomical. As a consequence, the Group would, in due course, be giving its consideration to potential methods of generating efficiency savings from a five-day round.

(d) Events Policy

The Panel noted that the consultation deadline had been extended until the end of August 2016 and the Task and Finish Group would be reconvened soon after that deadline.

The Group was still intending to present its findings to the Panel meeting on 3 November 2016.

18. Actions Arising/ Decisions Log

O&S.18/16

The Panel noted the latest log of Actions Arising and Decisions.

19. Scrutiny Proposal Form - Review of South Hams Permits

O&S.19/16

A Scrutiny Proposal Form was considered by the Panel that sought to review the number of permits that were available from the Council.

In discussion, a number of Members confirmed their support for the proposal and felt that it had been very well presented.

In reply to a question, officers confirmed that the methodology for customers to appeal against their fines would be built into the imminent upgrade of the parking software.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That a Review of South Hams Permits Task and Finish Group be established with the Group comprising of: Cllrs Baldry, Holway, Saltern and Pringle.

20. **Draft Annual Work Programme 2016/17**

O&S.20/16

In consideration of its Annual Work Programme, the following points were raised:

- (a) With regard to the Sherford Development Update, Members requested that a site visit take place before the scheduled Panel meeting on 6 October 2016;
- (b) In light of the anticipated length of the next Panel meeting agenda, it was agreed that the Locality Service update should be deferred to the meeting on 3 November 2016;
- (c) It was requested that the six-month update on Customer Services and the Development Management Service be scheduled for the Panel meeting on 24 November 2016;
- (d) The Panel was reminded that the Events Policy should be added to the Programme for the Panel meeting on 3 November 2016;
- (e) As a consequence of the discussions earlier in the meeting (Minutes O&S.14/16(a) and (b) above refer), updates on the Devon Homes Choice and Allocations Policy and the Homelessness Strategy were requested to be added to the work programme for the meeting on 24 November 2016.

The Meeting concluded at 12.40 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
