

SOUTH HAMS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL



Minutes of a meeting of the **South Hams Overview and Scrutiny Panel** held on **Thursday, 14th January, 2016 at 10.00 am** at the **Cary Room** **- Follaton House**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Saltern
Vice Chairman Wingate

Barnes
Brown
Hawkins
May
Pringle

Blackler
Green
Horsburgh
Pennington
Smerdon

In attendance:

Councillors:

Officers:

62. **Minutes**

(O&S.62/15)

19 November 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63. **Declarations of Interest**

(O&S.63/15)

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 J D Hawkins declared a Personal Interest in Item 13(d): 'Task and Finish Group Updates: Events Policy' (Minute O&S.71/15(d) below refers) by virtue of being the Chairman of the Dartmouth Royal Regatta and remained in the meeting during the debate on this item.

64. **Public Forum**

(O&S.64/15)

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

65. **Executive Forward Plan**

(O&S.65/15)

Members were presented with the most recently published Executive Forward Plan. In discussion, Members particularly highlighted the proposed agenda item on 10 March 2016 entitled: 'Income Generation Opportunities/Business Development Update' and felt that it would be useful to receive an update on the Income Generation Opportunities at the next Panel meeting on 25 February 2016

66. **Budget Proposals Report 2016/17 - Update Information**

(O&S.66/15)

The Panel considered a report that updated Members on the figures shown in the Capital and Revenue Budget papers that were presented to the Executive at its meeting on 10 December 2015 (Minutes E.47/15 and E.48/15 refer).

In his introduction, the Leader made particular reference to:-

- the loss of the Revenue Support Grant. The Leader expressed his major disappointment at the central government announcement whereby the Council would receive no Revenue Support Grant funding by 2018/19;
- the four year offer to Councils to have certainty of their funding. The Panel noted that a meeting was to be held later this week between senior finance officers across the county during which the merits of whether or not to accept the four year offer would be discussed further.

In discussion on the draft revenue budget, the following points were raised:-

- (a) As a general point, a Member was of the view that central government cuts were far too severe and key stakeholders needed to take every possible step to reverse this trend. In response, the Leader advised that active and ongoing

lobbying was taking place in this regard with both the District Councils Network and Local Government Association particularly pro-active. Furthermore, the Member continued to question why town and parish councils remained exempt from any Council Tax referendum limits;

- (b) It was clarified that the central government funding stream that had been designated solely for homelessness prevention had now been discontinued;
- (c) In respect of the set up costs of the Local Authority Controlled Company, officers advised that they were awaiting a response from the Local Government Association to ascertain whether or not the Council would be entitled to receive a sum of transformation funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government to support this project. It was noted that the cost pressures had been increased (to £150,000 per Council) as a consequence of some further exploratory work that had been undertaken by Grant Thornton. In response to some Member concerns over these rising costs and the projected payback period, officers confirmed that a more detailed agenda item would be presented to Members in the upcoming weeks for consideration;
- (d) A Member felt that it would be helpful for a breakdown of the £230,000 affordable housing contribution to be made available for interested Members. In reply, officers advised that, in light of the reactive nature of this fund and the likelihood that projects may continually emerge, such a breakdown would be difficult to produce;
- (e) With regard to the Base Budget figures, the Section 151 Officer agreed to illustrate (by virtue of a future Members' Bulletin article) how the savings and pressures reconciled in relation to the Transformation Programme savings;
- (f) Officers confirmed that the New Homes Bonus modelling had taken account of feedback provided by lead officers working on the Sherford development proposals.

Specifically on the revenue budget proposals, it was then **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** that the Executive be advised that the Panel **RECOMMEND** that:-

1. The Council Tax level for 2016/17 should be increased by 1.99%;
2. The anticipated surplus for 2016/17 should be transferred into a contingency reserve; and
3. The themes arising from the Medium Term Financial Strategy be endorsed.

In discussion on the draft capital budget, reference was made to:-

- (i) provision of an external platform lift to link to the Council Chamber. In light of the severity of the Council's budgetary position, a Member questioned the justification for spending £75,000 on a platform lift. In response, Executive Members highlighted the potential income that could be generated by letting this office space and the projected two year payback period for this investment;
- (ii) replacement costs of the existing boilers at Follaton House. Despite offering their help from the offset to support this project, some Members expressed their disappointment that they had not yet been contacted. Following a debate during which the potential for a biomass or ground source heat pump solution was raised, it was concluded that an options appraisal was required. Furthermore, the Panel endorsed the suggestion whereby this project was included in the Commercial Services work plan, with Cllrs Barnes and Wingate being involved from the early stages;
- (iii) the costs of vehicles for the operational locality officers. Officers gave assurances that this proposed capital spend would be held in abeyance until the Locality Service review that was scheduled for the Panel meeting in March 2016;
- (iv) future Disabled Facilities Grant funding. When questioned, officers confirmed that they had received assurances from colleagues at Devon County Council whereby, for 2016/17, the Council would receive at least the same amount on funding as had been allocated for 2015/16.

Specifically on the capital budget proposals, it was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** that the Executive be advised that the Panel has considered the agenda report and made comments as outlined in the minutes above.

67. **Contact Centre Update**

(O&S.67/15)

In line with the wish of the Panel at its most recent meeting to see a far greater improvement in performance (Minute O&S.55/15 refers), a report was considered that presented a draft clear action plan for Customer Services.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) Members expressed their surprise at the second highest volume phone call type was ordering recycling sacks. These Members felt that there were a number of measures that could be implemented to reduce the burden on the contact centre arising from this call type and it was felt that there was scope for Locality Officers and local ward Members to take on additional responsibility. As a general point, some Members felt that the Council should be utilising the Locality Service more in order to support the Contact Centre;
- (b) Some Members repeated their previously raised viewpoint that staff numbers were insufficient in the contact centre. Officers countered this point by expressing the view that resources should be prioritised towards ensuring that the designed processes were accurate. In addition, since the staff members were currently operating multiple different systems, the Council was not yet in a position to determine whether the staff numbers were appropriate.

Finally, the Head of Paid Service confirmed that once the processes were all in place and functioning correctly, he was committed to reviewing the officer establishment to ensure that resources were allocated in the right place and at the appropriate level;

- (c) It was noted that the budget allocated for agency staff would be spent by the end of March 2015. In response to a request, officers agreed to provide Members with a list outlining how this would impact upon staff numbers;
- (d) In recognising the urgent need for channel shift and improved signposting and communications, Members felt that it would be interesting to receive comparable information outlining the average costs of transactions through the website, telephone calls and face to face respectively;
- (e) A Member felt that the Panel had extensively scrutinised the contact centre over recent meetings and there was now a desperate need to let officers get on with delivering the action plan to drive through service improvements. As a further comfort, it was noted that the contact centre performance figures were to be reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team on a weekly basis;
- (f) It was noted that work was ongoing in an attempt for outgoing calls from the Council to no longer be displayed to the recipient as being from a 'withheld' number.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That Members continue to support the work being undertaken to improve Customer Services and monitor performance through regular updates; and
2. That the Action Plan (as outlined at Appendix C) be endorsed.

68. **Development Management Service Update**

(O&S.68/15)

A report was considered that outlined the measures that had been both implemented and still planned to secure a sustainable improvement in performance in delivering Development Management.

During the debate, some Members expressed their frustrations and concerns specifically in relation to:-

- the poor quality of service being experienced by town and parish councils, who were becoming increasingly frustrated. Officers recognised this point and stated that there was a need for the Council to improve its communications with town and parish councils;
- the need to improve performance quickly or run the real risk of the service being 'designated'. In addition, the view was expressed that customer satisfaction must not be lost sight of when chasing prescribed service targets;
- the problems that had been encountered when elements of the service had gone live on the new Planning system. A Member expressed their regret that the IT systems were currently letting down the service. In taking this point a step further, Members asked that a message be passed back to senior Civic representatives whereby the Panel felt very let down by the service being received by the Council;
- the loss of capacity, experience and local knowledge as a consequence of the Transformation Programme. A Member proceeded to state that there was a need to look at placing additional resources in the service. The Head of Paid Service reiterated the comments that he had expressed during the previous agenda item (O&S.67/15(b) above refers) whereby he was committed to reviewing the officer establishment.

In response, other Members felt that these points were unduly harsh when considering that the presented agenda report was highlighting overall improvements in the Development Management Service.

Nonetheless, a Member **PROPOSED** that:

1. closer liaison take place between Planning Case Officers and town and parish councils in respect of the lead in times for planning applications to ensure that town and parish councils have as much time as possible to consider an application during the consultation process; and
2. closer liaison take place between individual Members and Planning Case Officers.

A Member duly **SECONDED** part 1 of the proposal but, in the absence of a seconder for part 2, there was no debate on this part.

In discussion on part 1, Members acknowledged the comments of the Development Management COP Lead whereby the Council was restricted by the statutory time period for consulting with local town and parish councils and the vote was therefore declared **LOST** on this motion.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the measures that were being implemented to improve performance within Development Management (as outlined at paragraph 4 of the presented agenda report) be endorsed; and
2. That the Head of Paid Service inform senior Civic representatives that the Panel is very disappointed with the level of service being received by the Council to date.

69. **Health and Wellbeing (Leisure) Procurement Update**

(O&S.69/15)

A report was presented that provided an update on the Health and Wellbeing (Leisure) procurement exercise. The lead Executive Member for Customer First provided a timetable of events for the project and expressed his confidence that the Council would receive some positive bid submissions.

In discussion, some Members highlighted the comments outlined in the presented agenda report that described the role to be played by local Ward Members in this exercise. It was therefore deemed unfortunate by a number of Members that they had received no information or contact to date. Officers responded that they would arrange a meeting for all local ward Members in due course.

Moreover, at this meeting, greater information would be revealed to Members in respect of costs and the dialogue sessions that had been conducted.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the progress of the procurement for Health and Wellbeing (Leisure) Services be noted.

70. **Quarter 2 Performance Indicators**

(O&S.70/15)

A report was considered that provided Members with information on Key Performance Indicators at the end of quarter 2 for 2015/16.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) future 'deep dive' reports. The Panel felt that Indicators pertinent to the Contact Centre and Development Management should not be subject to a 'deep dive' report for the foreseeable future. The indicator that was identified by Members as an area of interest for the next meeting was the 'average end to end time benefits new claims (days)';
- (b) the number of days lost due to sickness absence. Some Members welcomed the improvements in the sickness absence indicators;
- (c) the definition of 'narrowly off target be aware'. Officers accepted that this definition currently lacked clarity and it would therefore be re-defined in future quarterly reports;
- (d) the lack of comments accompanying some of the Performance Indicators. Officers confirmed that, for some of the indicators, there was a lack of information as a consequence of the cross over from the old to the new system.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the key Performance Indicators for Quarter 2 be noted and the action detailed to improve future performance has been considered; and

2. That the 'average end to end time benefits new claims (days)' be selected as an area of interest for the next meeting.

71. **Task and Finish Group Updates**

(O&S.71/15)

(a) Dartmouth Lower Ferry

In light of the report being published in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was noted that this agenda item would now be considered at the end of this meeting (Minute O&S.74/15(a) below refers).

(b) Partnerships

It was confirmed that two joint meetings had been held with West Devon Borough Council colleagues and the key theme which was becoming increasingly apparent was that the number of Council partnerships was more than had been initially envisaged.

In terms of next steps, the joint Group was trying to classify the partnerships and, at its next scheduled meeting, would be focusing upon significant partnerships only.

Following the next meeting, and recognising the need to notify and communicate with these partners, it was envisaged that the groups would then revert back to meeting as two separate entities.

(c) Waste and Recycling

The Panel noted the concluding report that had been generated by the Task and Finish Group and wished to put on record its gratitude for Group Members and lead officers in completing an excellent piece of work.

(d) Events Policy

The Group had met for the first time on 13 January 2016 and had agreed its terms of reference. A series of queries had been raised by the Group and these would be followed up at the next scheduled meeting which was to be held during week commencing 11 April 2016.

72. **Draft Annual Work Programme 2015/16**

(O&S.72/15)

The Panel considered its draft 2015/16 Work Programme and made particular reference to the earlier point whereby it would be useful to be in receipt of an update in Income Generation Opportunities at the next Panel meeting on 25 February 2016.

73. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

(O&S.73/15)

RESOLVED

That in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business as the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Schedule 12A to the Act is involved.

74. **Task and Finish Group Updates**

(O&S.74/15)

(a) Dartmouth Lower Ferry

An exempt report was considered that presented the latest findings of the Task and Finish Group and presented the Business Case that had been commissioned to fully explore the cost of the current service.

During the debate, the quality of the Business Case was praised by Members. In addition, it was noted that the work of the Task and Finish Group was to continue, with regular feedback reports being presented to future Panel meetings.

It was then

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that:-

1. at this point, the best overall service delivery choice for the Dartmouth Lower Ferry will be either via Option 1 or Option 2b (as outlined in the Business Case at Appendix A of the presented agenda report);
2. service efficiencies (as outlined as Section 2 of the Business Case at Appendix A of the presented

agenda report be implemented as soon as is practicable; and

3. negotiations continue on the provision of the best operationally practical and cost effective solutions for the maintenance of the floating stock.

The Meeting concluded at 1.00 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
