

SOUTH HAMS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL



Minutes of a meeting of the South Hams Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 27th August, 2015 at 10.00 am at the Cary Room - Follaton House

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Saltern
Vice Chairman Cllr Wingate

Cllr Baldry
Cllr Blackler
Cllr May
Cllr Pringle

Cllr Barnes
Cllr Brown
Cllr Pennington
Cllr Smerdon

In attendance:

Councillors:
Cllr Bramble
Cllr Hicks
Cllr Hodgson
Cllr Pearce
Cllr Ward

Cllr Gilbert
Cllr Hitchins
Cllr Holway
Cllr Tucker
Cllr Wright

Officers:
Head Of Paid Service
Executive Director – Service Delivery
& Commercial Development
Group Manager – Customer First
Group Manager – Support Services
Monitoring Officer
CoP Lead – Housing Revenues &
Benefits
South Hams CAB Manager
South Hams CAB Treasurer

23. **Minutes**
O&S.23/15
The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 9 July 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
24. **Declarations of Interest**
O&S.24/15
Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but there were none made.
25. **Public Forum**
O&S.25/15
In accordance with the Public Forum Procedure Rules, no items were raised at this meeting.
26. **Executive Forward Plan**
O&S.26/15
Prior to the Forward Plan being considered, the Leader of Council informed that he was aware of some confusion amongst Members in respect of the individual Executive portfolio areas of responsibility. As a consequence, it was intended that a diagram would be produced and circulated to Members that would illustrate the division in responsibilities. In reply to a request, the Head of Paid Service also confirmed that a more detailed organisational structure chart was currently being produced and this would also be distributed to Members in due course.

With regard to the most recently published Forward Plan, and in accordance with Procedure Rules, requests had been made for updates on the following future Executive agenda items:-

(a) Business Development Opportunities

The Panel was informed that the Forward Plan included a standing agenda item entitled 'Business Development Opportunities' to enable the Council the ability to respond quickly in the event of opportunities arising at very short notice. However, it was noted that the Executive meeting agenda on 10 September 2015 would include a report relating to business rate relief. Whilst this item would be considered by the Executive in the first instance, officers confirmed that this matter would ultimately be determined at the Special Council meeting on 10 September 2015.

(b) Budget 2016/17

On behalf of her Group, the Leader of the Opposition had submitted a number of budget related questions to this meeting. In thanking her

for submitting these questions, the Chairman requested that an all Member Budget workshop be convened in the ensuing weeks, with these questions then being addressed during this session.

(c) Devon Home Choice Policy Review

A report (which was due to be considered by the Executive at its next meeting on 10 September 2015) was presented that reviewed the existing arrangements for Devon Home Choice (the Council's current model of allocating affordable housing in the South Hams).

In the ensuing discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- (a) 9% of housing being allocated to people with no housing need. When questioned, the Panel was advised that a large proportion of these related to Section 106 properties which were allocated based upon local connection regardless of need. However, assurances were given that residents would need to be on the housing register in order to potentially be allocated such a property. In reply to a further question, officers informed that safeguards were in place to ensure that S106 properties were allocated to appropriate persons, however it was also acknowledged that these were not wholly infallible;
- (b) the adverts always stating the conditions of the tenancy let. The Panel was advised that it was often the case that properties were advertised (and subsequently let) on a fixed term (e.g. 3-5 years) basis;
- (c) the dramatic reduction in Band E applicants on the Housing Register being welcomed. Whilst welcoming the reduction and acknowledging that some neighbouring local authorities had excluded Band E applicants from their Registers, some Members expressed the view that such a course of action would be a mistake for this Council. To support this view, some examples were cited whereby there were Band E residents living in the district who were desperate to move house;
- (d) local housing needs in very rural villages. A Member commented that local Band E households should be included in the list of those given preference in very rural villages. In response, officers advised that if Band E households were included in this criteria then the Council would be unable to meet its statutory obligations under the Housing Act 1996;
- (e) the supply of housing. The Panel was informed that in the region of 80 affordable houses were currently being built in the South Hams

each year. However, evidence suggested that there was a need to build 242 affordable houses each year. Given this gap in supply and demand, a Member expressed her surprise at the proportionate low numbers on the Housing Register. The Panel endorsed this point and requested that a benchmarking exercise be undertaken in this respect, with the findings forming part of the twelve month review;

- (f) population statistics. Members requested that they be in receipt of the latest population statistics per district council ward and per town and parish.

It was then:

RECOMMENDED

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

1. note the content and findings of the presented agenda report;
2. remain in the Devon Home Choice partnership, with a further review being carried out in twelve months time, with the results of a benchmarking exercise forming part of this review;
3. make no changes at this time to the Council's Local Allocation Policy, with a further review being undertaken in twelve months time.

27. **Maritime and Coastguard Agency Update**

O&S.27/15

Further to the deferral of this agenda item at the previous Panel meeting (minute O&S.16/15 refers), a letter of response to Member questions had subsequently been received from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA). This letter had been attached to the published meeting agenda for Member information and reference.

In the subsequent debate, it became apparent that some Panel Members were dissatisfied with the response received and were therefore of the view that the Council should accept the MCA's offer to send a delegation to meet MCA representatives in Falmouth. In contrast, other Panel Members felt that the responses were sufficient and therefore queried the merits of attending a meeting in Falmouth.

On balance, the majority of Members felt that the Harbour Master should be sent a copy of the letter and asked for his views as to the merits of attending a meeting in Falmouth. In the event of the Harbour Master being of the view that a meeting would be beneficial, it was then suggested that he should accompany the Member Group to Falmouth. In

addition, it was considered that the Group should comprise of a maximum of three Members and the Harbour Master.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Harbour Master be sent a copy of the letter of response from the MCA and be asked for his views as to the merits of attending a meeting in Falmouth; and

That, in the event of a meeting being deemed beneficial, the Member Group should comprise of a maximum of three Members and the Harbour Master.

28. **Follow-Up Report on South Hams Citizens Advice Bureau Service Level Agreement**

O&S.28/15

An updated report was presented to the meeting in light of the Panel decision at its last meeting to revisit the South Hams Citizens Advice Bureau (SHCAB) Service Level Agreement (Minute O&S.17/15 refers).

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) A number of Members congratulated the report authors on their production of an excellent report;
- (b) A Member reiterated his concerns raised at the previous Panel meeting with regard to the decision taken by Plymouth City Council whereby residents from outside of the city boundaries were not permitted to use the Plymouth CAB service. The Panel sympathised with this view and the following addition to the recommendation was therefore **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** as follows:

'That the Head of Paid Service clarify the policies regarding South Hams residents in the Plymouth and Torbay hinterlands being able to use the services provided by Plymouth CAB and Torbay CAB respectively.'
- (c) The SHCAB Treasurer informed that any salary increases were attributed to additional funding received for specific projects. For example, the additional £22-23,000 salaries in the published accounts were as a consequence of a funding stream being obtained for a specific South Devon apprenticeships project;
- (d) It was noted that the most recent Outreach and Home Visitor Project SLA was in need of amending to ensure that it was accurate and up to date;
- (e) Some Members felt it to be unfair and inequitable whereby some town and parish councils gave financial contributions to the CAB whereas others did not. As a result, the Panel was of the view that the CAB should write to each town and parish council encouraging them all to provide financial contributions to the CAB.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the content of the presented agenda report and the performance of SHCAB in relation to the agreed SLA's be noted;
2. That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that the existing SLA should be renewed for a further twelve months on the existing terms (in accordance with clause 15.2 of the SLA);
3. That Cllrs Brown, Pringle and Saltern be appointed to assist with a structured long-term review of the CAB partnerships, with a report being presented back to the Panel in due course; and
4. That the Head of Paid Service clarify the policies regarding South Hams residents in the Plymouth and Torbay hinterlands being able to use the services provided by Plymouth CAB and Torbay CAB respectively.

29.

Transformation Programme Monitoring

O&S.29/15

In providing a verbal progress update on the Transformation Programme, the Support Services Group Manager and lead Executive Member made reference to:-

- the processes in the new W2 System. The Panel was informed that the processes in relation to community, street scene and waste were now completed. Furthermore, the corporate lead-in time for W2 processes had been slightly extended to ensure that the impact on existing services was kept to a minimum;
- the newly appointed Support Services Specialist Manager. The lead Executive Member had already met with the recently appointed postholder and he was confident that he would prove to be an excellent appointment;
- the commencement of the Member IT project was likely to be delayed by a week due to unforeseen technical issues. In addition, as a result of Member feedback, each Member would be given the choice of receiving a Council owned iPad or retain the use of their own iPad (albeit with reduced functionality in comparison).

In general discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the Development Management Service. Previously raised concerns in relation to the Development Management Service were again reiterated. In reply, it was recognised that the Panel was scheduled to be in receipt of a Development Management Service update at its next meeting on 17 September 2015;

- (b) the fine balance between meeting existing operational need whilst still being able to support the Transformation Programme. A number of Members expressed the view that accuracy was far more critical than pace in respect of the Transformation Programme;
- (c) the positives already being seen by Members in respect of the Locality team.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the progress update be noted.

30. **Customer Services Stats Update**

O&S.30/15

Having presented the Panel with the latest Customer Services performance comparisons, the Group Manager Customer First advised that:-

- the service had answered a further 3% more telephone calls than the previous month;
- 50% of staff were currently either temporary or in training;
- failure demand calls were now being documented;
- the self-service web portal would be going live imminently. Once in operation, this would help to reduce the number of calls being received by the Council;
- since Phase 2 of the Transformation Programme had now been completed, the Council was now in a position to advertise for 7 new members of staff.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) To be fully competent in all service areas, officers advised that it took between 4 and 6 months for a new member of staff to be fully trained;
- (b) Some Members who had paid a visit to the Customer Contact Centre highlighted how beneficial they had found this to be and proceeded to encourage all other Members to do likewise. Assurances were given that such visits did not impinge upon the existing service;
- (c) Regardless of targets, Members felt that the onus should be on the quality of the response given to a customer rather than the time taken to answer their call;

- (d) A number of Members shared their positive experiences of the Customer Services email account facility and felt that this service was working very well.

31. **Ombudsman Update and Annual Review Letter**

O&S.31/15

The Panel considered a report that presented the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter for 2015 regarding Ombudsman complaints received against the Council for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) The Panel felt it regrettable that the Council's Complaints Policy had not been included with this agenda item and was of the view that it would be timely for a review to be undertaken into the Policy;
- (b) Officers highlighted that the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) was giving great emphasis to the importance of dealing with (and reducing) the number of complaints received by the Council. SLT was in the process of rolling out a cultural shift across the organisation whereby a complaint should be considered as a project that needed to be solved. Furthermore, since the overwhelming majority of complaints received were associated with poor communication, SLT was having more pro-active dialogue with the Ombudsman and actively promoting officers to say sorry (where appropriate) to complainants. The majority of staff would also be attending a mandatory Ombudsman course during October 2015;
- (c) Since the LGA had recently recommended that Overview and Scrutiny should have a real grip on complaints, Members requested that they be in receipt of more relevant information. In particular, the Panel wished to see details relating to costs, trends, number by parish and ward and numbers of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the Ombudsman's Annual Letter has been reviewed; and
2. That a further report be presented to the Panel meeting on 25 February 2016 which presents a review of the Council's Complaints Policy and more in-depth information relating to the complaints (to include costs, trends, number by parish and ward and numbers of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints).

32. **Task and Finish Group Updates:**

O&S.32/15

(a) Performance Measures

The Panel was informed that the first meeting of the Group had been held on Monday, 3 August 2015 and a draft report was now being prepared based upon the points made during that meeting.

(b) Dartmouth Lower Ferry

Members noted that the Group had convened its first meeting and the tender evaluation process had been concluded. As a consequence, the Council was hoping to appoint a contractor this week.

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

O&S.33/15

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

- (a) the number of agenda items currently scheduled for the next meeting. In light of the potential length of this agenda, the following proposed agenda items were deferred to the meeting on 19 November 2015:-
 - Business Development – Projects Summary;
 - Leisure Review Update; and
 - Update report on work of RDPE – LEAF/LAG Programmes;
- (b) the complaints policy and complaints statistics agenda item being scheduled for consideration at the 25 February 2016 Panel meeting.

The Meeting concluded at 12.40 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
