

SOUTH HAMS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL



Minutes of a meeting of the **South Hams Overview and Scrutiny Panel** held on **Thursday, 19th November, 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 Green
Cllr Horsburgh
Cllr Pennington
Cllr Smerdon

Cllr Barnes
Cllr Brown
Cllr Hawkins
Cllr May
Cllr Pringle

In attendance:

Councillors:
Cllr Bastone
Cllr Brazil
Cllr Gilbert
Cllr Hitchins
Cllr Holway
Cllr Rowe
Cllr Tucker
Cllr Ward

Cllr Bramble
Cllr Cuthbert
Cllr Hicks
Cllr Hodgson
Cllr Pearce
Cllr Steer
Cllr Vint
Cllr Wright

Officers:

Head of Paid Service
Executive Director – SD&CD
Group Manager – Business Development
Group Manager – Customer First
Group Manager – Support Services
Section 151 Officer
Finance Business Partner
Lead Specialist – Place & Strategy
Monitoring Officer
Contact Centre Manager

46. **Welcome**
O&S.46/15
In his introductions, the Chairman welcomed Cllr J P Green to his first Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting following his recent election.
47. **Minutes**
O&S.47/15
The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 17 September 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
48. **Declarations of Interest**
O&S.48/15
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 P Green declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Item 8: 'Review of Fees and Charges for 2016/17' (Minute O&S.51/15 below refers) specifically in relation to the proposed fee for Acupuncture, Tattooing, Ear-piercing and Electrolysis by virtue of his wife being an acupuncturist. In the event of this particular fee being debated, Cllr Green advised that he would then leave the meeting during the discussion and he abstained from the vote on the recommendation.
- Cllr K R H Wingate declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Item 8: 'Review of Fees and Charges for 2016/17' (Minute O&S.51/15 below refers) specifically in relation to the proposal to establish an Events Policy Task and Finish Group by virtue of public comments that he had previously made in this regard. Cllr Wingate proceeded to leave the meeting room during the debate on this matter and abstained from the vote on the recommendation.
49. **Public Forum**
O&S.49/15
In accordance with the Public Forum Procedure Rules, no items were raised at this meeting.
50. **Executive Forward Plan**
O&S.50/15
The following issues were raised on the most recently published Executive Forward Plan:-
- Having sought clarity on the Rent Plus agenda item (which was scheduled for consideration by the Executive at its meeting on 10 December 2015), it was noted that a report was to be presented as a consequence of the implications arising from the Housing and Planning Bill;
 - In the absence of the Local Development Scheme from the most recently published Forward Plan, it was agreed that an update would be provided in the next Members' Bulletin edition.

51.

Review of Fees and Charges for 2016/17

O&S.51/15

The Panel considered a report that set out proposals for fees and charges for all services for 2016/17. The report noted that, in the event of each of the recommendations being endorsed, additional income that could be generated from this review would total £5.000.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the number of events being held on Council land. In acknowledging that the number of events were increasing year on year, a number of Members lamented the current lack of a consistent (yet with a degree of flexibility built in) approach from the Council. As a consequence, the following additional recommendation was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and when put to the vote was declared **CARRIED**:-

'That an Events Policy Task and Finish Group (comprising of Cllrs Baldry, Bramble (Group Lead) and Brown) be established with the primary purpose of reviewing and revising the Council's Events Policy.'

- (b) the justification for a proposed reduction in some fees and charges. The lead Executive Member for Support Services informed that these reductions were proposed in an attempt to bring these fees and charges in line with those proposed by West Devon Borough Council (WDBC). Some Members proceeded to put on record their views that the Council should be locally setting its own charges and should not be giving any consideration to those proposed by WDBC. In reply, officers informed that there was a need for the Council to be able to justify its fees and charges structure and it would be deemed disproportionate if the same shared officers (and processes) were proven to be working to two different sets of charging regimes;

- (c) charging for the use of public conveniences. A Member highlighted the inconsistency of approach for charging to use public conveniences and urged the lead Executive Member to make progress in this regard;

- (d) the proposed charges for shower use. Some Members felt that the proposed charges to be applied for shower use were too low and should therefore be increased. As a result, it was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and when put to the vote was declared **CARRIED**:-

'That, for 2016/17, the shower charges should be increased from 20p to £1.'

- (e) the proposed Site Sponsorship charges. Having been informed that Site Sponsorship opportunities were not being taken up, an additional recommendation was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and on being put to the vote was declared **CARRIED**:-

'That, before a decision is taken by the Council, a benchmarking exercise be undertaken in order to review the proposed Site Sponsorship charges and the Panel also task officers to investigate methods of increasing marketing opportunities to promote this initiative.'

- (f) opportunities arising from trade waste charges. A non-Panel Member expressed his disappointment that the Council was not being more ambitious in respect of utilising opportunities to generate more income from the trade waste function. The Member was of the view that the Council could generate at least an additional £200,000 per annum if it exploited the opportunities which were available to it from the trade waste service.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the Executive **RECOMMEND** to Council that the proposed fees and charges (as set out in the presented agenda report and appendices) be approved as part of the 2016/17 Budget Setting process, subject to the shower charges being increased from 20p to £1;
2. That the Executive **RECOMMEND** to Council that delegated authority be given to the Community Of Practice Lead for Environmental Health, in consultation with the Lead Executive Member, to modify the charges of Food Export Certificates, once the outcome of the current review is known;
3. That the Executive **RECOMMEND** to Council that delegated authority be given to the Group Manager for Commercial Services, in consultation with the lead Executive Member, to set the Commercial Waste charges, once all the price modelling factors are known;
4. That, before a decision is taken by the Council, a benchmarking exercise be undertaken in order to review the proposed Site Sponsorship charges and the Panel also task officers to investigate methods of increasing marketing opportunities to promote this initiative; and
5. That an Events Policy Task and Finish Group (comprising of Cllrs Baldry, Bramble (Group Lead) and Brown) be established with the primary purpose of reviewing and revising the Council's Events Policy.

(NOTE: recommendations 1, 2 and 3 (above) will be considered by the Executive at its 4 February 2016 meeting as part of the wider 2016/17 Budget Setting process).

52. **New Homes Bonus Allocation to Dartmoor National Park Authority**

O&S.52/15

In line with the Council decision when approving the 2015/16 Budget at its meeting on 12 February 2015 (Minute 66/14 below refers), a paper was considered that provided a progress update on the application and use of the New Homes Bonus funds that had been transferred to the Dartmoor National Park Sustainable Community Fund.

In the ensuing discussion, the Panel noted that the allocations varied in the published agenda papers, as a consequence of there being a twelve month time lag in the process.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the paper be noted.

53. **Our Plan: South Hams - Review**

O&S.53/15

A report was considered that provided a progress update on Our Plan: South Hams.

During the debate, reference was made to:-

- (a) the division of responsibilities between lead Executive Members. For clarity, it was confirmed that the Leader of Council was the lead Executive Member for the overriding 'Our Plan: South Hams' and Cllr Hicks was the lead Executive Member specifically for the 'Local Plan' element of 'Our Plan: South Hams'. In welcoming this clarification, Members were keen to emphasise that Our Plan: South Hams was more than just concerned with the local plan and house building. Having said that, another Member stressed that it was of paramount importance that the Council established its housing need numbers. In this respect, the Leader informed that the Housing Needs Survey was being refreshed and would be reported back to Members for consideration;
- (b) the need to improve the communications in relation to Our Plan: South Hams was recognised by the Panel;
- (c) Member participation in the process. The Panel was of the view that an all Member event should be held early in the New Year to discuss Our Plan: South Hams and the underpinning delivery plan;
- (d) the Village Housing Initiative (VHI). Officers confirmed that they were attempting to bring together a number of approaches to housing

development and the VHI concept was a key scheme that would be specifically looked at during this process;

- (e) the Delivery Plan being a shared document with West Devon Borough Council (WDBC). Whilst it was noted that the key themes and objectives were almost identical between the two councils, the Panel asked that, in the future, consideration be given to the Delivery Plans being separated for both councils.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the monitoring of Our Plan: South Hams and the 2015/16 Action Plan be noted;

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

2. Our Plan: South Hams be issued for the start of the 2016/17 Financial Year as a document that:-
 - o recognises Our Plan: South Hams for the start as the single comprehensive Council Plan;
 - o re-states the Council's corporate Vision and Objectives;
 - o establishes the common basis for the Council's Financial Plan, Asset Management Plan, Local Plan and all other Plans and Strategies;
 - o establishes long-term and short-term priorities for delivery including a delivery plan commencing in 2016/17;
 - o establishes mechanisms for delivery; and
 - o establishes engagement, monitoring and review procedures;
 - o provides context for subsequent incorporation of the Local Plan element currently subject to separate preparation.
3. a Member Workshop be held early in the New Year to progress this work;
4. the final document return to the Executive and Council for agreement prior to its publication.

54.

IT and Customer Services Update

O&S.55/15

Following regular updates to the Panel, a report was presented that updated Members on the Customer Services performance trends since the last meeting. In particular, the report paid attention to telephone call answer times, call volumes and staff recruitment as areas of particular concern.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) Whilst it was acknowledged that the latest performance trends were showing some signs of improvement, a number of Members expressed their opinions and disappointment that the service was still of an unacceptable standard. The two statistics that were repeatedly highlighted as being of particular concern were that:
- 18% of calls were not being answered; and
 - 26% of callers were having to wait over 7 minutes to have their call answered.

In response to Members citing specific examples of the public receiving poor service from the Contact Centre, the Head of Paid Service urged that, in such instances, Members let him know accordingly.

The Panel reiterated its desire to see a far greater improvement in performance and it was then **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and when put to the vote declared **CARRIED** that:-

'A clear action plan be produced for Customer Services and presented to the next Panel meeting on 14 January 2016 for its consideration.'

- (b) When questioned, the Panel noted that, as a result of the blueprinting exercise, the Contact Centre had provision for a core staffing level of 15 full-time equivalent members of staff. Such was the pressure on the service, some Members felt that, whilst there were inevitable revenue implications, staffing numbers had to be reviewed in the Contact Centre;
- (c) With regard to some quick wins, officers agreed to remind staff throughout the Council to be professional in their telephone manner. In addition, it was agreed that, for outgoing calls from the Council, officers would ensure that the telephone number was no longer displayed as being 'withheld'.

In conclusion, whilst the Panel had been robust in stating its concerns and frustrations, Members did recognise that the staff in the Contact Centre were doing a good job and working tirelessly in very difficult circumstances. As a consequence, the Panel asked that its thanks be passed on to those staff who work in the Contact Centre.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That a clear action plan be produced for Customer Services and presented to the next Panel meeting on 14 January 2016 for its consideration.

55. **Transformation Programme Monitoring**

O&S.54/15

The Group Manager – Support Services provided an update on the Transformation Programme and highlighted that:-

- the Development Management service had gone live on the W2 System this week;
- a positive meeting had been held recently with Civica (the IT system provider); and
- the Programme remained on target in respect of timescale and budget.

During the debate, reference was made to:-

- (a) presenting monitoring reports to the Panel prior to their consideration by the Executive. In the future, officers agreed to re-align the quarterly monitoring reports that were presented to the Executive to ensure that they were considered by the Panel in the first instance;
- (b) the pace and extent of the Programme. Some Members were of the view that, in hindsight, the Programme had been progressed too quickly and staff numbers had been reduced too severely;
- (c) the Modern.Gov committee management system. Officers advised that the Council was now in a position to commence with a Member trial of the new system. As a general point on the Council's intention to reduce its paper usage, it was noted that discussions were taking place with town and parish councils in an attempt to minimise the impact of this drive.

RESOLVED

1. That the progress update be noted; and
2. That, in the future, the quarterly Transformation Programme Monitoring Reports be presented to the Panel before being considered by the Executive.

56. **Dispensations to Dual-Hatted Members**

O&S.56/15

A report was considered that sought to consider whether the general dispensation that had previously been granted to all dual-hatted Members should be extended.

In discussion, a Member expressed his dissatisfaction over the recommendation and, in particular, was unhappy that a Member of the Executive could also be a Devon County Council (DCC) Member. The Member felt it to be inevitable that there would be occasions when the two roles would lead to a Member having a conflict of interest. To counter this view, other Members highlighted that a dual-hatted Member

could in fact utilise this position to the benefit of the Council. Moreover, it was recognised that Executive Members had very limited individual decision-making powers.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the general dispensation that had been previously granted to all dual-hatted Members of South Hams District Council to enable them to speak and vote on matters where they are a Member of another local authority and in receipt of a Members' Allowances for that other authority be extended until May 2019.

57. Business Development Group Manager Update

O&S.57/15

The Panel considered a report that presented an update on the Business Development Group Manager role.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the 27 possible income generation activities identified in the presented agenda report. In light of a request, the lead Executive Member confirmed that he would circulate a generic list of these activities to the wider membership. As an assurance, it was confirmed that activities relating to trade waste and sponsorship were included on this list;
- (b) the performance and intelligence team. It was noted that the team was still heavily involved in the process mapping for the Transformation Programme and, realistically, the team would be fully integrated and established early in the New Year;
- (c) projects related to Salcombe Harbour. Having been informed that the Harbour Master had a number of potential business development opportunities in mind, the Panel asked that the Harbour Board be fully consulted with as and when ideas started to be progressed.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the report and the work completed and planned by the Business Development Group Manager role be noted.

58. Update on the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) 2014-2020

O&S.58/15

The Panel considered a report that provided an update on the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) 2014-2020.

In discussion, it became apparent that some Members had concerns regarding the seeming lack of monitoring, transparency and feedback that the Council received from the South Devon Coastal Local Action Group (LAG) and Greater Dartmoor – Local Enterprise Action Fund (LEAF). As a consequence, the Panel requested that representatives from the LEAF and LAG be invited to attend the Panel meeting on 17 March 2016.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted and the scheme be promoted as appropriate with local residents and businesses;
2. That the Council continue to support the Greater Dartmoor – Local Enterprise Action Fund (LEAF) and the South Devon Coastal Local Action Group (LAG); and
3. That representatives from the LEAF and LAG be invited to attend and provide an update to the Panel meeting on 17 March 2016.

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

O&S.59/15

(a) Performance Measures

A report was considered that presented the final report of the Performance Measures Review Task and Finish Group. In introducing the report, the Group Chairman paid particular attention to the choice of performance measures being subject to continuous review and changed as and when deemed necessary and as Members concerns altered.

The Panel wished to put on record its thanks to the Chairman and Members of the Group, officers and the lead Executive Member for undertaking an excellent review.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the findings of the Task and Finish Group be endorsed whereby:-

1. streamlined versions of the Balanced Scorecard and Background and Exception report (as shown in Appendices A and B respectively of the presented agenda report) be made available to Members on a quarterly basis, containing measures where a Scrutiny role is beneficial;

2. financial measures be reported elsewhere and therefore not included in these reports, with these measures being replaced with specific T18 measures;
3. an in-depth quarterly analysis of an area or department be included within the reporting, designated to interrogate the high level performance data further and identify trends, improvements etc. This 'deep-dive' quarterly analysis will either follow a pre-determined schedule or be flexible enough to focus on issues raised by a prior quarterly report; and
4. once the T18 Programme is fully operational, Members will be given easy access to a much larger range of 'live' performance data that they can choose to access at any time, rather than just relying on the reports presented to them.

(b) Dartmouth Lower Ferry

It was noted that an interesting and informative site visit had been undertaken to the Ferry and Workshop. Following this visit, a further Group meeting had been held on 5 November 2015, during which a broad overview of the initial findings of the report produced by RPT Consulting was presented.

In terms of next steps, Members were advised that a Group meeting was to be held in December 2015, with the subsequent recommendations then presented to the next Panel meeting on 14 January 2016, before then being considered by the Executive on 4 February 2016.

(c) Partnerships

Members were advised that the first joint Group meeting had been held and valued contributions had been made from Members of both the Council and West Devon Borough Council. The meeting had given a real insight into the vast number of Partnerships that the Council was involved in and the joint meeting had enabled for a number of useful comparisons to be drawn.

It was noted that the next joint meeting was to be held on 6 January 2016 at Kilworthy Park, Tavistock.

(d) Waste and Recycling

The Panel acknowledged that a final wash up meeting of the Task and Finish Group had been held on 24 September 2015 and the newly convened Group was to hold its first meeting in December 2015.

Members commented that it would be beneficial for the notes of the final Group meeting to be circulated with the agenda for the next Panel meeting on 14 January 2015.

60. **Member Visit to National Maritime Operations Centre in Fareham**

O&S.60/15

The lead Executive Member for Customer First introduced a paper that had been prepared by the Harbour Master following their visit to HM Coastguards National Maritime Operations Centre on Friday, 13 November 2015.

In conclusion, the paper outlined that the visit had been useful and informative and had addressed all known concerns that had been raised by Members. Particularly reassuring was the willingness to acknowledge that the Centre still had further progress to make that was coupled with a resolve to do so.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the presentation given by the Coastguard representative. In commending the quality of the presentation that they had received, the lead Executive Member was of the view that a number of the public relations problems that had been incurred by the organisation would have been overcome if the key messages in the presentation had been disseminated from the offset;
- (b) the transformation agenda. Members were informed that the impact of Central Government budget cuts had been kept to a minimum for the organisation in light of it having the foresight to begin its transformation agenda before any government funding announcements had been made;
- (c) concerns over the loss of local knowledge. In countering these concerns, an example was cited to the meeting whereby three officers from Brixham were now working at the Centre in Fareham;
- (d) two main challenges remaining. The Panel was informed that a new pager system was in the process of being tested to replace the current antiquated system. Also, the representative had promised to follow up on a specific query relating to blind spots and he gave a commitment to let the Council know in due course.

The Chairman proceeded to thank the Member and Harbour Master for attending such a worthwhile visit and asked that the Council's thanks also be extended to the organisation. Finally, the Panel welcomed the conclusion of this longstanding agenda item and felt that any specific issues that arise in the future should be progressed through local MPs.

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

O&S.61/15

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

- (a) a Development Management (DM) service update. The Panel endorsed the suggestion that a DM service update be presented to its next meeting on 14 January 2016. In particular, Members asked that

this agenda item made reference to service improvements following the new system going live on the website and an update on the outsourcing of the services backlog of applications;

- (b) the Customer Services Action Plan. The Panel reiterated that this agenda item should be scheduled on to the agenda for 14 January 2016 meeting;
- (c) attendance of the LEAF and LAG representatives. Members repeated their request for LEAF and LAG representatives to be invited to the Panel meeting on 17 March 2016.

The Meeting concluded at 1.00 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
