

# WEST DEVON HUB COMMITTEE



West Devon  
Borough  
Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **West Devon Hub Committee** held  
on  
**Tuesday, 22nd September, 2015** at **2.00 pm** at the **Chamber**  
**- Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

**Chairman** Cllr Sanders  
**Vice Chairman** Cllr Baldwin

Cllr Benson  
Cllr Oxborough  
Cllr Sampson

Cllr Cann OBE  
Cllr Parker  
Cllr Samuel

**In attendance:**

Councillors:

Cllr Cloke  
Cllr Evans  
Cllr Moyse  
Cllr Pearce

Cllr Edmonds  
Cllr Leech  
Cllr Musgrave  
Cllr Stephens

Officers:

Executive Director (Strategy & Commissioning)  
Executive Director (Service Delivery & Commercial Development)  
Lead Specialist – Place and Strategy  
Lead Specialist – Housing, Revenues & Benefits  
Group Manager Customer First  
Group Manager Support Services  
Place and Strategy Specialist  
S151 Officer

11. **Apologies for absence**

\*HC11

Apologies were received from Cllr J B Moody.

12. **Declarations of Interest**

\*HC 12

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be discussed and the following were made:

Cllr R J Oxborough declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Item 6 'Business Development – Discretionary Rate Relief' (Minute HC 15 below refers) by virtue of being a business owner himself and he left the meeting for the duration of this item.

13. **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

\*HC 13

The Chairman advised that in view of concerns about the level and quality of service, specifically in the Customer Contact Centre and Planning, discussions had taken place with the Executive Directors. Members had been aware that service levels could suffer with the transition to new ways of working, however, issues were now being raised at Parish Council meetings with Borough Councillors.

The Executive Director (Service Delivery and Commercial Development) thanked Members for the opportunity to set out the latest position and advised that there had been a dip in service in two key areas. She set out the recruitment position for staff into the Customer Contact Centre, and plans to consider temporarily outsourcing Revenue and Benefits calls. There had been an increase overall in the number of calls received into the Customer Contact Centre, caused by failure demand in other areas. Assurances were given that once new ways of working were fully implemented this demand would be addressed. The main issues were at the validation stage, and this would not be an issue once the full complement of 'Planning qualified' Case Managers were in post. Of four vacancies, one and a half had now been filled. Discussions were being held with external companies in terms of supporting the Council temporarily with validation requests, enforcement and land charges. A plan was in place, and the ability to use additional resource would help dramatically and be of direct benefit.

The Executive Director (Strategy and Commissioning) apologised to Members for the difficulties they were experiencing when attending Parish Council meetings. The changing ways of working and changing IT systems were always going to cause difficulties but definite plans were in place and both Leaders were prepared to support through additional finance.

The Leader stated that both he and the Leader of South Hams District Council were prepared to look at additional resource but it would be a Council decision. However the current situation could not continue and clearing the backlog of work was the issue. He also wanted to make absolutely certain that it was understood that the current difficulties were in no way a reflection on or criticism of staff who were working incredibly hard, over long hours in difficult areas.

The Executive Directors then responded to a number of queries from Members. Members also wished to echo the Leader in stating that the staff were appreciated and the current problems were in no way a criticism of them.

14.

### **Our Plan**

HC 14

The Portfolio Holder for Our Plan and Strategic Planning presented a report that updated Members on the status of Our Plan and made recommendations for next steps. It highlighted responses to the Our Plan public consultation that took place in the spring and set these in a regional and national context of significant change over the last 6 months.

He then responded to a number of detailed questions regarding the recommendations contained within the report.

It was then **RECOMMENDED** that Council be **RECOMMENDED** that:

1. Option 2 for progression of Our Plan, as set out at paragraph 4 of the presented agenda report, be pursued recognising that this will need an extended plan period to 2032 or 2033;
2. A detailed Duty to Co-operate protocol, or similar agreement, be established with neighbouring planning authorities within the Housing Market Area. This would address joint approaches to strategic planning relating to timetable, evidence, policies, strategic allocations, governance, staffing, scope of Housing Market Area, viability and infrastructure amongst other matters;
3. The Local Development Scheme be reviewed and re-issued in line with recommendation 1;
4. That further evidence work (joint or specific) be procured as required;
5. That a budget provision for 2016/17 of £75,000 be made for Our Plan, which will be a cost pressure built into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2016/17 onwards;
6. That a Settlement Boundary Policy be considered for incorporation in future versions of Our Plan and necessary preparatory work be undertaken to allow for this option;
7. That it be agreed that a World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) be pursued in line with existing and proposed development plan policies;
8. That a further "Call for Sites" be initiated;
9. That site OP16 at Brook Lane, Tavistock be agreed to be deleted from future versions of Our Plan;
10. That Guidance for Neighbourhood Plan Groups be issued to inform their work as it relates to Our Plan;

11. That a refreshed Our Plan Engagement Strategy be issued;
12. That regular Member update sessions be timetabled;
13. That a further report be submitted to Hub Committee and Council making specific proposals for future consultation, consideration and submission of Our Plan; and
14. Those specific details to be agreed under recommendations 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 and 11 be delegated to the Lead Specialist – Place and Strategy in consultation with the lead Hub Committee Member and the Leader of Council.

15. **Business Development - Discretionary Rate Relief**

HC 15

The Deputy Leader presented a report that recommended to Council that the Borough Council utilise its powers to apply discretionary business rate relief. The purpose of these new powers was to give billing authorities the ability and scope to encourage, sustain and improve local economic performance by temporarily lowering the business rate burden while local businesses grew and created significant additional employment within the Borough.

Members had a detailed debate on this item, including how the proposed policy differed from the existing Rate Relief Panel. During discussion, it was confirmed that reference in the presented report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee chairman as a substitute Member of the business rate relief decision panel should state the Overview and Scrutiny (External) Committee. Members also discussed amending specific points within presented Appendix one, however these proposed amendments fell as there was not sufficient support.

It was then **RECOMMENDED** that Council be **RECOMMENDED** to:

- a) to offer local businesses discretionary business rate relief where it is in the interest of local Council tax payers to do so;
- b) to ratify a new discretionary business rate relief policy as detailed within Appendix one and approve the rate relief application form as shown in Appendix two attached to this report;
- c) to agree the formation of a discretionary business rate relief decision panel, who will appraise and determine applications on an as-needs basis as set out in paragraph 1.6 of this report;
- d) to delegate authority to the Group Manager, Business Development in consultation with the Deputy Leader of West Devon Borough Council to make minor legal amendments to the Policy shown in Appendix one prior to it being published and adopted as appropriate;
- e) to review the policy after one year; and

- f) to refer decisions made by the panel to the Audit Committee.

16. **Council Tax Discretionary Discount and Reduction Policy**

HC 16

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing presented a report that set out how the Council could use its discretionary powers to assist persons liable for Council Tax who are facing extreme hardship or distress. The report presented a new policy which incorporated these powers with the Exceptional Hardship Fund which specifically provided additional support to customers in receipt of Council Tax reduction. This would allow all applications for assistance with Council Tax to be considered under one framework and would ensure all applicants are treated consistently and fairly.

It was then **RECOMMENDED** that Council be **RECOMMENDED** to approve the combined Council Tax Discretionary Discount & Reduction Policy.

17. **Devon Home Choice & Local Allocations Policy Review**

HC 17

The Lead Specialist Housing, Revenue and Benefits presented a report that reviewed the existing arrangements for Devon Home Choice – the Authority's current model of allocating affordable housing in the borough. The report included a summary of the experiences of other authorities who had made significant changes locally to the Devon Home Choice Policy and set out the reasons for the recommendations going forward.

There was some discussion regarding the example presented in the report of the policy adopted by another Council to remove Band E residents from the list. Whilst not all Members agreed with this way forward, it was noted that officers should look at alternatives to Devon Home Choice in time for the next annual review.

It was then **RESOLVED**:

- a) that the content and findings of the report be

noted to **RECOMMEND** to Council to:

- b) remain in the Devon Home Choice Partnership and review again in twelve months time; and  
c) make no changes at this time to the West Devon Borough Council Local Allocation Policy and review again in twelve months time.

18. **Planning Obligations Report**

HC 18

The Portfolio Holder for Our Plan and Strategic Planning presented a report that sought to revoke the interim planning obligations decision agreed at full Council on 17 February 2015.

Members discussed the report and particularly the effective date of the decision.

It was then **RECOMMENDED** that Council be **RECOMMENDED** to revoke the interim planning obligations decision agreed at full Council on 17 February 2015.

19. **Health and Safety**

HC 19

The Executive Director (Strategy and Commissioning) presented a report that sought acceptance of the Health and Safety Statement of Policy and recommend that the Statement of Policy be reviewed and signed annually on the occasion of the Annual Council Meeting.

During discussion the Members confirmed that the policy, whilst not specific to West Devon Borough Council, was acceptable, as it related to staff working across both Councils.

The Chairman commented that whilst it was important to have policies in place, it was more important that the culture of an organisation reflected the commitment to working in a healthy and safe manner.

It was then **RECOMMENDED** that Council be **RECOMMENDED**:

- a) that the Health and Safety Statement of Policy is accepted and signed by the Head of Paid Service and the Leader of the Council; and
- b) that the Health and Safety Statement of Policy is reviewed and signed annually on the occasion of the Annual Council Meeting.

20. **Data Protection Policy**

HC 20

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance presented a report that brought a revised Joint Data Protection Policy for approval. The Policy had been drafted to support the Council's T18 ways of working.

It was then **RECOMMENDED** that Council be **RECOMMENDED**:

1. to approve the Joint Data Protection Policy attached at Appendix A to the presented report and supporting Codes of Practice and documentation; and
2. to delegate to the Monitoring Officer to make minor amendments

21.

**Write Off Report**

\*HC 21

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing introduced a report that informed Members of the debt written off for revenue streams within the Revenue and Benefits service. Debts up to the value of £5,000 were written off by the s151 Officer under delegated authority. Permission was sought to write off individual debts with a value of more than £5,000.

It was then **RESOLVED**  
that:

1. The write off by the s151 Officer of individual West Devon Borough Council debts totalling £65,532.49, as detailed in Tables 1 and 2 of the presented report, be noted; and
2. The write off of individual debts in excess of £5,000, totalling £25,244.26 as detailed in Table 3 of the presented report be approved.

At the conclusion of this item, the Executive Director (Strategy and Commissioning) advised Members that the external auditors, Grant Thornton, had issued an unqualified opinion in respect of the accounts and acknowledged the hard work of the shared finance team. Members congratulated the s151 Officer on an excellent job and asked that thanks to her and her team be noted.

The Meeting concluded at 4.30 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chairman**

