

**MINUTES of the MEETING of the  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE,  
Held in the Council Chamber, Follaton House, Totnes, on  
THURSDAY, 12 January 2023**

<b>Panel Members in attendance:</b>			
* Denotes attendance		∅ Denotes apology for absence	
*	Cllr L Austen	*	Cllr R Rowe
*	Cllr J P Birch	*	Cllr P C Smerdon (Vice Chairman)
*	Cllr M Chown	*	Cllr B Spencer
∅	Cllr S Jackson	*	Cllr J Sweett
*	Cllr L Jones	*	Cllr D Thomas (Chairman)
*	Cllr J McKay	*	Cllr B Taylor
*	Cllr J Rose		

<b>Other Members also in attendance either in person or via Teams:</b>
Cllrs V Abbott; K Baldry; H Bastone; J Brazil; J Hawkins; T Holway; N Hopwood; K Pringle and J Pearce

Item No	Minute Ref No below refers	Officers in attendance and participating
All		Director of Strategy & Governance; Democratic Services Manager; Assistant Director - Strategy & Organisational Development (via Teams); Head of Organisational Development (via Teams); Head of Housing (via Teams); Customer Service Improvement Manager (via Teams); Specialist - Climate Change Head of Environmental Health & Licensing (via Teams) Environmental Health Officer; South Devon & Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership Representative; Devon & Cornwall Police Representative

**O&S.35/22 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the following correction being made to Minute ref O&S.32/22 discussion point (c):

*'In particular, it was agreed that the Information Board in the Car Park at Follaton House which provided the Council's recycling rates was accurate and should be removed in view of the information contained in the presented agenda report' should be amended to read:*

*'In particular, it was agreed that the Information Board in the Car Park at Follaton House which provided the Council's recycling rates was **inaccurate** and should be removed in view of the information contained in the presented agenda report.'*

**O&S.36/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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.

**O&S.37/22 PUBLIC FORUM**

In accordance with the Public Forum Procedure Rules, the Chairman informed that no questions had been received for consideration.

**O&S.38/22 SOUTH DEVON AND DARTMOOR COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**

The Committee was presented with a report that provided Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the work of the South Devon and Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership (CSP). During the presentation, attention was drawn to the introduction of new legislation, the 'Serious Violence Duty', which would result in more responsibilities for the Partnership, although it was confirmed that much preparation work had already been undertaken.

In summarising the focus of the Partnership's work over the previous twelve months, the following work was brought to Members' attention:

- Engagement with Secondary Schools regarding violence against women and girls and harmful sexual behaviour;
- Work to highlight Exploitation – preventing radicalisation, modern slavery, people trafficking and harmful drugs/County Lines;
- Work to highlight changing youth culture and young people's mental health, including the growing problem of vaping amongst young people;
- Work with Children's Care Homes within the District;
- Anti-Social Behaviour issues, particularly concerning increased instances of anti-social behaviour on Dartmoor;
- The Turning Corners Programme delivering Outreach work; and
- The expansion of the 'Let's Talk' Programme, running a number of very well supported and successful sessions for parents.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

(a) A number of Police specific issues were raised that included:

- the importance of police stations operating a front desk resource;
- the emphasis being placed by the recently appointed Chief Constable on neighbourhood policing being welcomed;
- concerns being expressed over the lack of frontline policing levels within the South Hams;
- the lack of police reports at town and parish council meetings being disappointing;
- the priority intention for Police Community Support Officers to be recruited in Dartmouth and Kingsbridge was welcomed;

- the ability for all Members (and local town and parish councillors) to attend the Councillor Advocate Scheme meetings. Despite attendance unfortunately being very low, those Members who attended made reference to how useful these meetings were and it was agreed that a reminder should be sent to all Members and Town and Parish Council Clerks about these meetings taking place.
- (b) It was acknowledged that the Council had certain statutory responsibilities in respect of both anti-social behaviour and the prevention of crime. As a result, Members were encouraged, for matters related to anti-social behaviour and crime prevention, to contact the Council in addition to the Police;
- (c) Having been made aware of the recently adopted Council Motion, Partnership representatives confirmed their support in the drive for vapes to be subjected to the same restrictions as cigarette products;
- (d) The representatives informed that the increased concerns relating to the internet usage of young people was recognised and, as a consequence, the 'Let's Talk' program was being adapted to include a session on this matter.

It was then:

### **RESOLVED**

1. That, in addition to the points raised in the detailed minute above, the following issues have been identified by the Committee for onward consideration by the Partnership:
  - The increased realisation of all Members and the general public of the statutory role played by the Partnership and the role of Members in reporting instances of anti-social and crime prevention; and
  - The need to promote attendance of Members and Town and Parish Councillors at Councillor Advocate Scheme meetings; and
2. That the Committee formally thank the Partnership for its sterling work over the last 12 months.

## **O&S.39/22 BETTER LIVES FOR ALL – CLIMATE CHANGE THEMATIC UPDATE**

The lead Executive Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity introduced the report and invited Members' questions on the contents of the Climate Change Thematic Update.

In the ensuing debate, particular reference was made to:

- Action AM1.1 (Converting our Environmental Management Vehicles to Electric). It was noted that the Council had been unable to recruit to the short-term post related to fleet planning. However, an alternate resource was now in place and work on the fleet transition was therefore underway. Members acknowledged that there was a current national shortage of Electric Vehicles and an increase in unit costs which, in combination with ensuring the project was progressed with best value for money, could result in the transition of the fleet not being completed by 2024;
- Action AM1.3 (Explore Renewable Energy Opportunities Across the District). Officers advised that this action had not yet commenced as it would need to be undertaken in conjunction with partners, primarily the Devon Climate Emergency Group. As a result, it was suggested that the Plan be updated accordingly, highlighting that the Council would not be able to progress this action until the relevant partners were in a position to proceed;
- Action AM1.4 (Deliver Funding for Community Projects). Questions of clarity were raised on this action specifically regarding the budget position for funding Community Climate Change and Biodiversity Projects and the timeframe in which the funds were expected to be allocated. It was confirmed that, with tightening budgets and as the funds were limited, it was essential that the best and most suitable projects were funded and that any projects coming forward were carefully considered and that, despite the urgency of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Emergency, it was not prudent to fund projects without first undertaking appropriate research and/or feasibility studies. It was further confirmed that part of the remaining budget had already been earmarked for projects such as Fleet Transition or for further feasibility work on new or the next stage of ongoing projects. Nonetheless, some Members still remained concerned about the apparent lack of pace in spending the allocated funding.

In response to a question regarding funds available for Community Composting schemes, it was confirmed that the Waste team had now taken on responsibility for this initiative and, as a result, all enquiries and bids for financial support should be directed to the team;

- Action AM1.5 (Adopting an Electric Vehicle (EV) Strategy). In response to a local Ward Member question, it was confirmed that the identified car park in Totnes was the next one for which the installation of EV Charging Points would be completed;
- Action AM1.6 (A 10% increase in Biodiversity on Council land). In discussion, Members stated their support for the activity that had been undertaken to date on this Action.

It was then:

**RESOLVED**

That the progress in delivery of the Better Lives for All Climate Change thematic delivery plan be noted.

**O&S.40/22 SIX-MONTH OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

The lead Executive Member for Service Delivery provided the Committee with a report which gave a high-level overview of performance across the Council.

During the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) There was Committee support expressed for the new format of the report, although it was recognised that further Key Performance Indicators were still to be added to the evolving template;
- (b) Disappointment was expressed that the figures contained within the report related to Quarter 2 (ending 30 September 2022) and not those for Quarter 3, which would have provided a more current review of the Council's performance.

In taking this point a step further, an additional Recommendation was **PROPOSED, SECONDED** and when put to the vote declared **CARRIED** that:

*'the Calendar of Meetings for 2023/24 is drafted to ensure that the timing of Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings is reflective of the Quarterly Performance Monitoring Cycle.'*

- (c) It was noted that the number of Planning Enforcement Cases that were live at the end of the reporting Quarter had exceeded the prescribed target, but this had been due to increased demand and the formation of a new team, which was still being embedded at that time;
- (d) A Member sought information on the Council process for answering Freedom Of Information (FOI) requests and further requested information on the number of complaints received by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) pertaining to FOI requests. The Member further requested that this information be added to the Performance Report template as a standing item. In reply, the lead Executive Member advised that she would arrange for the Monitoring Officer to supply information regarding the number and outcome of complaints received by the ICO outside of the meeting and that consideration would be given as to whether or not this information should form a substantive part of future Performance reports;
- (e) Some concerns were raised over the poor performance against the target for answering calls relating to Revenue and Benefit queries.

In reply, officers confirmed that measures were already being undertaken to improve performance and that members of the public had a range of ways to contact the team other than by telephone which might prove more effective for them;

- (f) There was a lengthy debate regarding the performance of the Council's Planning service and concern that the Performance Indicators did not reflect the actual position as certain information was not included in the dataset, including the size of caseload per Planning Officer and the impact this had had on the performance of the Service. There was acknowledgement that overall performance was improving but that there were still areas of concern.

It was then:

### **RESOLVED**

1. That the new suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), present performance and proposals for improvement where detailed, be noted,
2. That it be noted that the further KPIs, presently under development, would be provided at the next six-monthly update; and
3. That the Calendar of Meetings for 2023/24 be drafted to ensure that the timing of Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings be reflective of the Quarterly Performance Monitoring Cycle

## **O&S.41/22 TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATES**

### **(a) EV Strategy Task and Finish Group: Concluding Report**

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group introduced the report and thanked Members and Officers for their work in supporting the Review.

In discussion, a Member queried whether or not consideration had been given to the installation of charging points along the A38 corridor within the Council's boundaries. In reply, it was confirmed that, as the responsible authority, this would be a matter for Highways England.

It was then:

### **RECOMMENDED**

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **RECOMMEND** the content of the draft EV Strategy (as set out at Appendix A of the published minutes) to the Executive and that officers be requested to undertake a public consultation exercise on the Strategy in line with the Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

**(b) Consultation & Engagement Strategy Task and Finish Group**

The Chairman advised that there had been a misunderstanding concerning the Terms of Reference (ToRs) at the initial meeting of the Consultation & Engagement Strategy Task and Finish Group.

The Committee proceeded to express its agreement that the ToRs that were presented to the first Group meeting were reflective of the wishes of the Committee when approving the establishment of the Group at its previous meeting (Minute O&S.34/22(a) refers) and should therefore be used to underpin this Review.

**O&S.42/22 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23**

A Member of the Committee requested that further to the item considered earlier in the agenda; the Six-Month Operational Performance Review (Minute O&S.40/22 above refers), a report on the Council's procedures for responding to FOI requests and information on any subsequent complaints to the ICO be brought to the Committee in the Spring.

In view of the proximity of this date to the District Elections taking place on 4 May 2023, it was agreed that this would be tabled as an item to be considered for scheduling on the Work Programme for the next Council term.

(Meeting started at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.15 pm)

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Chairman