

At a Meeting of the **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Kilworthy Park, Drake Road, **TAVISTOCK** on **TUESDAY** the **10th** day of **October 2023** at **2:00 pm**.

Present:

Cllr P Kimber – Chairman
Cllr A Johnson – Vice-Chairman

Cllr J Elliott
Cllr S Guthrie
Cllr U Mann
Cllr T Southcott

Cllr P Vachon
Cllr N Viney
Cllr S Wakeham
Cllr C West

Director of Place and Enterprise
Head of Housing
Democratic Services Specialist

Also in Attendance: Cllr M Ewings (Leader), Cllr M Renders (Deputy Leader), Cllr G Dexter and Cllr C Edmonds. Cllrs M Calder and T Leech (Via MS Teams) Head of Democratic Services and Head of Revenue and Benefits (Via MS Teams)

***O&S 8/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllrs M Casbolt, I Saxby and P Squire.

***O&S 9/23 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 July 2023 were confirmed as a true and correct record.

***O&S 10/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Mann declared an interest as she was employed by Citizens Advice Bureau, and she left the meeting during the presentation by them on Item 6 of the agenda.

***O&S 11/23 PUBLIC FORUM**

The Chairman confirmed that no formal requests had been received in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

***O&S 12/23 CITIZENS ADVICE IN WEST DEVON**

The Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Bureau gave a presentation to Members on the work that they do within West Devon. Although a member of the National Citizens Advice Bureau this branch remain an independent charity. The income they generate is purely their own and they do not receive any funding from the national body, however they benefit from branding and insurance from their membership. They receive funding from Devon County Council, West Devon Borough Council and Town and Parish Councils within West Devon.

In 2022-23 2,857 people with 6,573 problems were helped. From 1 April to 30 September 2023 1,375 people with 3,936 problems were helped, generating £698,623 income gain for families in West Devon.

More complex problems are being presented and this has given an increase of presenting issues being dealt with on last year by +21.3%.

The cost of living crisis has impacted with welfare benefits being the most common area the bureau was dealing with. The main debt problem presented was council tax.

Currently there are 17 volunteers in the West Devon offices.

In response to a question on universal credit it was explained that it is a complex process to get right particularly when there are changes in circumstances, so people go to the CAB for help. The statistics shown are based on individuals helped but this can extent to families members within the household of the person presenting for help. In regard to rurality a current pilot scheme with video meetings is proving encouraging. Hate crime reported to the bureau is unreported to the police, however the bureau is a reporting centre and have a portal to provide information based on what is reported to them.

***O&S 13/23 SOCIAL HOUSING STANDARDS, HOMELESSNESS, TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION AND RURALITY**

The Head of Housing gave the Committee Members a verbal update on Housing KPI's. There were currently 16 households in temporary accommodation within West Devon, comprising 6 families and 10 single people of which 4 of those singles are care leavers. 9 of those were in bed and breakfast accommodation, whilst 7 were in self-catering accommodation. West Devon have the lowest number of people in temporary accommodation in Devon. The cost of temporary accommodation for the last year was £329,000, with the cost to West Devon being £247,000.

Five properties have been purchased through the local authority housing fund and had permission through the Hub Committee to purchase a further three properties for Afghan and Ukrainian refugees in the first instance and then for longer term housing need. In 2022-23 West Devon accommodated 72 households of which 53 were single people and 19 were families.

Last year 5,916 nights there were spent in temporary accommodation, an increase on last year of 2,440. Some of this was due to the lack of private rental and less opportunity to prevent homelessness. Over the last three

years homelessness was prevented in 404 instances and 967 people present at the same time. The rough sleeper count is 0, this count is done on a yearly basis.

194 guests have been welcomed from Ukraine to West Devon as their first location and a further 10 have moved in as their second location in the UK. Temporary accommodation was only used on four occasions, which is testament to the hosts and resettlement teams in the borough. The government will need to give some security for what happens after month 24 as the host will receive no payment as it stands after this time.

The Head of housing explained that legislation states that people cannot be in bed and breakfast accommodation for any longer than six weeks. In West Devon this has not been broken but it has come very close and they continue to remain concerned. People with poor tenancy history would be likely to remain in temporary accommodation longer as they need a package of support. Lack of four-bedroom properties through Devon Homechoice means families wanting a larger property need to look at the private sector rental.

In response to whether there was a seasonal trend to rough sleepers in the borough the Head of Housing commented that she was aware people may flee other areas due to domestic violence or being in the armed forces.

50% of housing need is for single people. Under the local housing allowances, if you are under 35 years old you are only entitled to a shared room in a house of multiple occupation. Some of the support mechanisms are not there in a rural area for the cohort of homeless in West Devon, although they work closely with County colleagues. It was reiterated that an outreach worker is available to speak to anyone that Members are aware of who are sleeping rough in their wards. In 2022-23, 348 people presented as homeless there were applications for 157 people with 191 being advice cases only, where they were able to resolve their homelessness with advice from the housing team.

The housing team that is shared with South Hams was described as a strong hard-working team. The Head of Housing will be circulating all the facts and figures in a report to Members of the Committee.

***O&S 14/23 TASK & FINISH GROUP UPDATES**

The Committee was asked to decide which groups they wished to join in regard to setting up task and finish groups for both Fusion and South Water, so that they could gather questions to put to both when they attended the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings over the coming year. Interest to join the group for SWW was shown by Cllrs Southcott, Guthrie, Elliott, West and Viney. Interest was shown to join the Fusion group by Cllrs Wakeham, Johnson, Mann and Vachon. The Director of Enterprise and Place described the brief on these groups as to influence and help and support these companies when looking at questions to ask. He agreed to attend the start of both meetings to give a brief on each. The

Leader and Lead Hub Member would also feed into the Fusion Task and Finish group.

***O&S 15/23 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME**

The Leader outlined that in previous years only two items would appear on the agenda as some topics created a good and long debate. A member voiced their concern on the lack of understanding from the whole council in the role the agricultural sector can play and in particular climate change. The Leader stated that in the latest draft version of the Corporate Strategy it acknowledged agricultural modernisation in the farming community. Members were reminded that they are able to attend any of the Hub Advisory meetings and can ask questions at the Hub meetings to gain more knowledge.

(The meeting terminated at 3.30 pm)

Chairman