

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (EXTERNAL) COMMITTEE



Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny (External) Committee** held on **Tuesday, 17th November, 2015** at **2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Ridgers
Vice Chairman Cllr Cloke

In attendance:

Cllr Ball
Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Jory
Cllr Pearce

Cllr Roberts
Cllr Sheldon
Cllr Stephens
Cllr Watts

Councillors:

Cllr Benson
Cllr Moody
Cllr Moyse
Cllr Musgrave

Cllr Sampson
Cllr Samuel
Cllr Sanders
Cllr Yelland

Officers:

Head of Paid Service
Place & Strategy – Lead Specialist
Corporate Procurement Officer
Jobcentre Plus Representatives
Connecting Devon & Somerset
Representative

16. **Apologies for Absence**
***O&S(E) 16**
Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs A F Leech and G Parker.
17. **Declarations of Interest**
***O&S(E) 17**
Members and officers were asked to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of this meeting, but there were none made.

18. **Public Forum**

***O&S(E) 18**

The Chairman informed that there had been no issues raised for this meeting in accordance with the Public Forum.

19. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**

***O&S(E) 19**

The most recently published Hub Committee Forward Plan was presented for consideration.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the provision of discretionary inspection services by the Devon Building Control Partnership report. Officers clarified that the intention was for a recommendation to be made by the Hub Committee, which would be presented to the Council at its meeting on 8 December 2015;
- (b) the Social Media Policy and Protocol and the Safeguarding Policy. The Committee was advised that these agenda items had now been deferred from 1 December Hub Committee meeting agenda;
- (c) the Devolution Draft Proposal. In light of the date constraints associated with this matter, it was noted that the report to accompany this agenda item was likely to be received by Members only a day or so before the Hub Committee meeting took place.

20. **Job Centre Plus Representatives**

***O&S(E) 20**

Following a formal proposal request from Cllr Leech (which was subsequently endorsed by the Agenda Setting Panel), Job Centre Plus (JCP) representatives (Naomi Brooks, Maria Sullivan and Jacki Williams) were in attendance to respond to Member questions.

In responding to Member questions, particular reference was made to:-

- (a) the consultation period on the JCP proposals to cease the arrangement of conducting Fortnightly Jobsearch Reviews with its customers in Okehampton and Tavistock. The representatives informed that Borough Council Members and Okehampton and Tavistock Town Councils were advised of the proposals at the same time. When questioned in respect of why the consultation period was so short (4 weeks rather than 12), the representatives advised that they were unsure as to the methodology and would respond in writing after this meeting;
- (b) the reasoning behind the changing arrangements. It was noted that the decision had been taken in light of the central government budget cuts and the recent significant reduction in customers who now required the Fortnightly Jobsearch Reviews (currently 87 in Tavistock and 59 in Okehampton);

- (c) the circumstances for each customer being considered on their own merits. Members asked a series of questions regarding consideration being given to appointment times in Plymouth and Exeter being made to take into account factors such as public transport timetables and childcare/caring responsibilities. In reply, JCP representatives gave assurances that the JCP did not wish to make things difficult for customers and looked at the individual circumstances in each instance. In addition, the Committee was advised that the JCP did everything possible to ensure that appointments were made at the most convenient time;
- (d) failure to attend a Fortnightly Jobsearch Review meeting. In line with national policy, customers would be required to give reasons for their failure to attend a meeting and, in respect of potential 'sanctions' being imposed, each case would then be looked at on its own merits. For example, allowances would be made for instances such as inclement winter weather and road traffic accidents;
- (e) the Ockmont Centre, Okehampton alternative proposal which would prevent customers from needing to travel to Exeter. JCP representatives confirmed that the proposal to utilise Skype had been ruled out at this time since the JCP did not currently have the ability to utilise this technology. However, this would be revisited by the JCP when the new national agreement was considered;
- (f) making an initial claim. It was noted that customers had always been expected to make their initial claim at either Exeter or Plymouth and this facility had never been offered at either Okehampton or Tavistock;
- (g) the extra travel distance for customers. In line with the expectation that customers were actively looking for work, a Member commented that the extra travel distance may act as an incentive for claimants to find work;
- (h) an open invitation to Members. The representatives extended an invitation to any interested Members who wished to visit the Plymouth or Exeter office and sit in on a Fortnightly Jobsearch Review interview.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked the representatives for their informative responses to Member questions.

21.

Rural Broadband Project Update

***O&S(E) 21**

A representative from Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) (Karen Bohan) provided a project update to the Committee. In so doing, the Committee noted that:-

- 217,000 premises across Devon and Somerset had been connected to the BT fibre network. Of these, around 185,000 homes and businesses had the capability to access superfast broadband speeds of 24Mbps and over;
- CDS was well set to achieve the Government's target to provide an average of 90% of homes and businesses across Devon and Somerset with access to superfast broadband by the end of 2016;

- when looking towards Phase 2 (95% of homes and businesses having the capability to access superfast broadband) of the project, early discussions with broadband suppliers had been completed. Subject to State Aid clearance, CDS wished to launch the invitation to tender in February 2016, with a view to having contracts in place by June 2016.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:-

- (a) In reply to a number of Members citing examples of areas that fell between those allocated to be provided by a commercial supplier and those currently under review by CDS, the representative confirmed that Phase 2 of the project would need to be underpinned by an Open Market Review, which would provide a revised picture of need;
- (b) In instances of those postcode areas on some parts of Dartmoor that were proposed to be covered by both Airband and BT, the representative informed that CDS was currently looking at this matter;
- (c) In respect of the unfortunate delay to Phase 2, Members were informed that this was due to the initial tender submission received not constituting value for money;
- (d) The representative gave assurances that Airband was a sustainable and reliable provider which had successfully undergone due diligence tests. Furthermore, CDS was confident that Airband had longevity and would ensure that the network was run effectively for at least seven years after being deployed;
- (e) Some Members requested that the coverage map be made available as soon as was practically possible;
- (f) With regard to the survey to build an evidence base of superfast need for businesses in the West Devon area, officers confirmed that, upon receiving a copy of the survey, they would disseminate it to businesses and upload it on to the Council website accordingly.

The Chairman concluded consideration of this agenda item by thanking the representative for her interesting presentation and thought provoking responses to Member questions.

22.

Our Plan Review

O&S(E) 22

A report was considered that provided an update on Our Plan. In the ensuing debate, reference was made to:-

- (a) the division of responsibility between Hub Committee Members. For clarity, the Leader advised those present that he was the lead Hub Committee Member for the overriding 'Our Plan' and Cllr Parker was the lead Member specifically for the 'Local Plan'. In discussion, there was a general consensus that progress on the wider 'Our Plan' should not be constrained by any delays on the 'Local Plan' aspect and these should therefore run in parallel;

- (b) it was felt to be reassuring that the activity plan illustrated that at least some progress had been made on every action related to the Borough;
- (c) the relationship with Plymouth City Council (PCC) and Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA). The Leader informed that PCC was keen on investigating the merits of developing a joint Local Plan. As a consequence, a meeting was due to take place in the upcoming weeks between PCC, DNPA, South Hams District Council and Borough representatives to discuss this matter further;
- (d) being realistic and reasonably ambitious. Members recognised that there was a need to strike the delicate balance between setting realistic aims and objectives whilst still being sufficiently ambitious;
- (e) future reporting methods. The following presentation methods were suggested for future consideration:-
 - differentiating between the less contentious actions and those that require more focus;
 - creating a 'Traffic Light' system to enable for Committee focus to be on the 'Red' and 'Amber' actions; and
 - separating those actions that would not see any progress until the year end.
- (f) the need to improve the communications in relation to Our Plan was recognised by the Committee;
- (g) Member participation in the process. A number of suggestions were put forward for Members to be involved in the Our Plan process. In conclusion, the Committee was of the view that, in the first instance, an Overview and Scrutiny sponsored all Member event should be held with South Hams District Council Members early in the New Year. When put to the vote, this proposal was declared **CARRIED**.

It was then:

RECOMMENDED

That the Hub Committee **RECOMMEND** to the Council that:

1. The monitoring of Our Plan and the 2015/16 Annual Delivery Plan be noted;
2. West Devon Our Plan be re-issued for the start of the 2016/17 Financial Year as a document that:-
 - o recognises Our Plan as the single comprehensive Council Plan;
 - o restates 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;

- establishes engagement, monitoring and review procedures; and
 - provides context for subsequent incorporation of the Local Plan element currently subject to separate preparation;
3. an Overview and Scrutiny sponsored all Member event should be held with South Hams District Council Members early in the New Year; and
 4. the proposed document be presented back for review to the Overview & Scrutiny (External) Committee, Hub Committee and Council for agreement prior to publication.

23.

Leisure Member Working Group Update

***O&S(E) 23**

The Committee considered an update report on the matter of the Health and Wellbeing (Leisure) procurement exercise.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) one life leisure. The lead Hub Committee Member informed that one life leisure (the current contract providers for both Meadowlands and Parklands) had initially participated in the process but had subsequently opted against tendering for the contract;
- (b) the project timescale. It was noted that the Invitation to Submit Detailed Solutions would expire on 7 February 2016. Following this deadline, a further session of dialogue would take place before final tenders would be invited during next summer. After this time, negotiations would be undertaken with the preferred company, with the contract being awarded by August 2016 and a go live date of 1 December 2016. In light of the pace of the process, the Committee concluded that it would be useful to receive a further update at its next meeting on 15 March 2016.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the progress of the procurement for Health and Wellbeing (Leisure) Services be noted and a further update report be presented to the next Committee meeting on 15 March 2016.

24.

Task and Finish Group Updates

***O&S(E) 24**

(a) DCH Review Proposal

As an update, Cllr Watts informed that the Group had yet been unable to convene a meeting with the lead officer.

In addition, a series of figures had been obtained and were to be analysed by the Group and it was therefore deemed appropriate for a more detailed update to be given to the next meeting on 15 March 2016.

(b)Partnership Review

Group Members confirmed that the first joint meeting had been held at Follaton House, Totnes. During this meeting, the Group terms of reference had been established and work had commenced through the list of partnerships. It was confirmed that the next meeting had been scheduled to take place at Kilworthy Park on 6 January 2016.

When questioned, the lead officer confirmed that he would circulate to Members the summary notes arising from the first Group meeting.

25. **Committee Decisions Log**

***O&S(E) 25**

The latest version of the Decisions Log was considered and welcomed by the Committee.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the published Decisions Log be noted.

26. **Draft Work Programme 2015/16**

***O&S(E) 26**

The Committee considered its draft 2015/16 Work Programme and made reference to the following comments, additions and amendments:-

- (a) The need to look beyond 2015/16 was recognised and Members were asked to begin to consider potential future agenda items. In so doing, Members felt that it would be opportune to informally consider in more detail after the joint Budget meeting on 12 January 2016;
- (b) The Committee acknowledged the need to include the Leisure project update on the next meeting agenda on 15 March 2016.

The Meeting concluded at 4.25 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
