

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (INTERNAL) COMMITTEE



Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny (Internal) Committee** held on **Tuesday, 21st July, 2015** at **2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Musgrave
Vice Chairman Cllr Yelland

Cllr McInnes
Cllr Mott
Cllr Moyse
Cllr Sellis

In attendance:

Councillors:
Cllr Cloke
Cllr Parker

Cllr Pearce
Cllr Sheldon

Officers:
Head of Paid Service
Executive Director (Service Delivery & Commercial Development)

10. **Apologies for Absence**
***O&S(I) 10**
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr J B Moody, who had been invited to attend this meeting in his capacity as the lead Hub Committee Member for Customer First and Cllr K Ball, who had been invited to attend in his capacity as Chairman of the Member Development Steering Group.
11. **Confirmation of Minutes**
***O&S(I) 11**
The minutes of the Meeting held on 9 June 2015 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.
12. **Declarations of Interest**
***O&S(I) 12**

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.

13. **Committee Terms of Reference**

***O&S(I) 13**

Further to the request made by the Committee at its last meeting to streamline its terms of reference (Minute O&S(I) 3 refers), an updated version had been presented to the meeting.

In discussion, the Committee expressed its support for the revised version and felt it would be useful for these to be included with the published agenda for future meetings.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the streamlined version of the draft terms of reference be noted.

14. **Public Forum**

***O&S(I) 14**

It was noted that no issues were raised in accordance with the Public Forum.

15. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**

***O&S(I) 15**

The most recent (published 16 July 2015) Hub Committee Forward Plan was presented for consideration.

In general discussion, Members acknowledged that there were a number of overlaps in the roles of the lead Hub Committee Members. For clarity, Members were informed that Cllr Parker's portfolio area was 'Our Plan and Strategic Housing' whilst Cllr Moody's area of responsibility included Planning.

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 Onwards

The S151 Officer attended the meeting to provide an update on the 'Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 Onwards' agenda item that was due to be presented to the Hub Committee meeting on 22 September 2015.

In discussion on this item, reference was made to:-

- (a) the recent budget announcement by the Chancellor. Whilst unconfirmed, the S151 Officer advised that the anticipated grant reductions from central government may be phased over a slightly longer period than had been initially anticipated, but details of this would not be known until the Chancellor had issued the Autumn Statement later in the year. Officers informed the Committee that modelling work would be undertaken in the next few weeks to assess various scenarios;

- (b) the living wage being increased to £7.20 per hour from April 2016. A Member expressed his concern at the Chancellor's seemingly contradictory announcements whereby the living wage would dramatically increase yet other public sector wage increases would be restricted to 1% per year. In reply, it was noted that the Local Government Association was aware of the implications and would be lobbying central government accordingly;
- (c) the draft Statement of Accounts for 2014/15. Members were advised that the draft Statement would be presented to the Audit Committee meeting on 28 July 2015 and it indicated a budget underspend of £70,000 for 2014/15;
- (d) a summary of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. In light of Member interest, the Committee requested that the S151 Officer present a summary of the Financial Strategy to the next Committee meeting on 6 October 2015.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the Forward Plan be noted; and
2. That a summary of the 2016/17 Medium Term Financial Strategy be scheduled on to the annual work programme for the next Committee meeting.

16.

Customer First Update

***O&S(I) 16**

At the request of the Committee Chairman, the Group Manager – Customer First was in attendance to provide an update on the service areas which were contained within Customer First.

In so doing, reference was made to:-

- (a) Customer Services. With the aid of a paper outlining performance comparisons for 2014-15, the Group Manager commented that she was of the view that Customer Services had now turned a corner and overall performance was improving. The paper also highlighted that:
 - call volumes had dramatically increased (by 12%), largely as a consequence of the service now receiving the Development Management Service telephone calls;
 - one third of staff were currently temporary and in training;
 - 70% of calls were being answered, with 35% of these being answered within 20 seconds. However, 30% of callers were also experiencing a greater than 7 minute wait to have their call answered;

- the self-service portal on the website was absolutely critical to the effectiveness of the service. Once it was in place and operational, more customers would be able to self-serve and therefore the number of calls into the Council would be reduced.

In the drive to reduce instances of failure demand, officers informed that such calls had recently started to be logged and this was seen to be a key workstream for Customer Services.

Some Members expressed their concerns that 30% of calls were not being answered.

To address the capacity issues in Customer Services, officers were currently seeking the approval of the HR Panel to increase the staff numbers in this area by 3 full time equivalent posts.

When informed that officers did signpost customers to other agencies and the website (where appropriate), some Members felt that there was scope to also direct callers to 'My Devon' which was a service provided by Devon County Council. In response, officers confirmed that they would follow this matter up and report back in due course.

Whilst still in its infancy, there was a general appreciation for the initiative whereby a Member Direct Dial telephone number into the Council had been established for the exclusive use of Members.

- (b) Locality Working. It was noted that the locality model had got off to a good start and there had already been a number of instances of success stories.

With regard to locality officers attending a meeting of each town and parish council to introduce themselves, a Member felt it to be regrettable that this was not going to happen as a matter of course. Following a lengthy debate, officers informed that locality officers would be in attendance during the Town and Parish Council Event on 1 September 2015 and they would also give more consideration to the issue of raising their profile amongst the town and parish councils;

- (c) Housing Advice and Housing Benefits. The Committee was advised that whilst both services were performing reasonably well, the Transformation Programme Phase 2 recruitment process was likely to have a significant impact in the upcoming months;

- (d) Council Tax. In light of the backlog of work increasing, Members were informed that the service was focusing on its newest work to ensure that the backlog did not increase further. Due to the sheer volume of work, officers stated that some staff were working weekends in an attempt to reduce the backlog;
- (e) Business Rates. There were no service issues identified in respect of Business Rates;
- (f) Planning. Whilst there would not be a qualified planning officer in the Okehampton Drop-in office for four weeks during the summer, there would be an officer on site who had extensive experience of working within the planning department. As a consequence, officers were confident that she would be able to deal with the bulk of planning queries raised.

The Committee noted that the number of planning applications received remained fairly constant, but there were 76 which still awaited processing. Planning advice related work had now been transferred to Follaton House, Totnes and planning staff were also working additional hours to deal with the current workload. To also help with the volume of work, the councils had now successfully recruited four new permanent planning officers and were still using Plymouth City Council to help with the registering of planning applications.

Members felt that the average time taken to register planning applications was far too long and this view was acknowledged by officers, who commented that their current focus was on the front end of the planning process.

- (g) Planning Enforcement. There were currently 191 live enforcement cases in the Borough and these were being picked up by shared officers, who would ultimately be supported (once trained) by the locality officers. Officers informed that this number was constant with the number of live cases back in 2012. A Member queried this point and expressed his view that the number of enforcement issues were on the increase and the figures were only constant in light of the amount of cases which had run out of time and had therefore dropped off the system;
- (h) Assets. The Assets service was still in the process of recruiting and, in addition to its already hefty workload, was also supporting the leisure centre procurement exercise;

- (i) Environmental Health. The Committee was notified that the software migration exercise was now complete;
- (j) Customer First vacancies. For clarity, the Group Manager stated that there were currently 15 vacancies in the Customer First service;
- (k) the administrative base for the Programme being located at Follaton House. Whilst accepting that this decision was taken by the previous council, some Members wished to put on record their concerns at the implications of this decision and the consequent lack of fixed base staff who were located at Kilworthy Park. In response, the Head of Paid Services made reference to the agile working agenda being an underpinning principle of the Programme and it being his ethos that it did not matter where officers were situated and it was more crucial that the work was being completed and to a good standard. Furthermore, if the Council took the decision to revisit where the administrative base was located, then this would have significant budgetary implications on both the Programme and the Council;
- (l) Customer Satisfaction. As part of the Task and Finish Group review into performance measures, it was felt that the way that the Council obtained its customer's views would be absolutely critical;
- (m) the Committee Work Programme. In light of Members not wishing to lose sight of the performance of Customer Services and the Development Management Service, it was requested that updates be scheduled on to the next meeting agenda on 6 October 2015.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Customer First update be noted.

17. **Update on Transformation Programme T18**

***O&S(I) 17**

The Committee was presented with the T18 Budget Monitoring Report – Q4 2014/15, which had also been considered by the Hub Committee at its meeting on 14 July 2015 (Minute HC 9 also refers).

The Executive Director (Service Delivery and Commercial Services) presented the report and in particular directed Members to the comments related to the following T18 workstreams: HR, IT, Finance and Accommodation. In so doing, the Executive Director emphasised the

headline message whereby the Transformation Programme was both on time and within the agreed budget.

In the ensuing debate, specific reference was made to:-

- the high level transition plan for phase 1(b). In response to a query regarding the timeline, it was agreed that this would be attached to these minutes (Appendix A refers). When questioned, officers informed that the timeline for the planning portal was towards the end of the programme due to the much longer test time period prior to it being launched;
- the Civica mobile application. In reply to a query, officers confirmed that they would find out when exactly the Civica mobile application would be available and let Members know accordingly.

18. **Notes Arising from the Member Development Steering Group Meeting held on 6 July 2015**

***O&S(I) 18**

The Committee was presented with the notes arising from the Member Development Steering Group meeting held on 6 July 2015.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) the importance of continual learning and development opportunities for Members was emphasised. It was also recognised that ongoing learning and development added value to Members; the Council; and West Devon residents;
- (b) Once the Induction questionnaire had been compiled and circulated, Members were encouraged to fill it in;
- (c) The importance of arranging ongoing planning training for Members and designing sessions which were interactive and engaging was stressed;
- (d) In line with the Modern Gov. IT rollout, officers gave assurances that extensive training would be arranged and support would be readily available for Members to help them through this transition.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the notes arising from the recent Member Development Steering Group meeting be received and noted.

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

***O&S(I) 19**

(a) Performance Management

The Panel was informed that the first meeting of the Group had been arranged to take place on Monday, 3 August 2015.

20.

Draft Work Programme 2015/16

***O&S(I) 20**

The Committee considered its draft 2015/16 Work Programme (as circulated with the published agenda) and made reference to the addition of the Medium Term Financial Strategy summary paper being presented to the next Committee meeting on 6 October 2015.

The Meeting concluded at 3.30 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
