

# SOUTH HAMS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL



## **Minutes** of a meeting of the **South Hams Overview and Scrutiny Panel** held on **Thursday, 8th October, 2020 at 10.00 am** at the **Via Skype**

Present:        **Councillors:**

**Chairman** Cllr Birch  
**Vice Chairman** Cllr Smerdon

Cllr Pennington	Cllr Austen
Cllr Chown	Cllr McKay
Cllr O'Callaghan	Cllr Reeve
Cllr Spencer	Cllr Sweett
Cllr Thomas	

### **In attendance:**

Councillors:

Cllr Baldry	Cllr Bastone
Cllr Brazil	Cllr Hawkins
Cllr Hodgson	Cllr Holway
Cllr Hopwood	Cllr Pearce
Cllr Rowe	Cllr Taylor

Officers:

Deputy Chief Executive  
Director of Place & Enterprise  
Head of Strategy & Projects  
Head of Housing Revenue & Benefits  
Head of IT  
Senior Specialist Projects – Governance & Assurance  
Democratic Services Manager

10.

### **Minutes**

O&S.10/20

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 16 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11. **Declarations of Interest**

O&S.11/20

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.

12. **Public Forum**

O&S.12/20

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

13. **Executive Forward Plan**

O&S.13/20

The Panel was presented with the most recently published Executive Forward Plan. In accordance with the Panel Procedure Rules, prior requests had been received for updates on:

**(a) Housing Strategy: Progress Update**

The Panel considered a report that presented a progress update on the Housing Strategy.

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

- (i) consulting with partner agencies. Officers confirmed that they were committed to consulting on the draft Strategy with as many partner agencies as was practically possible. In addition, the list of consultees was currently being compiled and Members were able to add relevant agencies to that list by contacting the lead officer;
- (ii) the 'Better Homes, Better Lives' strapline. The Panel expressed its support for the proposed strapline and it was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and when put to the vote declared **CARRIED** that this be reflected in the Panel recommendations to the Executive;
- (iii) the implications of the upcoming Planning White Paper. Such were the potential affordable housing implications arising from the Central Government Planning White Paper that a Member questioned the timing of the Strategy. In reply, the Deputy Leader emphasised the importance of the Council making progress on its Housing agenda and was of the view that the Strategy could be reviewed in the event of the White Paper coming into effect;
- (iv) the close linkages between the Strategy and the work of both the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group and the Council's Draft Recovery Plan;
- (v) affordable housing need. A Member cited an example of a number of carers working (but not living) in the South Hams and

made the point that accurately identifying affordable housing need in the South Hams would be difficult;

- (vi) the existing housing stock. The Deputy Leader stated the importance of the Strategy not solely focusing on the development of new properties but equally making the best use of the existing housing stock in the South Hams;
- (vii) the invitation for the Panel to consider the results of the public consultation exercise. The Panel welcomed this invitation and it was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and when put to the vote declared **CARRIED** that this should be incorporated into the Panel's Work Programme.

It was then:

### **RECOMMENDED**

That the Panel **RECOMMEND** to the Executive that:

1. the progress made on the Housing Strategy be noted;
2. the 'better homes, better lives' strapline be supported;
3. it be noted that the Panel has requested that the results of the consultation exercise be reported back to a future Panel meeting; and
4. the proposed way forward be endorsed and that all Members continue to contribute to this key policy development.

### **(b) Formation of a Wholly Owned Company – Verbal Update**

The Director of Place and Enterprise provided an update during which particular reference was made to:

- the legal agreement still to be concluded in light of the Council resolution arising from its meeting held on 13 February 2020 (Minute 75/19(g) refers);
- the importance of all partners being fully satisfied before the agreement was concluded;
- it being hoped that the agreement would be concluded before the end of December 2020;
- the £40,000 budget set aside to form a Community Benefit Society. In reply to a question, it was anticipated that the total spend would be much lower than the £40,000 cap that had been applied.

### **(c) Gypsy and Traveller Update and Options – Verbal Update**

In his introduction, the Director of Place and Enterprise advised that it was intended that the report to be presented to the Executive meeting on 22 October 2020 would seek to:

1. Endorse a Strategy of Engagement with Devon County Council to work towards identifying a Gypsy and Traveller Site in the South Hams;
2. Endorse a Strategy of Engagement with Registered Provider partners to identify and manage a Gypsy and Traveller Site in the South Hams; and
3. Request that a further report be presented back to the Executive in the Spring of 2021.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- Members welcomed the proposal to collaborate with Devon County Council and Registered Provider partners. In particular, a Member stressed the need for both transient and permanent sites to be brought forward and emphasised the current disparity in identified need between the County Council (80 pitches) and the District Council (5 pitches). In reply, officers reiterated the importance of co-operation between the District and County Councils and it was asked that dual-hatted Members help to progress this intention;
- A Member highlighted the trend whereby an increasing number of residents were living in their vehicles and it was recognised that there were different groups within the overall 'Gypsy and Traveller' category;
- Whilst stressing that this was a longstanding issue, a Member requested that greater progress needed to be made on this matter. In reply, another Member made reference to the associated difficulties and the amount of distress that was caused to local residents and the cost to the Council of clearing up sites. In his conclusion, the Member stated that sites needed to be established in locations where Gypsies and Travellers wished to be sited.

#### **(d)Consolidation of Off-Street Parking Places Order – Verbal Update**

Officers advised the Panel that this report had now been deferred to the Executive meeting to be held on 3 December 2020.

#### **14. Future IT Project Update**

O&S.14/20

The Panel considered a report that presented an update on the Councils' Future IT Project.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) Members paid tribute to the IT service for ensuring that the Council was able to operate as normal during the recent COVID-19 lockdown;
- (b) Members were informed that, in response to Skype for Business being decommissioned, the Council was in the process of piloting the Microsoft Teams platform as an alternative. Once officers were ready to formally launch the Teams platform, it was confirmed that a variety of training opportunities would be made available for Members.

It was then:

**RESOLVED**

That the progress of the Future IT Project and the evaluation of risks be noted.

15. **Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2020**

O&S.15/20

A report was considered that presented the Ombudsman Annual Review Letter for 2020.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- (a) The Panel noted that the current complaints process was to be reviewed in the upcoming months;
- (b) When questioned, officers advised that a revised Debt Recovery Policy was intended to be presented for adoption to the Council meeting to be held on 17 December 2020.

It was then:

**RESOLVED**

1. That the Ombudsman's Annual Letter for 2020 (as set out at Appendix A of the presented agenda report) has been reviewed; and
2. That the steps set out to ensure that the Council continues to address complaints fairly and in line with best practice be noted.

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

O&S.16/20

**(a) Locality Service**

A Member of the Group advised that, in light of the COVID-19 impact, a revised set of Terms of Reference had been adopted at the last meeting.

The Group was next due to meet on 13 October 2020 and was still working towards presenting its concluding report to the Panel meeting to be held on 19 November 2020.

### **(b) Consultation and Engagement Strategy**

Prior to the first meeting being held (at which the draft Terms of Reference would be presented for approval), there was a strong steer from the lead Executive Member and some Members of the Panel that a series of concluding recommendations should be presented to the next Panel meeting to be held on 19 November 2020.

17.

### **Annual Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme**

O&S.17/20

During consideration of the latest version of the Panel's Annual Work Programme, the following additions, amendments and deletions were made to the Programme:

- Members requested that Livewest representatives be invited to attend the Panel meeting on the afternoon of 14 January 2021. In terms of the purpose of this invitation, it was felt that the representatives could provide an update on:
  - Current and future activities and delivery programmes in the South Hams; and
  - The impact of COVID-19 on the organisation.
- In light of the Waste Contract Monitoring Report being scheduled to be considered at the Executive meeting to be held on 22 October 2020, it was agreed that this item should be removed from the Work Programme;
- It was agreed that the following items should be added to the list of those to be considered by lead officers and the Panel Chairman and Vice-Chairman for scheduling:
  - o The results of the public consultation exercise on the draft Housing Strategy (Minute O&S.13/20(a) above refers);
  - o An update on the Peer Review Action Plan;
  - o An update on the Town Centres Strategy; and
  - o An update on the Electric Charging Points. In discussion, a number of Panel Members stressed the importance of this matter and requested that, if at all possible, this item be scheduled for consideration at an earlier meeting of the Panel.

The Meeting concluded at 11.35 am

**Signed by:**

**Chairman**

