

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday, 18th January, 2022** at **2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Ewings
Vice Chairman Cllr Kimber

Cllr Blackman
Cllr Sellis
Cllr Spettigue

Cllr Kemp
Cllr Southcott
Cllr Vachon

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Crozier
Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Jory
Cllr Moyse (via Teams)
Cllr Yelland (via Teams)

Cllr Daniel
Cllr Heyworth (via Teams)
Cllr Leech (via Teams)
Cllr Wood (via Teams)

Officers:

Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Strategic Finance
Democratic Services Manager (via Teams)
Head of Strategy and Projects (via Teams)
Head of Finance (via Teams)
Customer Services Improvement, Manager
Community Digital Specialist
Senior Case Manager – Democratic Services

33. **Apologies for Absence**

*O&S 33

Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllrs A Coulson, J Moody, and L Samuel.

34. **Confirmation of Minutes**

*O&S 34

The minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 November 2021 were confirmed by the Meeting as a true and correct record.

35. **Declarations of Interest**

*O&S 35

Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of this meeting but there were none made.

36. **Public Forum**

*O&S 36

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

37. **Draft Budget Proposal 2022/23**

*O&S 37

The Leader of the Council introduced the Draft Budget Proposals.

In so doing, particular reference was made to:

1. A one-off services grant in addition to the New Homes Bonus Grant being rolled forward and the continuation with a lower tier services grant which was previously introduced. It remained a requirement for any council tax increases to be limited to the higher of 1.99% or £5 per year.
2. The report made provisions for a balanced budget for 2022/23 subject to the financial pressures. Contributions to ear-marked reserves of £209,350, the proposed use of £75,000 from business rates retention ear-marked reserves and use of £150,000 of new homes bonus funding were also recommended as part of the proposals.
3. Rough sleeping outreach post proposed to be made permanent and an increase in IT support costs.
4. The business rates retention reserve of £1,260,000 could be partly used for smoothing out the volatility in income over the next three years.
5. The annual staff pay award had not been resolved but a budget provision of 2% was contained within the cost pressures.
6. Funding of £122,000 had been set aside to deliver some of the actions contained within a Plan for West Devon. £172,084 of new homes bonus grant was proposed to be included in an affordable housing reserve.
7. Revenue on car parking income was expected to be £69,000 down on budget however this would be partly offset by planning income being anticipated is expected to be about £30,000 over budget.

In response to Member questions the Leader confirmed that the Council's property investment portfolio was performing well. Clarification was given on the staff pay award. The employers offer to the Union was 1.75% and the Council had budgeted for a 2% increase. The pay award was still going through negotiations.

It was then **RESOLVED:**

That the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were sought on the content of the Revenue Budget Proposals report for 2022/23.

Committee support was expressed for:

- i) The proposed increase in Council Tax for 2022/23 of £5 (Band D of £246.63 for 2022/23 – an increase of 10 pence per week or £5 per year – equates to a 2.07% increase);
- ii) The financial pressures shown in Appendix A of £689,000;
- iii) The net contributions to Earmarked Reserves of £209,350 as shown in Appendix A, including the proposed use of £75,000 from the Business Rates Retention Earmarked Reserve as set out in 3.21 of the report;
- iv) That the Council transfers £162,850 into a Financial Stability Earmarked Reserve in 2022/23, to be available for any future financial pressures from future local government funding reforms and any other budget pressures;
- v) To use £150,000 of New Homes Bonus funding in 2022/23 to fund the Revenue Base Budget as set out in 3.30 of the report
- vi) That £172,084 of the New Homes Bonus grant allocation for 2022/23 is allocated to an Affordable Housing Earmarked Reserve as a one-of contribution for 2022/23 as set out in 3.30 to 3.31.
- vii) The savings of £221,000 as shown in Appendix A; and
- viii) The proposed Capital Programme Proposals for 2022/23 of £835,000 and the proposed financing of the Capital Programme as set out in Appendix D.
- ix) That Unearmarked Reserves should continue to have a minimum level of £900,000 (as set in the Medium Term Financial Strategy in September 2021), but an operating level of a minimum of £1.25million.
- x) That the Committee notes that West Devon Borough Council will continue to be part of the Business Rates Pool for 2022/23 as per 3.23

38.

Third Sector Partners -Tamar Valley AONB

O&S 38

The Tamar Valley AONB Manager gave an overview and set out the key issues relates to the Tamar Valley AONB. These were summarised as:

- Meeting local authorities Duties (s.89 & 85) under CROW Act 2000;
- Funded via a combination of: Defra core grant, local authority partners contributions and other project grant funding;
- Volunteering opportunities, health and wellbeing and production of local produce were identified as some of the active programmes;
- Strong continued delivery against their five-year management plan.
- Core programmes included land management with the farming community, the agricultural transition plan, removing non-native species such as giant hogwood and improving and upkeep the Tamar Trails.
- The Governments response to the Glover review would bring change and opportunity in governance, resourcing and Farming in Protected Landscapes.

In response to Member questions it was noted that building homes for dormice was still continuing. A close connection with the North Devon Biosphere was confirmed. Working with schools and getting them involved with schemes was a priority. It was confirmed that health and wellbeing projects were being focussed and built on.

The Glover report recommended that the AONB should become a statutory planning consultee. It was questioned whether there would be sufficient resource available should the AONB become a statutory consultee.

A Member proposed the following recommendation:

That the Committee **RECOMMEND** to Council that it lobby and make representations calling for the ability for the Council to insist that, where practicable and appropriate, all future developments in West Devon must be landscaped with indigenous plants. West Devon had declared both a climate and biodiversity emergency and such an ability would fit in with West Devon's ambition to increase safeguarding biodiversity.

This recommendation was then seconded and, in discussion, support was expressed from a number of Members and the Committee then voted unanimously to recommend the proposal to Council.

RECOMMENDED

That the Committee **RECOMMEND** to Council that it lobby and make representations calling for the ability for the Council to insist that, where practicable and appropriate, all future developments in West

Devon must be landscaped with indigenous plants. West Devon has declared both a climate change and biodiversity emergency and such an ability would fit in with West Devon's ambition to increase safeguarding biodiversity.

39. **Council Delivery Against Key Performance Indicators**

*O&S 39

The Lead Hub Member introduced the report that provided the Committee with a high level update of performance (October to December 2021) across the Council. In discussion, the re-housing of homeless people was raised in response to the statistics on the success of the number of those being housed.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the performance figures shown in the Pentana Report.

40. **Community Broadband -quarterly update**

*O&S 40

The Community Digital Specialist gave an update on Community Broadband. In the update the specialist explained;

- Monthly meetings were being held with key suppliers.
- Weekly engagements with CDS and Airband, but still issues remained with data sharing.
- Created digital connectivity webpages
- 220 people, including 76 businesses, had responded to say that they needed better broadband provision.
- There were 45 Broadband local community champions, covering 25 of the 59 parishes
- Two webinars were run for the champions, which were also attended by representatives from Connecting Devon and Somerset and Broadband suppliers. The champions would work with Parish Councils to build a database of need in their area and identify potential community led fibre projects. The champions would also be a point of contact for residents on digital connectivity matters.
- Openreach Rural Exchange Programme in Tavistock and Okehampton had committed to deliver to over 75% of the premises. Airband CDS contract -1,348 premises (5% of premises in WD) but many more would be offered connection. Planned delivery by the end of 2022. Alternative networks were stated as Jurassic, City Fibre and Airband. Fixed wireless providers included: Airband, RadioFibre Skylight and Cloud Wireless. The champions will help identify gaps in coverage.
- Next steps would be to continue to engage with suppliers and organisations and to assist broadband champions in their areas and to support the development of a robust digital policy for Joint Local Plan. In addition, there was a need to both ensure that West Devon Borough Council was prioritised in further central Government

funding and to challenge Connecting Devon and Somerset on where additional funding is spent.

In response to a Member question the Specialist confirmed that all of the details of the Broadband champions had been made public on the website and therefore Members could see which parishes were currently unrepresented.

41. **Task and Finish Group Updates (if any)**

*O&S 41

There were no updates.

42. **O&S Annual Work Programme inc. prep for next meeting**

*O&S 42

The Deputy Chief Executive said that the reporting cycles were being aligned so that updates on corporate themes and strategy were aligned with reports going to the Hub Committee therefore presenting the opportunity for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review in detail the progress on the actions.

A question on the progress on the South West Mutual Bank was answered by the Lead Hub Member who responded by saying that the bank was committed to moving forward and obtaining a banking licence. An update on the Mutual Bank would be given at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting in April.

43. **Member Learning and Development Opportunities Arising from this Meeting**

*O&S 43

There were no learning opportunities to note.

The Meeting concluded at 3.47 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
