

SOUTH HAMS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Minutes of a meeting of the **South Hams Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held
on
Thursday, 16th June, 2022 at 2.00 pm at the **Council Chamber - Follaton House**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Thomas
Vice Chairman Cllr Smerdon

Cllr Abbott (as a Substitute)	Cllr Austen
Cllr Birch	Cllr Jones
Cllr Rowe	Cllr Sweett
Cllr Taylor	

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Bastone	Cllr Hawkins (via Teams)
Cllr O'Callaghan (via Teams)	Cllr Pannell (via Teams)
Cllr Pearce	Cllr Reeve (via Teams)

Officers:

Director – Strategy & Governance
Head of Finance (via Teams)
Business Manager – Specialists
Head of Housing
Democratic Services Specialist

- 1. Minutes**
O&S.01/22
The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) held on 21 April 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.
- 2. Urgent Business**
O&S.02/22
Since this was the first Committee meeting of the 2022/23 Municipal Year, the Chairman and Vice Chairman both gave thanks to Cllr John Birch for his exemplary

chairing of the Committee for the last three years. Thanks were also given to Cllrs Pennington and O'Callaghan for their years of service on the Committee.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

O&S.03/22

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 declared.

4. **Public Forum**

O&S.04/22

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

5. **Third Party Partners**

O&S.05/22

(a) **LIVEWEST**

The Committee was addressed by Mr R Baldwinson and Ms S Brown who gave a presentation outlining the work of LiveWest and its relationship with South Hams District Council (SHDC).

During the question and answer session, the following points were made:

- In response to SHDC declaring a housing crisis, LiveWest had met with officers to discuss this, and confirmed that creating more outlets, prioritising delivery of affordable housing, and prioritising land for affordable housing would help towards solving the crisis.
- 'Right to Buy' caused issues as a property sold took four years to replace, and often could not be replaced due to issues with land availability.
- The LiveWest representatives confirmed that they pursued debt for rent but were also aware that an eviction could lead to people being made homeless. When questioned, it was confirmed that there had been no evictions in the South Hams area last year.

The Chairman then gave thanks to the LiveWest representatives for their excellent presentation.

(b) **SOUTH WEST MUTUAL**

Mr T Greenham of South West Mutual gave his presentation to the Committee, outlining the progress of the Mutual.

During the question and answer session, the following points were made:

- SHDC was one of the major shareholders of the Mutual, who had one vote amongst 100. Updates were sent regularly to SHDC as a shareholder and the Section 151 Officer attended each Annual General Meeting. The Section 151 Officer confirmed that she would ensure she reported back after the next meeting.

- More investment was being sought for the next stage of the project. It was confirmed that if sufficient funds were not received, the Mutual would be disbanded with no liability to the Council.
- The legality of working with other mutuals was still not clarified: South West Mutual was waiting to hear from the Secretary of State for Business but accepted that this was unlikely to be a priority for the Secretary of State.

The Chairman gave thanks to Mr Greenham for his interesting and informative presentation.

6. **Council Delivery against Corporate Theme: Council Services**

O&S.06/22

Following the Council's adoption of the Better Lives for All Strategy in September 2021, the Committee was provided with an update on the Council Services strand of the Better Lives for All Strategy.

Each project that was not on target, as outlined in Appendix A of the attendant report, was then reviewed in turn:

CS1.1: It was confirmed that, although this strand was off track, it was hoped that it would be back on track within six months. Following a question from a Member, the officer stated she would look into the proposed mobile solution for locality officers and would email the Committee with her findings.

CS1.2: The Leader confirmed that opening hours for the reception at Follaton House was being reviewed. Hours of opening would be reduced to help promote channel shift as everything was now offered online, which was a much more efficient, and cheaper, way to respond to customer queries. However, it was noted that there would always be some individuals who needed face to face and/or telephone exchanges with the Council.

With regards to CS1.3 and CS1.4, following Member discussion, it was agreed that the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would write to the Executive Lead Member to ask if she wished input from the Committee, as a 'critical friend', in consultations and resident engagement.

7. **Progress of Recruitment on Future Lawyers**

O&S.07/22

It was noted that all five vacancies within the Legal Services Team were currently being advertised. The closing date for applications was 20 June 2022. A report on the progress of the recruitment would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee, on 21 July 2022.

A Member of the Committee stated that the Council carrying five lawyer vacancies was not acceptable and had impacted on some actions of the Council. The Member proceeded to call for a task and finish group to be set up to examine the workings of the legal services team and to come forward with options to make it more efficient and effective. The Director of Governance and Strategy confirmed that agency lawyers, other local authorities, and external consultants had been used when necessary, but he was happy to respond to individual situations outside of the meeting. It was confirmed that two new posts had been created in Autumn 2021 to support the Monitoring Officer, pay had been reviewed alongside an internal review of the team, including a skills set review.

Following the debate, where several Members stated their belief that all was already being done to fill the vacancies it was therefore felt that a task and finish group review was unnecessary and the request for a task and finish group was declared **LOST** at the subsequent vote.

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

O&S.08/22

a) Housing

The final report would be available for the Executive meeting on 7th July and the work of the Task and Finish Group would then be completed.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the above and **ACKNOWLEDGE** that the Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairman would collate the examples before these would then be relayed to the Executive.

9. **O&S Annual Work Programme 2022/23**

O&S.09/22

The latest version of the draft annual work programme for the coming fiscal year was reviewed and approved by the Committee.

The Meeting concluded at 4.25 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
