

West Devon Hub Committee



West Devon
Borough
Council

Title:	Agenda								
Date:	Tuesday, 7th June, 2022								
Time:	2.00 pm								
Venue:	Chamber - Kilworthy Park								
Full Members:	<p style="text-align: center;">Chairman Cllr Jory</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Vice Chairman Cllr Edmonds</p> <p><i>Members:</i></p> <table style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td>Cllr Cheadle</td> <td>Cllr Mott</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cllr Crozier</td> <td>Cllr Ratcliffe</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cllr Daniel</td> <td>Cllr Vachon</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cllr Leech</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Cllr Cheadle	Cllr Mott	Cllr Crozier	Cllr Ratcliffe	Cllr Daniel	Cllr Vachon	Cllr Leech	
Cllr Cheadle	Cllr Mott								
Cllr Crozier	Cllr Ratcliffe								
Cllr Daniel	Cllr Vachon								
Cllr Leech									
Interests – Declaration and Restriction on Participation:	Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any disclosable pecuniary interest not entered in the Authority's register or local non pecuniary interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda (subject to the exception for sensitive information) and to leave the meeting prior to discussion and voting on an item in which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest.								
Committee administrator:	Democratic.Services@swdevon.gov.uk								

1. Apologies for absence

2. Declarations of Interest

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Members are invited to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, Other Registerable Interests and Non-Registerable Interests including the nature and extent of such interests they may have in any items to be considered at this meeting;

3. Items Requiring Urgent Attention

To consider those items which, in the opinion of the Chairman, should be considered by the Meeting as matters of urgency (if any)

4. Confirmation of Minutes

1 - 6

Minutes of meeting held 12 April 2022

5. Public Questions -a period of up to 15 minutes is available to deal with issues raised by the public

6. Hub Committee Forward Plan

7 - 10

7. Annual Report Achievements

To follow

8. Housing Crisis Update Report - Strengthening Housing Delivery

11 - 24

9. Waste and Recycling Performance Update

To follow

10. Key Partnerships Funding

25 - 34

11. Council Tax Rebate Discretionary Scheme

35 - 58

12. Contact Centre Service Review Update

59 - 70

13. Planning Services Improvement Plan

To follow

Agenda Item 4

At a Meeting of the **HUB COMMITTEE** held in the **Council Chamber, Kilworthy Park, Tavistock** on **TUESDAY** the **12th** day of **April 2022** at **2:00 pm**

Present: Cllr N Jory – Chairman

Cllr P Crozier	Cllr L Daniel
Cllr C Edmonds	Cllr T Pearce
Cllr B Ratcliffe	

In attendance: Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Section 151 Officer
Director of Strategy & Governance
Monitoring Officer
Democratic Services Manager
Head of Strategy and Projects
Senior Specialists – Housing
Senior Specialist – Parking and Public Conveniences
Senior Specialist – Climate Change

Other Members also in attendance in a non-voting capacity:

Cllrs M Ewings, N Heyworth, A F Leech and J Yelland

***HC 78/21 APOLOGIES**

There were apologies for absence received for this Meeting from Cllrs R Cheadle, C Mott and A F Leech.

***HC 79/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be discussed and there were none made.

***HC 80/21 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Hub Committee meeting held on 8 March 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

***HC 81/21 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

It was noted that no Public Questions had been received in accordance with the Hub Committee Procedure Rules.

***HC 82/21 HUB COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN**

Members were presented with the Hub Committee Forward Plan that set out items on the agenda for Hub Committee meetings for the next four months.

***HC 83/21 AMENDMENT OF THE OFF STREET PARKING PLACES ORDER**

A report was considered that sought the implementation of changes within the Council's Off Street Parking Places Order so as to remain compliant with its enforcement following changes within the associated legislation.

It was then **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Head of Assets be authorised to publish notice of proposals for the West Devon Borough Council (Off-Street Parking Places) Order 2022 to consolidate with amendments the current Off-Street Parking Places Order; the amendments to be made to be to the relevant parts of the Order to reflect changes to legislation in respect of parking enforcement; and
2. That the Head of Assets be requested to prepare a report summarising the representations received in response to the notice of proposals for consideration by the Hub Committee before making a decision whether to make the off-street parking places order as proposed or with modifications.

***HC 84/21 HOUSING STRATEGY YEAR 2 UPDATE AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2022-27**

The Hub Committee was presented with a report that reviewed progress made to date against the themes and priorities during the first year of the Housing Strategy and provided the new draft delivery plan for the second year. The report also sought approval for the adoption of the Joint South Hams and West Devon Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 and Joint Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2022-23

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) With regard to the recently adopted Tenants Incentives Scheme, officers confirmed that they had already seen an increase in both interest and uptake of the Scheme;
- (b) In respect of defined Housing Need across the Borough, it was felt that this would be an appropriate topic for further consideration by all Members at a future Informal Council session;
- (c) To ensure that the long-term sustainability of rural villages was preserved, the importance of affordable housing being developed in these villages was reiterated;
- (d) With reference to the delivery of affordable housing in the Borough during 2021/22, it was agreed that details in respect of the locations of those that had been built would be included as part of the Thematic Delivery Plan review agenda item to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting to be held on 26 April 2022.

It was then:

RESOLVED

For Part 1 – Housing Strategy Year 2 Action Plan:

1. That Members review the progress to date on Better Homes, Better Lives; and
2. That Members endorse the Year 2 Action Plan;

For Part 2 - 2022/27 Homelessness Strategy:

1. That, with effect from 1 April 2022, Members approve the Joint South Hams and West Devon Homelessness Strategy 2022-27; and
2. That, with effect from 1 April 2022, Members approve the Joint Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2022-23.

***HC 85/21 REVENUE AND BENEFITS SERVICE REVIEW UPDATE**

Consideration was given to a report that provided an update on the service review undertaken in 2021 across the Revenues and Benefits Service, and the actions taken since then to implement the recommendations of the Review.

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) a Member Briefing. The Committee welcomed the suggestion that a Member Briefing on the work of the Benefits Team be convened in the near future;
- (b) Council Tax Collection rates. Bearing in mind the economic pressures that were being faced by households, the fact that Collection rates had remained fairly consistent in recent times was considered to be to the great credit of local residents;
- (c) the workload of the Team. Members wished to record their thanks to the Revenue and Benefits Team for their tireless work since the offset of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

- (i) the achievements of the Revenues and Benefits Team in maintaining core service delivery, whilst also ensuring that businesses and residents were supported throughout the pandemic through the administration of business grants, personal grants such as Track and Trace and administering benefits schemes, be recognised;
- (ii) the approach taken following the Revenues and Benefits Review and the subsequent Implementation Plan be endorsed;
- (iii) the progress of the Revenues & Benefits Implementation Plan be noted and a further update in six months' time be requested;
- (iv) the recruitment of a Head of Service for Revenues and Benefits, to be funded on a self-funding basis be endorsed and that next iteration of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) will increase both the annual staffing budget by £30,000 (the Council's share of the staffing cost) and the annual income from council tax by £30,000 (to reflect the anticipated increase in council tax collection rates by at least 0.5%), be noted; and
- (v) it be endorsed that the stretching targets the new Head of Service will be set, will mean that the Council will continue to improve collection rates across council tax and business rates generating significant further income for the Borough Council.

HC 86/21 CLIMATE CHANGE & BIODIVERSITY ACTION - COUNCIL NET-ZERO UPDATE

Members considered a report that set out progress and the potential carbon savings (or biodiversity net gain) from significant projects aligned to two of the three aims as stated in its Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy, these being Aim 1, reducing its carbon footprint to net-zero by 2030 and Aim 3 increasing biodiversity on its own land by 10% by 2025

The report also contained a business case to invest a further £300,000, in the form of a loan to Fusion Leisure (the chosen provider for the Councils' leisure facilities), to install solar arrays on the four leisure centres within the Borough.

In discussion the following points were made:

- (a) When questioned, officers confirmed that, due to the recent spiralling energy costs, the costs quoted in Section 6.2 of the published agenda report were now no longer reflective of the current situation;
- (b) In respect of community planting schemes, the importance of informing local town and parish councils that these were taking place was recognised;
- (c) Officers advised that initial structural survey works had been carried out and it had been concluded that Solar Panels could be installed on the roof of Meadowlands Leisure Centre.

It was then **RESOLVED**:

- 1. that the progress on plans aligned to the aim of the Council being net-zero by 2030 and increasing biodiversity on its own land by 10% by 2025 be noted; and

That Council be **RECOMMENDED** to delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the lead Hub Member for Finance to:

- 2. approve and agree the lending terms to Fusion Leisure for a loan of up to £300,000 to facilitate solar panel installation across both WDBC Leisure Centres over the remaining term of the leisure contract, in accordance with treasury management advice; and
- 3. update the Council's Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy for 2022/23 for a £300,000 loan provision to Fusion Leisure for the solar installation, in accordance with treasury management advice.

***HC 87/21 A PLAN FOR WEST DEVON- QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT**

Members considered a report that set out the Integrated Performance Management report covering the Quarter 4 period (from 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2022). The report also provided detail on a revised suite of operational Key Performance Indicators for the Hub Committee to consider.

It was then:

RESOLVED

- (i) That the progress in achieving our plans as adopted in the Plan for West Devon be recognised;
- (ii) That the proposed Key Performance Indicators as set out in Appendix B of the presented report be endorsed; and
- (iii) That the Hub Committee commence work with Lead Officers on refining the 2023/24 delivery plans for consideration by Council in Autumn 2022.

(The meeting terminated at 2.50 pm)

Chairman

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM FRIDAY, 22 APRIL 2022, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MINUTE HC 86/21 PARTS 2 AND 3 WHICH ARE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL MEETING TO BE HELD ON 24 MAY 2022, UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 18)

This page is intentionally left blank

Hub Committee Forward Plan

About the Forward Plan

This is the provisional forward plan for at least four months starting June 2022. It provides an indicative date for matters to be considered by the Hub Committee. Where possible, the Hub Committee will keep to the dates shown in the plan. However, it may be necessary for some items to be rescheduled and other items added.

The forward plan is published to publicise consultation dates and enable dialogue between the Hub Committee and all Councillors, the public, and other stakeholders. It will also assist the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in planning their contribution to policy development and holding the Hub Committee to account.

The Plan is published on the Council's website (www.westdevon.gov.uk)

About the Hub Committee

The Hub Committee currently consists of nine Councillors. Each has responsibility for a particular area of the Council's work.

- Leader of the Council – Cllr N Jory
- Deputy Leader of the Council, with specific responsibility for Enabling Inclusive and Accessible Services – Cllr R Cheadle
- Lead Hub Member for the Economy - Cllr P Crozier
- Lead Hub Member for the Natural Environment - Cllr L Daniel
- Lead Hub Member for Resources and Performance - Cllr C Edmonds
- Lead Hub Member for Leisure, Health and Wellbeing - Cllr A F Leech
- Lead Hub Member for the Built Environment - Cllr C Mott
- Lead Hub Member for Communities - Cllr P Vachon
- Lead Hub Member for Housing – Cllr B Ratcliffe

Further information on the workings of the Hub Committee, including latest information on agenda items, can be obtained by contacting Democratic Services on 01803 861105 or by e-mail to democratic.services@swdevon.gov.uk

All items listed in this Forward Plan will be discussed in public at the relevant meeting, unless otherwise indicated with *



Forward Plan from June 2022

Portfolio Area	Report Title and Summary	Lead Member / Officer	Documents to be considered in making decision	Date of Decision	Consultees and means of consultation
Council	<p>Title: Annual Report of Achievements 2021/22</p> <p>Purpose: To consider a report that presents the Council's Draft Annual Report for 2021/22</p>	Cllr Jory / Neil Hawke	Report of Head of Strategy and Projects	7 June 2022	
Built Environment	<p>Title: Planning Service Improvement Plan Update</p> <p>Purpose: To consider a report that provides an update on the Planning Service Improvement Plan.</p>	Cllr Mott / Drew Powell	Report of Director of Strategy and Governance	7 June 2022	
Leisure, Health and Wellbeing	<p>Title: Council Tax Rebate Discretionary Scheme</p> <p>Purpose: To consider a report that presents the draft Discretionary Scheme for approval.</p>	Cllr Leech / Lorraine Mullineaux	Report of Senior Specialist Benefits	7 June 2022	
Clean Environment	<p>Title: Waste and Recycling Performance Update</p> <p>Purpose: To consider a report that presents a performance update on the Waste and Recycling Collection Service</p>	Cllr Daniel / Steve Mullineaux	Report of Deputy Chief Executive	7 June 2022	
Communities	<p>Title: Key Partnership Funding</p> <p>Purpose: To consider a report that presents the approach to funding for our key partners beyond the current three-year funding term (which ends on 31 March 2023).</p>	Cllr Vachon / Neil Hawke	Report of Head of Strategy and Projects	7 June 2022	
Homes	<p>Title: Housing Team Structure</p> <p>Purpose: To consider a report that presents a proposed revised Housing Team Structure to enable the Council to be</p>	Cllr Ratcliffe / Issy Blake	Report of the Head of Housing	7 June 2022	



Portfolio Area	Report Title and Summary	Lead Member / Officer	Documents to be considered in making decision	Date of Decision	Consultees and means of consultation
	better placed to deal with the recently declared Housing Crisis.				
Resources & Performance	Title: Contact Centre Review Purpose: To consider a report that presents the findings of the Contact Centre Review.	Cllr Edmonds / Steve Mullineaux	Report of the Deputy Chief Executive	7 June 2022	
Homes	Title: Springhill Project Update Purpose: To consider a report that presents an update on the Springhill Project.	Cllr Ratcliffe / Laura Wotton	Report of Head of Assets	21 June 2022	
Council	Title: Quarter 1 Integrated Performance Management Report Purpose: To consider the integrated performance management report for the Quarter 1 period of 2022/23.	Cllr Jory / Neil Hawke	Report of Head of Strategy and Projects	12 July 2022	
Resources and Performance	Title: 2021/22 Revenue Outturn Purpose: To consider a report that presents the final Revenue Outturn figures for 2021/22	Cllr Edmonds / Pauline Henstock	Report of the Deputy Section 151 Officer	12 July 2022	
Leisure, Health and Wellbeing	Title: Health and Wellbeing Pilot Purpose: To consider a report that provides an opportunity for Members to have an input into the Pilot.	Cllr Leech / Ian Luscombe	Report of the Head of Environmental Health	12 July 2022	
Resources and Performance	Title: 2021/22 Capital Outturn Purpose: To consider a report that presents the final Capital Outturn figures for 2021/22.	Cllr Edmonds / Pauline Henstock	Report of the Deputy Section 151 Officer	12 July 2022	



Portfolio Area	Report Title and Summary	Lead Member / Officer	Documents to be considered in making decision	Date of Decision	Consultees and means of consultation
Resources and Performance	<p>Title: Medium Term Financial Strategy for the three years 2022/23 to 2024/25</p> <p>Purpose: To set the strategic intention for all of the different strands of funding available to the Council. This brings together all known factors affecting the Council's financial position and its financial sustainability, to provide a long term financial forecast.</p>	Cllr Edmonds / Lisa Buckle	Report of Section 151 Officer	13 September 2022	
Resources and Performance	<p>Title: Revenue Budget Monitoring Report to Month 4</p> <p>Purpose: To consider a report that presents the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report to Month 4.</p>	Cllr Edmonds / Lisa Buckle	Report of Section 151 Officer	13 September 2022	
Natural Environment	<p>Title: Climate Emergency Planning Statement</p> <p>Purpose: To consider a report that seeks to make a recommendation to Council to adopt a Climate Emergency Planning Statement.</p>	Cllr Daniel / Jo Lee	Report of the Strategic Planning Manager (Joint Local Plan)	13 September 2022	
Resources and Performance	<p>Title: Capital Programme Monitoring Report to Month 4</p> <p>Purpose: To consider a report that presents the Capital Programme Monitoring Report to Month 4.</p>	Cllr Edmonds / Pauline Henstock	Report of Head of Finance	13 September 2022	

Report to: **Hub Committee**

Date: **7th June 2022**

Title: **Housing Crisis Update – Strengthening Housing Delivery**

Portfolio Area: **Homes – Cllr Barry Ratcliffe**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:

Author: **Isabel Blake** Role: **Head of Housing**

Contact: **Telephone 01822 813551 email: Isabel.blake@swdevon.gov.uk**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Hub Committee:

- 1. note the proposed revised Housing Team Structure at Appendix 1; and**
- 2. RECOMMEND to Council, to approve an annual revenue cost pressure of £29,800 (WDBC share) to be built into the budget process for 23/24 onwards, and a one off expenditure of £100,520 to be funded from the 2021/22 Government Homeless Prevention grant. This will be used to fund the additional posts for the new Housing Team Structure as set out in Appendix 1.**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 In February 2022, the Council declared a housing crisis. At the same time, it set out a range of activities it would undertake to tackle the crisis. The Leader of the Council has requested that an update be provided to the Hub at their regular committee.
- 1.2 The Council has been clear with its priorities around Housing and delivering homes for local people whilst making best use of existing stock, in accordance with A Plan for West Devon, and Better Homes, Better Lives (Housing Strategy 2021-2026).

Following a resources review to deliver against these aspirations, it is recommended that changes to staffing levels and structure are made to the Housing Team.

- 1.3 This report sets out the measures officers are taking to readdress this imbalance, to ensure there is sufficient capacity within the team to drive forward the projects within the housing strategy. This includes sites within our ownership at Springhill Tavistock and Wonnacotts Road in Okehampton, exploration of a strategic partnership with a Registered Provider and accelerating our work to bring forward affordable led schemes. All whilst continuing to deliver the various statutory functions to the best standard possible.
- 1.4 The proposal is that this team is increased 100% (by 4 FTE) to 7.8 FTE. This will be achieved through a mix of flexing existing resources within the Housing Options team, whilst recruiting new permanent and temporary resources. The additional resource, like the rest of the housing service will be shared with South Hams District Council on a 40/60 percentage split.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council has a number of functions regarding housing and the current structure is attached to this report (appendix 1). A number of those are statutory, which the Council must perform – particularly in relation to homelessness and housing advice. The team is high performing with a proven track record in homeless prevention, effective use of temporary accommodation and significant reductions in rough sleeping. The Council also own its own temporary accommodation and manages private sector accommodation on behalf of private landlords through our own in house letting agency Seamoor Lettings.
- 2.2 The Council also has a strategic and enabling role, responsible for negotiating affordable housing contributions with developers, working with our RP (registered provider) partners on S106 contributions, redevelopment, land opportunities and disposals. Gypsy & Traveller projects, policy, strategy and support to the development management and JLP teams are all service functions of this team. This team consists of 3 officers, 1 of which is a temporary resource and it is within this team (called housing delivery) where the staffing numbers are inadequate to address the housing crisis to the best of our ability.
- 2.3 The Council declared a Housing Crisis in the autumn of 2021 and the reconfiguration of resources and additional resources will enable the Council to create real momentum. Specifically:
 - Working on providing the necessary evidence base and housing need analysis to ensure that members will have a

choice in the future to seek to go further than the JLP currently does in its ask for affordable housing. The work will inform further iterations of the Housing Strategy and importantly be a direct contributing factor in S106 negotiations with developers.

- Enable closer interaction and engagement with our Registered Providers (RPs) at both a strategic and operational level.
- Commission and develop a strategic partnership with a Registered Provider to unlock delivery of new affordable homes on both Council land and elsewhere.
- Bring forward opportunities to purchase land and commission affordable social housing.
- By having a dedicated planning resource, ensure that schemes that are delivering affordable homes are progressed through the planning system efficiently, delivering the maximum number of affordable homes possible.

This proposal also takes into account the additional workload pressures such as the Homes for Ukraine scheme and maintains the number of FTE in Housing Advice & Homelessness Prevention team.

The total additional annual cost of the proposal for West Devon is £29,800 that we are recommending is built into the budget process for 23/24 onwards as a cost pressure. In addition, an amount of £100,520 will be funded from the Government homeless prevention grant for 21/22. This will fund the fixed term posts set out in appendix 1.

Housing Advice & Homelessness Prevention

Existing team

2 x FTE L4 Specialists

7.8 FTE Housing advisors

1 FTE Team Leader

1.8 FTE Seamoor lettings / Temporary accommodation

1 FTE Vulnerable person support (Temporary external funding)

2 FTE Rough sleeper / G&T Outreach (1 post temporary external funding)

0.8 FTE DHC (Devon Home Choice)

Total FTE 16.4

Key workload

Development & ongoing monitoring of the Homelessness Strategy and annual action plan

SeaMoor Lettings	Development and management of temporary accommodation and owned stock portfolio
-------------------------	---

	<p>Develop owned stock property/Seamoor offer to provide House in Multiple Occupation and other specialist accommodation</p> <p>Work with assets to identify stock options that can be developed into housing</p> <p>Establish and monitor KPI's</p> <p>Develop and maintain the landlord engagement section including referring in for advice</p>
Refugee work	<p>Ukraine resettlement work</p> <p>Implementing, coordinating the provision and arrival planning for refugees under the UKRS & ALES scheme and ongoing high level management</p>
Housing Options team	<p>Case support for individuals at risk of homelessness</p> <p>Deal with homelessness presentation</p> <p>Provide temporary accommodation. Manage those in temporary accommodation so that they find permanent solutions as quickly as possible</p> <p>Homelessness Reviews</p> <p>Devon Home Choice Reviews</p> <p>Devon & Cornwall Housing options Partnership</p> <p>Devon Homelessness Health Cell</p>
Vulnerable person work	<p>Signpost and support individuals</p> <p>Co-ordinate 3rd sector partners</p>
Rough Sleepers G&T / Caravan Dwellers	<p>Manage projects including Outreach, property acquisition, negotiate with RPs,</p>
Other	<p>Safeguarding lead</p> <p>Perpetrator programme accommodation work</p> <p>work with MH & Adult service regarding current housing needs etc. for those with additional support needs</p> <p>Homemaker contract tender and management</p> <p>Care Leavers (16/17 year olds)</p>

Housing Delivery

Existing team

1 x L6 FTE Housing Strategy / Business Intelligence (2 year temporary funded)

1 x L5 FTE Housing Enabling – Minor schemes/policy

1 x L4 FTE Housing Enabling / Strategy

Total FTE 3

Key workload

<p>Housing Enabling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing the undertaking of viability assessments to get best value. • Decision making within policy for housing schemes and discretion in taking action in relation to housing delivery • Engagement across RPs on the housing mix requirements and aligning delivery with need and political preference to deliver better location specific outcomes • Develop and implement housing policy to support housing delivery and best use of existing stock • Research and development • Reporting on Housing and Corporate Strategy progress, updating action plan and ensuring it accords with Corporate Strategy format • Drafting and presenting Housing Crisis reports at Executive and Hub • Project managing the formation of a housing company, including articles of association, reserved matters and governance • Ensure effective partnership working with a range of providers, funders and 3rd sector organisations (Alms houses, LT's HE) • Town & Parish & community liaison • Work to identify sites, initiatives, secures funding and monitors delivery • Deliver bespoke housing solutions for a small number of individuals whose housing options cannot otherwise be met • Monitor S106 Expenditure/commuted sums manage and make recommendations as to where funding should be spent • Complete the selection criteria, liaison with communities/ward members, completion, publication and information sharing of Housing Needs Surveys and manage effectively the Housing needs survey administrator • Supporting the JLP housing team through the JLP review to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Setting housing policy and testing what is possible ○ Informing through appropriate evidence base ○ Commissioning and undertaking housing needs surveys ○ Setting outcomes and work programme for Housing Analyst to support the above, in partnership with the Place Team
<p>Devon Home Choice</p>	<p>Support people through application process, queries etc.</p>

Key Issues to address

	Issue	Proposal	Costs p.a. across both South Hams & West Devon	WDBC Share of the cost
1.	Insufficient resources to deliver all the housing enabling activities listed above.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move across 1 x L4 FTE from Housing Advice and Homelessness prevention • Therefore increasing Housing Enabling specialist resource by 50% from 2 to 3 	Nil	
2.	Create 1 x L5 specialist role to backfill (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade 1 of existing roles 	£14,100	£5,640
3.	Make Housing Strategy Officer secondment permanent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides case management support to strategy and enabling team • Monitor housing strategy • Succession planning 	£5,600	£2,240
3.	Maintains team capacity whilst taking on additional Homes for Ukraine scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move 1 x L6 FTE back from secondment to Revenues 	Nil *bring back with existing funding.	
4.	Ramp up the Housing Needs Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional 1 x L7 business admin resource (2 years) 	£33,600 (x 2 years = £67,200)	£26,880 Funded from Housing grant

	Issue	Proposal	Costs p.a. across both South Hams & West Devon	WDBC Share of the cost
5.	Ensure that planning have sufficient resource to prioritise affordable housing schemes (developer & in-house)	1 x L4 Affordable Housing Planner (2 year role) to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage through the planning service for land led / affordable housing led schemes to ensure faster and stronger support Shape strategic housing delivery and meshing it into Place outcomes through engagement across Place and Enterprise Directorate Informing and supporting the acquisition of strategic land Acting as planning agent for Council led (direct or through strategic partner) housing schemes to ensure best planning outcomes 	£54,800 (x 2 years = £109,600)	£43,840 Funded from Housing grant
6.	Need a strategic housing partner. No in house skills to undertake this work. Once procured we will need to maximise the potential of this partnership to ensure delivery of housing projects. Required skillset: Chartered Surveyor with housing background	1 x L4 Housing Development Officer to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead and manage procurement of a strategic housing partner(s) to include responsibility for: setting Joint venture terms, financial structures, key outcomes, risk management, ongoing partner/client management, delivery functions, commercial agreements Supporting the Head of Housing in managing 	£54,800	£21,920

	Issue	Proposal	Costs p.a. across both South Hams & West Devon	WDBC Share of the cost
		<p>the strategic partner relationship, including any contract management requirements and reporting requirements to SLT and members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working up and defining scope of housing projects, for delivery by internal (assets) or external (strategic partner) teams • Defining scope, procuring and managing outsourced services to support housing delivery • Informing and agreeing specification for housing development standards, with internal and external partners 		
		Total Additional Annual Revenue Cost Pressure from 23/24	£74,500	£29,800 WDBC annual revenue cost pressure
		Total funded from Housing Government grant	£251,300	£100,520 (being £26,880 plus £43,840 for items iv) and v) and £29,800 for the revenue cost pressure in 2022/23

3. Outcomes/outputs

- 3.1 The Council has set an ambitious plan through A Plan For West Devon and Better Homes, Better Lives (the Corporate and Housing strategies) it cannot reasonably be expected to achieve these without additional resource to deliver new and emerging work.
- 3.2 Whilst there is no silver bullet to solving the housing crisis, working to smooth the planning process for affordable led schemes, dedicated resource to manage strategic partnerships and/or direct delivery, and ensuring our intelligence regarding housing need is up to date and robust will all contribute to removing the obstacles to success. Accelerated delivery, increase of affordable led schemes and the capacity to respond to the need of our communities will all be achievable outcomes.

4. Options available and consideration of risk

- 4.1 The Council can continue with its existing resource, as it is currently meeting its statutory duties regarding homelessness. However, these will become harder to perform without affordable housing delivery.
- 4.2 The Council will also need to be realistic in its ambition around housing if the proposals set out are not supported, and recognise that the Housing Strategy and Housing Crisis work will have to be reviewed.

5. Proposed Way Forward

That Members recommend to council approval of both the £100,520 from the government homeless prevention grant and to build in an additional cost pressure to the budget from 23/24 of £29,800 to fund the additional posts and that recruitment commences immediately.

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	<p>The Council has a number of duties to perform regarding its statutory housing functions. This report requests additional resource to ensure the Council continues to deliver these to the best of its ability.</p> <p>The Council has also declared a housing crisis, recognising the difficulty accessing accommodation for local people. The Council has made its ambitions around housing very clear and it is essential that where the Council has an opportunity to influence affordable housing delivery that those opportunities are fully explored. It can only do so with sufficient staff resource to do the job</p>

Financial implications to include reference to value for money	Y	<p>It is recommended that the Hub recommend to Council, to approve an annual revenue cost pressure of £29,800 (WDBC share) to be built into the budget process for 23/24 onwards, and a one off expenditure of £100,520 to be funded from the 21/22 Government Homeless Prevention grant.</p> <p>This will be used to fund the additional posts for the new Housing Team Structure as set out in Appendix 1.</p> <p>West Devon Borough Council received a Homeless Prevention Government grant of £211,244 for 2021/22.</p>
Risk	Y	There are significant service delivery and reputational risks if there is insufficient staff to deliver the Council's significant ambitions around affordable housing.
Supporting Corporate Strategy	Y	Improving Homes, growing our natural environment, adapting our built environment, maximising our resources, strengthening communities, enhancing community wellbeing
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	N	No direct carbon/biodiversity impact arising from the recommendations
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		There is no impact on any of the proposals in the report. Any recruitment would be in line with our equality, diversity & inclusion policy and compliant with The Equality Act 2010.
Safeguarding		Ensuring there is sufficient resource to deliver the housing service, which is also the Councils largest referrer for children & adults safeguarding services will minimise as much as is possible the risks to vulnerable adults and children
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		Ensuring there is enough resource to deliver the housing service, will assist victims of crime including domestic violence, and support initiatives to address anti-social behaviour in our communities.
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		Ensuring there is enough resource to safely deliver the housing service will address these concerns
Other implications		

Supporting Information

Appendices:

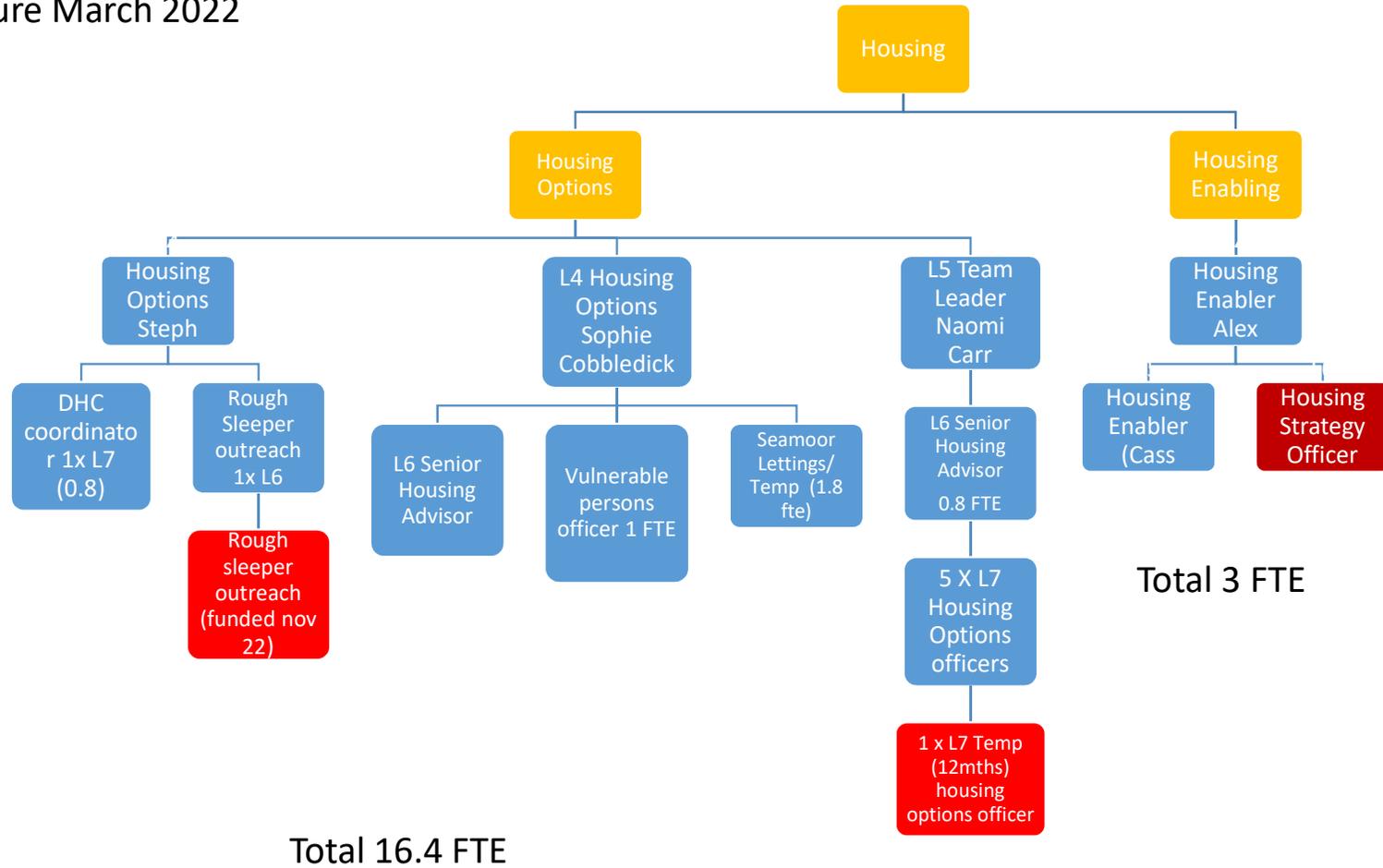
Appendix 1 – Existing & proposed structure

Background Papers:

None

This page is intentionally left blank

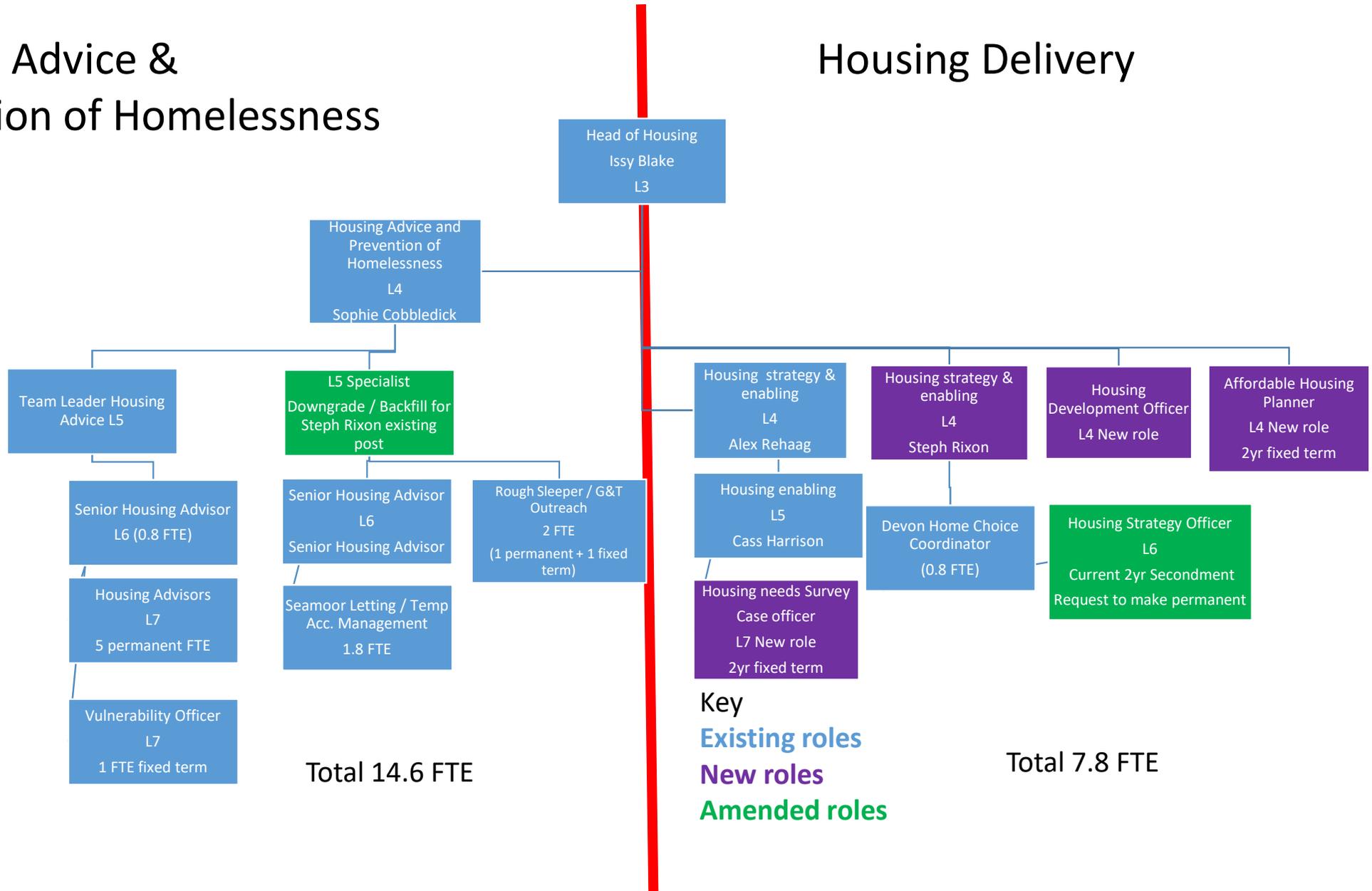
Current Structure March 2022



Housing Advice & Prevention of Homelessness

Housing Delivery

Page 24



Report to: **Hub Committee**

Date: **7 June 2022**

Title: **Key Partnerships Funding**

Portfolio Area: **Councillor Paul Vachon (Hub Lead, Communities)**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y / N**

Date next steps can be taken:

Author: **Neil Hawke** Role: **Head of Strategy**

Contact: Neil.Hawke@swdevon.gov.uk

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Hub Committee:

- 1. Note the positive contribution of our key funded partnerships in supporting our ambitions as set out in our Corporate Strategy, A Plan for West Devon;**
- 2. Request that the Head of Strategy liaise with existing key partners (as set out in section 2.6) to request that an updated application be submitted for a further two year funding arrangement from 31/03/2023; and**
- 3. Consider the returned application forms at their meeting in September 2022.**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Council has a number of key community and voluntary organisations that it funds to provide functions that complement Council Services or provide functions that support our ambitions of A Plan for West Devon (our Corporate Strategy).
- 1.2 In 2019 it was agreed to provide a three year funding arrangement to these key partners in order to provide them with longer term financial certainty.

- 1.3 The three year funding arrangement has now entered its final year and it is important that a decision is made as to the future support for the organisations concerned.
- 1.4 This report highlights some of the positive work of our key partners and recommends an approach for extending the current funding term by two years.

2. Background

- 2.1 For many years the Council has financially supported organisations that complement existing Council services or that are providing other support aligned to our own priorities.
- 2.2 In 2019, Council explored (as part of the budget setting process), a three year funding agreement for key partner organisations.
- 2.3 Organisations were asked to complete an application form which was assessed in terms of how it aligned to our ambitions or how it supported the Council in delivery of its services.
- 2.4 The applications were reviewed by a senior officer and Hub Leads before a recommendation was made to Council on which organisations to support.
- 2.5 As a result, it was agreed that the Council would fund nine key partner organisations, all of whom have played important roles in supporting our ambitions for the future.
- 2.6 The following partners were supported through the 2019 funding agreement.

Organisation & website	Amount per annum
Citizens Advice https://www.ruraldevoncab.org.uk/	£32,900
CVS https://www.westdevoncvcs.org.uk/	£5,100
OCRA https://ocrasport.org.uk/	£1,333
Okehampton Community Transport https://odctg.co.uk/	£6,533
Tavistock Ring & Ride http://www.tdltp.co.uk/	£6,533
Young Devon https://www.youngdevon.org/	£2,500
Tamar Estuaries Consultative Forum http://www.plymouth-mpa.uk/home/managing-the-mpa/tamar-estuaries-consultative-forum/	£4,500 Index linked
Tamar Valley AONB http://www.tamarvalley.org.uk/	£8,835
World Heritage Site https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/conservation/world-heritage-site/	£4,000

3. The importance of our key partners in supporting our priorities

3.1 While our Plan for West Devon corporate strategy was only adopted in September 2021, our key partners have all played, and continue to play important roles in delivering on our longer term vision for West Devon.

Citizens Advice

3.2 Supporting the Health and Wellbeing of West Devon residents is an important aspect of A Plan for West Devon specifically working with partners to pilot new approaches to tackling rural poverty (Action CW1.1)

3.3 Citizens Advice is by far the most significant partnership we have in terms of the funding allocated to it. They play an important role in supporting the Health and Wellbeing of our residents by offering them advice on support on a range of issues including Housing, Debt and employment.

3.4 The advice provided to residents through Citizens Advice ensures that they are able to access benefits that they are entitled to (including by supporting individuals with Universal Credit applications), and to tackle problem debts. If Citizens Advice were not able to continue offering this support, it is likely that those seeking support would turn to the Council by which time their support need could be more acute.

3.5 With the cost of living continuing to increase, the role of Citizens Advice in providing support and advice to our residents will be even more important than usual.

CVS

3.6 Another group at the centre of supporting West Devon residents through Covid-19 was the CVS.

3.7 A large number of community organisations stepped in across the district to ensure that some of our most vulnerable residents were able to access much needed support including collection of food and essential medical supplies, ensuring that individuals were able to get to medical appointments with volunteer drivers etc.

3.8 CVS played an important role in co-ordinating this effort, from offering new groups support and advice on how to operate in the correct way, training for community leaders and volunteers and linking volunteers to groups.

3.9 The CVS also continued with their business as usual activities throughout the pandemic including supporting voluntary organisations with signposting to fundraising opportunities.

3.10 Now that we are learning to live with Covid-19, the CVS is again stepping in to play an important role in respect of the Homes for

Ukraine Scheme. They are already supporting voluntary sector groups with linking up to translators, providing training and resources to community groups and ensuring signposting for hosts and refugees is in place.

- 3.11 We are currently having discussions with the CVS around formalising this arrangement and ensuring a coherent support network across the Borough for the medium to longer term.
- 3.12 The work of the CVS directly aligns to the Council ambitions of A Plan for West Devon, specifically through Action SC1.5 (Develop a plan for supporting our voluntary sector in the future).

Okehampton Community & Recreation Association

- 3.13 OCRA is a charity that aims to maintain and develop sporting / recreational opportunities for Okehampton and the surrounding areas. It does this through
 - Delivering a programme of over 1,400 sessions annually
 - Taking sport and activity sessions out to satellite towns and villages
 - Delivering and supporting special needs and disability activity
 - Supporting the delivery of facilities – with recent projects including skate parks, all weather pitches, play areas etc.
- 3.14 It works closely with organisations in the area to develop recreational activities for the community, a key aspect of our Plan for West Devon, specifically supporting CW1.5 (Provision of high-quality and accessible leisure services).

Community Transport

- 3.15 Both Okehampton Community Transport & Tavistock Ring and Ride schemes have seen volunteer drivers continue to offer vital transport throughout the pandemic and beyond. These services enable residents to maintain their independence and dignity and to also continue to live in their own homes whilst alleviating isolation and loneliness.
- 3.16 In the latest quarter January – March 2022, Okehampton Community Car Scheme carried 706 passengers, of which 22 couldn't transfer from their wheelchair in to a car seat.
- 3.17 In total during this period, 1214 passenger journeys were undertaken with the significant majority being for health related appointments.
- 3.18 This was delivered through a mix of 500 paid hours and 1900 volunteer driver hours.
- 3.19 Tavistock and District Ring and Ride are seeing numbers of users continuing to increase although it has been a challenge to build confidence of service users to begin travelling again, especially the more vulnerable groups that the service is aimed at.

- 3.20 Within the last couple of months the scheme has launched some new leaflets making it clearer how to access the service and the available route. These are distributed throughout the area. They have also tried to encourage users to recommence travel to vital appointments by promoting the service in the local press.
- 3.21 Ensuring that our communities are connected with easy access to transport for our most vulnerable residents is an incredibly important element of supporting the Health and Wellbeing of the District as well as reducing the cost on statutory services of transporting individuals to essential medical appointments.
- 3.22 These groups support our Plan for West Devon actions CW1.1 (Rural Poverty – through provision of affordable transport) and CW1.3 (Supporting more people to live independently for as long as they chose)

Young Devon

- 3.23 Young Devon have utilised funding from West Devon Borough Council to fund a young people’s counselling service in Tavistock for 1 day per week throughout the year, enabling young people to explore issues and allowing a safe space for disclose any problems and giving advice in possible ways to tackle those issues.
- 3.24 During 2020-2021 (we’re awaiting the following years report), 24 young people were worked with using the funding from WDBC with all but one of those young people presenting with Stress /Anxiety.
- 3.25 Of those supported by the service, 92% of the young people achieved a ‘reliable improvement’ as a result of the intervention. This compares very well to the average in the South West services of 72% ‘reliable improvement’
- 3.26 This project contributes to action CW1.6 – support delivery of mental health support and outreach for young people.

Tamar Estuaries Consultative Forum

- 3.27 The marine environment is under increasing pressure from human activity, which can damage and further threaten marine ecosystems. The Government is aiming to protect habitats and species in UK seas by contributing towards a network of well-managed Marine Protected Areas.
- 3.28 The Waters of Plymouth Sound and the Tamar Estuaries are classified as MPA’s through their designation as; Plymouth Sound and Estuaries Special Area of Conservation, Tamar Estuaries Complex Special Protection Area; and Tamar Estuaries Marine Conservation Zone.

- 3.29 Management measures are therefore required to protect the vulnerable features of the MPA's and Relevant Authorities need to consider appropriate measures when determining application for development or permitting activities near sites.
- 3.30 For well over 20 years the Tamar Estuaries Consultative Forum has been successfully managing these activities through a collaborative approach. Without the Forum, the financial burden and requirements on each individual organisation would be much higher than the contribution we make to TECF.
- 3.31 The activities of the Forum directly contribute to our ambitions for our Natural Environment, specifically NE1.8 (Map our ecosystems, species and other natural capital) and NE1.10 Work with key landowners and partners

Tamar Valley AONB

- 3.32 Ensuring that we protect and enhance our natural environment and responding to the climate and biodiversity emergency are both specific priorities within our strategy.
- 3.33 The AONB is a statutory designation and is of equal standing to a National Park.
- 3.34 AONB's are serviced by core AONB team and their main purpose is to deliver a Management Plan that will conserve and enhance the natural beauty on behalf of a local partnership reflective of the area.
- 3.35 The funding to employ the core team and some modest project funding is provided through contribution of local authorities.
- 3.36 In addition to the AONB being a statutory designation, the activities that they deliver promote volunteering activities, working with schools to promote health and wellbeing activities, improving the upkeep of the Tamar Trails and delivery against its core 5 year Management Plan.
- 3.37 The work of the AONB directly contributes to our priorities for our built and natural environment within A Plan for West Devon.

World Heritage Site

- 3.38 The final partnership that we have supported in the current funding round has been the World Heritage Site Partnership Board.
- 3.39 The partnership is the Steering Group for the World Heritage Site with Membership comprising Cornwall Council, Devon County Council and West Devon Borough Council – plus the National Trust.

- 3.40 The funding we provide is invested in an annual work programme which is agreed by the three Councils, for projects that deliver the World Heritage Convention Objectives.
- 3.41 The WH Convention Objectives are designed to support local communities to benefit from, and become involved in the management of, their internationally significant heritage assets.
- 3.42 The WHS also liaise with Parish and Town Councils that are drafting Neighbourhood Plans, to enable them to incorporate opportunities arising from the WHS status in the proposals.
- 3.43 WHS activities, such as cultural events and educational activities contribute to vibrant communities in the area, and directly support our ambitions around Supporting and Promoting events in the Borough (SC1.4), Progressing Plans for an Eco museum across West Devon to maximise the assets of the WHS (TE1.4) and Supporting the promotion of Parishes surrounding the WHS (BE1.2)

4. Options available and consideration of risk

- 4.1 The West Devon Borough Council Communities Advisory Group met in February 2022 to consider a number of matters in respect of the Plan for West Devon delivery plan. The delivery Plan includes a specific action in 2022/23 to review partnership funding (Action SC1.1)
- 4.2 During the meeting, a number of options were considered with Member key points from the discussion being
 - a. It is important that we understand the outcomes that are achieved by each partner
 - b. We should acknowledge that the cost of delivering some of the projects may now not reflect the funding awarded in 2019
 - c. While it was acknowledged that a large number of groups also play key roles in supporting the priorities set out in A Plan for West Devon, the Council is not able to provide funding to them all – so we need to be careful to manage expectations in any review of partnership funding.
- 4.3 While the Advisory Group has now decision making authority, the recommendation from the group was that we should look to offer existing partners (as set out in this report), the opportunity to provide a short update to their funding applications and, subject to satisfactory information being provided, provide an extension to the current three year funding term. More in-depth consideration of the options is set out below.

Option 1 – Extend the current round of partnership funding for two years in line with the Council’s Plan for West Devon refresh cycle

- 4.4 As set out in section 3 of this report, all of the key partnerships currently funded are making a significant positive impact on the lives of residents of West Devon. All of them are also aligned to the priorities set out in the Plan for West Devon and

accompanying delivery plans. The next series of delivery plans will be developed during 2023/24 to be implemented in 2024/25.

It is therefore recommended that to ensure our key partner organisations can continue their contributions to A Plan for West Devon, that we offer them the opportunity to complete a short refresh of their previous applications for funding for two years (to 31/03/2025 when the next three year delivery plan commences). This would enable the Council to consider how it wishes to commission partnership support for its future actions within the strategy while providing some longer term financial certainty for these organisations.

Option 2 – Offer partnership funding to only limited groups from the existing partners

4.5 This option would reduce the Councils financial contributions but would mean that support currently provided by any of those organisations would likely need to be reduced or stopped altogether. The full impact of this would need further analysis should it be the chosen option however this is currently not a recommended option given the contribution all of the groups are making to our Plan for West Devon ambitions.

Option 3 – No longer offer partnership funding to any groups

4.6 This option would provide the Council with a saving to its budget from 01/04/2023 of £72,234. However, while an initial saving, the ability of the existing partners to provide services would be significantly impacted by withdrawing funding. This would need a more in-depth analysis and, in all likelihood will lead to a longer term increase in costs as more residents look to the Council for support (for example for help with debt, housing advice etc). This option is therefore not recommended.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 The recommendation is to offer key partners the opportunity to extend their current funding arrangement by two years to 31st March 2025 (Option 1 above)
- 5.2 This extension would require a short application form setting out any significant changes since the last application in 2019.
- 5.3 The completed applications would then be considered by the Hub Committee at its meeting in September 2022.
- 5.4 All key partners would also be scheduled to provide an update to Members at least once a year (either in writing or by attendance at Overview and Scrutiny).

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address

Legal/Governance	Y	The Council has no legal duty to provide financial support to the groups included within this report beyond the term of the current funding arrangement (31/03/2023).
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	Y	This report sets out three options for providing funding to key partner organisations beyond 31/3/2023. Currently, the funding to pay for these costs is included within the Council's Revenue Base Budget for 2022/23.
Consultation & Engagement	Y	Our Key Partners provide regular updates to the Council on their work which includes presentation at Overview and Scrutiny on an annual basis. Should the Key Partner funding be agreed for an extension, we will schedule annual updates for each Key Partner to Overview and Scrutiny and consider wider updates on their work to our communities at that point – for example through joint press releases etc.
Risk	Y	There are a number of risks to consider in deciding the future of partnership funding. Each of the partner organisations plays a key role in contributing to the ambitions of A Plan for West Devon in stopping or reducing funding at this point we will negatively impact the ability to deliver on some of our specific actions within the delivery plan. Further consideration will be set out in the report alongside responses from the partners.
Supporting Corporate Strategy	Y	All
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	N	
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity	N	The key partners detailed in this report support a wide range of residents. Full consideration of E&D impacts will be set out once their updated applications are received
Safeguarding	N	
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder	Y	Some of the key partners are delivering activities that would have a positive contribution on community safety within the Borough.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing	Y	Many of the key partners are delivering activities that have a positive contribution to the Health and Wellbeing of residents.
Other implications	N	

Supporting Information

Appendices:

None

Report to: **Hub Committee**

Date: **7 June 2022**

Title: **Council Tax Rebate Discretionary Scheme**

Portfolio Area: **Council Resources - Cllr Edmonds
Community Wellbeing – Cllr Leach**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:

Author: **Steve Mullineaux** Role: **Director of Customer Service Delivery**

Contact: Steve.mullineaux@swdevon.gov.uk

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Hub Committee:

- (i) Approve the Discretionary Council Tax Rebate policy and scheme.**
- (ii) Endorse the current approach to distributing the main Government's Council Tax rebate for households in Bands A to D.**
- (iii) Note the existing discretionary support schemes the Council operate and recommend increasing the public and voluntary sector awareness of the schemes and support that are available for residents.**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. Supporting our residents as energy, food and fuel prices rise significantly is a key and urgent priority for the Council.
- 1.2. The purpose of this report is to enable the Hub committee to make a decision on the discretionary element of the Government's Council Tax Rebate scheme.
- 1.3. As part of the Government scheme, the Council has been awarded a sum of £110,550 (in addition to the main scheme award of £2,875,350), known as the Discretionary Fund, to support households who are in need but are not eligible for the main £150 Council Tax Rebate scheme.
- 1.4. As of 13 May 2022, the Council has paid 12,917 households out of 13,924 eligible Direct Debit payers, 93% and distributed £1,937,550.

- 1.5. The Council has received 903 applications (out of 4,875 eligible households) from those households that do not pay by direct debit and these will begin being processed for payment from 23 May 2022. The Council will be contacting the remaining households via direct mail within the next few weeks to offer direct payment via local Post Offices.
- 1.6. The policy attached as Appendix A proposes supporting those residents who are working, on low income with limited or no access or financial support from existing benefits and other discretionary schemes but are experiencing hardship due to the increasing cost of energy bills.
- 1.7. This report also explains (in Appendix C) what other discretionary schemes the Council has in place to support residents and updates members on the 2nd tranche of government funding of the Household Support Fund (HSF).

2. Background

- 2.1. The Government recognises that many households will need support to deal with the rising cost of household bills in 2022-23 driven by increasing energy bills. While these rising costs will affect most households across the country, they are more likely to disproportionately affect those on lower incomes, who tend to spend a higher proportion of their income on utility bills.
- 2.2. As part of this targeted response to rising energy bills, households liable for Council Tax in Bands A – D, along with those in Band E who receive a disabled band relief, will be eligible for a non-repayable £150 Council Tax rebate. The household must occupy the property, so this £150 rebate is not available to second homes or empty property.
- 2.3. Alongside the £150 Council Tax rebate, the Government has also provided local authorities with an additional sum for a discretionary scheme that can be used to top up payments, or for those in need that do not meet the eligibility for the main scheme.
- 2.4. The Government is providing the grant funding for both the main council tax rebate (£150) scheme and the discretionary scheme. The Council will receive £2,875,350 for the main scheme, which has to be administered and paid out by 30 September 2022. The amount of Government funding received will be the same as the actual amount paid out by 30 September. The Council will also receive £110,550 for the discretionary scheme which is a set amount and this will not be increased. Any discretionary funding not paid out by 30 November 2022 will have to be repaid to the Government.
- 2.5. Within the West Devon area, we currently have 18,799 properties in Bands A – D that currently appear as if they may be eligible for the £150 council tax rebate. Of this number, 13,924 (approx. 74%) currently have a Direct Debit set up to pay their Council Tax, whereas 4,875 (approx. 26%) do not.
- 2.6. When the £150 Rebate was first announced, the Government required the Council to provide residents with a national leaflet within their annual Council Tax bill for 2022/23. We also enclosed our own leaflet giving more detail, and how to apply locally.
- 2.7. We have purchased from our Revenue and Benefits software supplier additional modules to the software to allow us to identify residents paying

their Council Tax payers by Direct Debit who may be eligible for the £150 rebate payment, and to make the payment to them easier.

2.8. The Council has set up an online application form for those residents who are eligible for the £150 payment but do not pay by Direct Debit. For those who do not have the ability to apply online, the Customer Services Team are happy to help the resident complete their application over the telephone.

2.9. As of 13 May 2022, the Council has paid 12,917 households out of 13,924 eligible Direct Debit payers, 93% and distributed £1,937,550.

2.10. The Council has received 903 applications (out of 4,875 eligible households) from those households that do not pay by direct debit and these will begin being processed for payment from 23 May 2022. The Council will be contacting the remaining households via direct mail within the next few weeks to offer direct payment via local Post Offices. This will enable eligible residents (the Council Tax liable party) to present the letter they have received with associated identification and the Post Office will offer payment via cash, into a bank account or directly against an energy bill.

2.11. Any eligible households that have not claimed the rebate by the end of August 2022 will have the £150 credited against their Council Tax account.

3. Proposed CTAX rebate discretionary policy

3.1. The purpose of the policy is to determine eligibility for payment under the Council's Discretionary Council Tax Rebate scheme.

3.2. The scheme has been designed based on general guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 3rd February 2022. However it is separate to the mandatory Council Tax Rebate scheme which is largely determined by Government.

3.3. The scheme is aimed at supporting those residents that are working, on low income and have limited or no access to benefits. This makes it difficult to quantify the number of residents that will apply. We intend to spend all of the allocated monies on struggling residents, therefore we intend to make the payments in two phases. Phase one will:

3.3.1. Award a one-off payment of £150 to any household who reside in a property dwelling with a Council Tax band E-H and who are currently in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. There are currently 117 claims which would result in awards totalling £17,550.

3.3.2. Award a one-off payment of £150 to any household who resides in a dwelling and where the owner is liable for Council Tax under the Council Tax (Liability for Owners) Regulations 1992, but where the household are directly liable for energy bills. This could include people living in a house of multiple occupation or someone under the age of 18 etc.

3.3.3. Award a one-off payment of £150 to households who reside in a dwelling with a Council Tax band E-H and who are not in receipt of Council Tax Reduction but have capital of no more than £6,000 and a weekly net income less than the following:

- £250 for a single person
- £320 for a couple
- £400 for a family (lone parent or couple) with one dependent child
- £500 for a family (lone parent or couple) with more than one dependent child

3.4. The criteria for Phase two will be reviewed in July 2022 once we know how many claims we have paid out in 3.3.1 to 3.3.3.

4. Additional Financial Support Schemes.

4.1. The Council supports residents and households in financial difficulty or in need of additional financial support and in 2022/23 has over £3,042,000 of available funds through the following schemes;

- £2,835,146 through Council Tax Support (or Council Tax Reduction)
- £126,207 through Discretionary Housing Payments
- £81,000 through Exceptional Hardship Fund
- £172,292 through Household Support Fund

4.2. The schemes are detailed in Appendix C.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1. The Hub committee approves the discretionary policy set out in Appendix A.

5.2. That the Hub committee receive a further report in September 2022 that will;

- Update members on the number of households that have received additional financial support through phase one of the discretionary scheme and;
- Set out recommendations for phase two

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	The main criteria for the £150 Council Tax Rebate scheme is set out in Government guidance and this cannot be varied locally. The discretionary element however is a matter for the Hub committee as it not part of the Policy Framework or otherwise reserved to full Council.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	Y	The Government are providing the grant funding for both the main council tax rebate (£150) scheme and the discretionary scheme. The Council will receive £2,875,350 for the main scheme, which has to be administered and paid out by 30 September 2022. The amount of Government funding received will be the same as the actual amount paid out by 30 September.

		The Council will also receive £110,550 for the discretionary scheme which is a set amount and this will not be increased. Any discretionary funding not paid out by 30 November 2022 will have to be repaid to the Government.
Risk	N	
Supporting Corporate Strategy	Y	Council Resources; ensuring that we make the best use of the budget available to us to ensure value for money whilst paying people quickly and efficiently. Community Wellbeing; supporting residents that are financially vulnerable.
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	N	No direct carbon or diversity impacts arise from this report
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		None
Safeguarding		None
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		None
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		None
Other implications		None

Supporting Information

Appendices:

Appendix A – Discretionary policy for the Council Tax Rebate

Appendix B – Mandatory scheme for the Council Tax Rebate

Appendix C – West Devon Borough Council additional financial support schemes

Background Papers:

None

This page is intentionally left blank



West Devon Borough Council Discretionary Council Tax Rebate Scheme 2022-23

Contents

Definitions	3
1.0 Purpose of the scheme and background.	4
2.0 Funding	4
3.0 Eligibility criteria and awards.....	4
Effective date for Phase 1	5
Alterations to liability or the Council Tax Band.....	5
Eligibility Disputes	5
4.0 How the Council Tax Rebate will be paid	6
Direct Debit payers	6
Where the Council does not hold current a direct debit instruction for an eligible household ..	6
5.0 Provision of information to the Council	7
6.0 Scheme of Delegation.....	7
7.0 Notification of Decisions.....	7
8.0 Taxation and the provision of information to Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC)	7
9.0 Managing the risk of fraud	7
10.0 Recovery of amounts incorrectly paid	7
11.0 Data Protection and use of data	8

Definitions

The following definitions are used within this document:

‘Chargeable Dwelling’; means any dwelling that appears on the Council’s Council Tax Valuation List on 1 April 2022;

‘Council Tax Exemption or Exempt Dwelling’; means any chargeable dwelling which is determined by the Council as exempt from Council Tax as prescribed by the Council Tax (Exempt Dwellings) Order 1992 as amended;

‘Council Tax Rebate Scheme or Mandatory Scheme’; means the scheme announced by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 3 February 2022 as part of a package of support for rising energy costs;

‘Council Tax Payer or Liable Person’ means the liable person determined by the Council as being responsible for Council Tax under section 6 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992;

‘Council Tax Reduction (or Support)’ means any entitlement awarded under section 13A 1(A) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992;

‘Discretionary Scheme or Fund’; means the scheme determined by the Council in line with the guidance issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced on 3 February 2022;

‘Effective Date’ ; means the effective date of this scheme. The effective date shall be the situation as at the end of the day on 1 April 2022

‘Empty Dwelling (or premises)’ means any dwelling that is not deemed to be the sole or main residence of a person and are substantially unfurnished;

‘Liability for Owner’; means any dwelling determined to fall within the Council Tax (Liability for Owners) Regulations 1992, for example, House in Multiple Occupation or Residential Care homes;

‘Mandatory Scheme’; means the scheme determined by Government in line with the guidance issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced on 3 February 2022;

‘Second Home’ means any dwelling not deemed to be the sole or main residence of the liable person and which is furnished as defined by the Council Tax (Prescribed Class of Dwellings) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended; and

‘Sole or main residence’ means the dwelling determined by the Council to be the sole or main residence of a person.

1.0 Purpose of the scheme and background.

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to determine eligibility for a payment under the Council's Discretionary Council Tax Rebate scheme (the 'Discretionary Scheme').
- 1.2 The scheme has been designed based on general guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 3rd February 2022. However, it is separate to the mandatory Council Tax Rebate scheme which is largely determined by Government
- 1.3 The Council's Discretionary Scheme is part of a package of support for households in respect of rising energy costs.
- 1.4 Government has determined that Councils can decide locally how best to make use of the discretionary funding to provide payments to other households who are energy bill payers but not covered by the mandatory Council Tax Rebate. However, Government has stated that occupants of class M (student halls) are unlikely to be eligible for discretionary support, unless they are exposed to rising energy prices in a similar way to other households and discretionary support should **not** be offered to occupants of property in exemption class O, where the Ministry of Defence will provide cost of living support.

2.0 Funding

- 2.1 Government has provided funding to the Council; however, all payments will have to be made prior to the 30 November 2022 which is the deadline for this scheme.

3.0 Eligibility criteria and awards

- 3.1 The Council has decided that payments will be made in two phases, the first phase to be commenced immediately and the second phase will be commenced at the expiry of phase 1 provided funds are available.

Phase 1

- 3.2 The Council has decided that the payments in Phase 1 will be provided to households who have their sole or main residence in a dwelling and the following conditions are met:
- (a) A single one-off payment of £150 will be awarded to any household who resides in a dwelling with a Council Tax band E to H **and** who are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction;
- (b) A single one-off payment of £150 will be awarded to any household who resides in a dwelling with a Council Tax band E to H **and** who are not in receipt of Council Tax Reduction but have capital of no more than £6,000 and a weekly net income less than the following :
- £250 for a single person;
 - £320 for a couple;
 - £400 for a family (lone parent or couple) with one dependant child; or
 - £500 for a family (lone parent or couple) with more than one dependent child; and

- (c) A single one-off payment of £150 will be awarded to any household who resides in a dwelling and where the owner is liable for the Council Tax under the Council Tax (Liability for Owners) Regulations 1992 **but** where the household are directly liable for energy bills. For the sake of clarity, this category will be for household who are in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) where the tenant is responsible for energy bills.

3.3 In the case of 3.1(b), in calculating the amount of capital and net that a household possesses, the Council will use the rules as defined by the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006.

3.4 For the purpose of the discretionary scheme, a household is a person or group of persons occupying a single dwelling, as defined in section 3 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. No award will be made for any unoccupied premises or second homes.

Phase 2

3.5 The criteria for Phase 2 will be announced by the Council in July 2022 subject to funds being available. Details will be provided on the Council's website.

Effective date for Phase 1

3.6 The effective date for this scheme is 1 April 2022. The Council will determine eligibility based on the position at the end of that day.

Alterations to liability or the Council Tax Band

3.7 Where the Council has reason to believe that the information they hold about the valuation list, liable taxpayer(s) or residents' circumstances in respect of 1 April 2022 is inaccurate, it will withhold the payment and take reasonable steps to determine the correct information.

3.8 Where records relating to the liable taxpayer(s) or the residents' circumstances in respect of 1 April 2022 are retrospectively updated, the Council will take reasonable steps to either pay the discretionary award or potentially reclaim any payment made.

3.9 In any case, where the Council Tax band of the chargeable dwelling is amended retrospectively after 1 April 2022, for example where a successful appeal is made to the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) that concluded after this date, the Council is not required either to pay any discretionary award or to reclaim any payment made.

Eligibility Disputes

3.10 The decision of the Council on any eligibility matter will be final. Should any tax payer feel aggrieved by any decision, then matters will be dealt with through the Council's complaints procedure. Full details are available on the Council's website.

4.0 How the Council Tax Rebate will be paid

- 4.1 Where the Council determines that all of the eligibility criteria are met in full, payment will be made to the household as defined within section 3 above. It should be noted that **only one discretionary payment** will be made per household, regardless of the number of occupants or liable Council Taxpayers.

Direct Debit payers

- 4.2 Where the Council holds a current direct debit instruction for a liable Council Taxpayer of an eligible household, payment will be made using the bank account details held. Payments will be made as soon as practicable.
- 4.3 The Council is required to verify that the bank details held are those of the eligible household and where multiple residents of an eligible household are jointly and severally liable for Council Tax, the full payment will be made to the account for which the direct debit is held only. Payment of the award, however, is for the benefit of the household as a whole.
- 4.4 No payment will be made where the name on the bank details does not match a liable party. Should the Council require additional information in order to establish the correct person to receive the payment, it is expected that the household provides all necessary details as soon as possible. Further details of how this request will be made and responsibilities to supply such information are detailed below.
- 4.5 It should be noted that the award will be paid on the assumption that the person receiving the payment is the liable Council Taxpayer (or would have been if the property were not exempt) and that the property meets the criteria on 1 April 2022 as defined with section 3 above.

Where the Council does not hold current a direct debit instruction for an eligible household

- 4.6 Where the Council does not hold a current direct debit instruction for an eligible household, it will make reasonable efforts to contact the household and obtain the necessary bank details.
- 4.7 Where the Council is unsuccessful in contacting the household but where it is of the opinion that the household meets the eligibility criteria, the discretionary award will be credited to the Council Tax account.
- 4.8 In all cases, the Council must ensure that payments are made correctly and where appropriate, require households to verify that that they are eligible for the payment. Where no such verification can be made or where a household fails to respond to the Council's request, no payment whatsoever shall be made.

5.0 Provision of information to the Council

- 5.1 Residents, owners and managing agents should note that the Council has powers available to it under Regulation 3 (1) (c) of the Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1992, to request such information to determine the correct liable person for Council Tax purposes. Government has stated that these powers may also be used for Council Tax Rebate purposes.
- 5.2 Failure to respond to such a request, without a reasonable excuse, within 21 days could lead to penalties being imposed. The Council therefore encourages all such persons to provide any requested information as soon as possible.

6.0 Scheme of Delegation

- 6.1 The Council has approved this scheme. The Council's Section 151 Officer is authorised to make technical policy amendments to ensure the scheme meets the criteria set by the Government and the Council.

7.0 Notification of Decisions

- 7.1 All Council Tax Rebate payments shall be made by the Revenues and Benefits Service.
- 7.2 All decisions made shall be notified to the liable person either in writing or by email.

8.0 Taxation and the provision of information to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

- 8.1 The Council does not accept any responsibility in relation to a taxpayer's HMRC tax liabilities and all taxpayers should make their own enquiries to establish any tax position.

9.0 Managing the risk of fraud

- 9.1 The Council will not accept deliberate manipulation of this policy or fraud. Any person caught falsifying information to gain a discretionary payment will face prosecution and any amount awarded will be recovered from them.

10.0 Recovery of amounts incorrectly paid

- 10.1 If it is established that **any** payment has been made incorrectly due to error, misrepresentation or incorrect information provided to the Council by a taxpayer or any other person, the Council will look to recover the amount in full.

11.0 Data Protection and use of data

- 11.1 All information and data provided by applicants shall be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Data Protection policy and Privacy Notices which are available on the Council's website.



West Devon Borough Council Council Tax Rebate Scheme 2022-23

Contents

Definitions	3
1.0 Purpose of the scheme and background.	4
2.0 Funding	4
3.0 Eligibility criteria	4
Effective date	5
Alterations to liability or the Council Tax Band	5
Eligibility Disputes	5
4.0 How the Council Tax Rebate will be paid	6
Direct Debit payers	6
Where the Council does not hold current a direct debit instruction for an eligible household ..	6
5.0 Provision of information to the Council.....	7
6.0 Scheme of Delegation.....	7
7.0 Notification of Decisions.....	7
8.0 Reviews of Decisions	7
9.0 Taxation and the provision of information to Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC)	8
10.0 Managing the risk of fraud	8
11.0 Recovery of amounts incorrectly paid	8
12.0 Data Protection and use of data.....	8

Definitions

The following definitions are used within this document:

‘Chargeable Dwelling’; means any dwelling that appears on the Council’s Council Tax Valuation List on 1 April 2022;

‘Council Tax Exemption or Exempt Dwelling’; means any chargeable dwelling which is determined by the Council as exempt from Council Tax as prescribed by the Council Tax (Exempt Dwellings) Order 1992 as amended;

‘Council Tax Rebate Scheme or Mandatory Scheme’; means the scheme announced by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 3 February 2022 as part of a package of support for rising energy costs;

‘Council Tax Payer or Liable Person’ means the liable person determined by the Council as being responsible for Council Tax under section 6 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992;

‘Council Tax Reduction (or Support)’ means any entitlement awarded under section 13A 1(A) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992;

‘Discretionary Scheme’; means the scheme determined by the Council in line with the guidance issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced on 3 February 2022;

‘Effective Date ; means the effective date of this scheme. The effective date shall be the situation as at the end of the day on 1 April 2022

‘Empty Dwelling (or premises)’ means any dwelling that is not deemed to be the sole or main residence of a person and are substantially unfurnished;

‘Liability for Owner’; means any dwelling determined to fall within the Council Tax (Liability for Owners) Regulations 1992, for example, House in Multiple Occupation or Residential Care homes;

‘Second Home’ means any dwelling not deemed to be the sole or main residence of the liable person and which is furnished as defined by the Council Tax (Prescribed Class of Dwellings) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended; and

‘Sole or main residence’ means the dwelling determined by the Council to be the sole or main residence of a person.

1.0 Purpose of the scheme and background.

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to determine eligibility for a Council Tax Rebate under the mandatory scheme as set out by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 3rd February 2022. This scheme together with the Council's associated Discretionary Fund are part of a package of support for households in respect of rising energy costs.
- 1.2 The Government has also issued statements on a discount on electricity bills to be paid later in the Autumn. It should be noted that this is not part of the responsibility of local authorities and is separate from the Council Tax Rebate Scheme.
- 1.3 The Council Tax Rebate Scheme is effectively in two parts, the mandatory scheme which is covered within this policy and which is largely determined by Central Government, and the Discretionary scheme which forms parts of a separate policy which has been agreed by the Council.
- 1.4 This Council Tax Rebate Scheme is designed to provide single one-off grant of £150 to all eligible households who meet the criteria shown within Section 3.

2.0 Funding

- 2.1 Government has provided funding to the Council; however, all payments will have to be made prior to the 30 September 2022 which is the deadline for this scheme.

3.0 Eligibility criteria

- 3.1 To provide some immediate relief to households experiencing rising energy costs, while targeting those most likely to require support, Government expects the Council to provide a £150 one-off payment to a liable Council Tax payer (or a person who would otherwise be liable where the dwelling is exempt) for every household that occupies a property which meets all of the following criteria on 1 April 2022:
 - (a) The chargeable dwelling is valued in Council Tax bands A to D. This includes property that is valued in band E but has an alternative valuation band of band D, as a result of the disabled band reduction scheme (Reduction for disabilities);
 - (b) It is someone's sole or main residence; or
 - (c) is a chargeable dwelling which receives an exemption under classes N (other than HMOs for council tax purposes), S, U or W.
- 3.2 The above list is not exhaustive and the Council will use its judgement in consideration of the aims of the scheme, which is to support households with domestic energy costs.
- 3.3 The scheme will **not** cover any premises which are armed forces accommodation. The Ministry of Defence will be in touch with residents in those premises that are currently exempt under Class O.

- 3.4 For the sake of clarity, a property that meets all the criteria but has a nil Council Tax liability as a result of Council Tax Reduction will be eligible. However, a premises which is no one's sole or main residence, a second home or an unoccupied premises will not be eligible.
- 3.5 For the purpose of the Council Tax Rebate scheme, a household is a person or group of persons occupying a single dwelling, as defined in section 3 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Effective date

- 3.6 The effective date for this scheme is 1 April 2022. The Council will determine eligibility based on the position at the end of that day.

Alterations to liability or the Council Tax Band

- 3.7 Where the Council has reason to believe that the information they hold about the valuation list, liable taxpayer(s) or residents' circumstances in respect of 1 April 2022 is inaccurate, it will withhold the payment and take reasonable steps to determine the correct information.
- 3.8 Where records relating to the liable taxpayer(s) or the residents' circumstances in respect of 1 April 2022 are retrospectively updated, the Councils will take reasonable steps to either pay the Council Tax Rebate or potentially reclaim any payment made.
- 3.9 In any case, where the Council Tax band of the chargeable dwelling is amended retrospectively after 1 April 2022, for example where a successful appeal is made to the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) that concluded after this date, the Council is not required either to pay any Council Tax Rebate or to reclaim any payment made.
- 3.10 The Council will however make an exception where a property is a new build and awaiting an official banding from the VOA. In these cases, eligibility will be determined based on the official band subsequently allocated by the VOA, where this has an effective date before or on 1 April 2022.
- 3.11 Where a review, proposal, or appeal pre-dating the Government's announcement of the scheme on 3 February 2022 is successful after 1 April 2022 and, as a result, a property would have been eligible for the Council Tax Rebate, the Council *may* accept applications under its discretionary scheme.

Eligibility Disputes

- 3.12 Government has stated that it is for the Council to determine eligibility for the Council Tax Rebate and, as such, the decision of the Council in this matter will be final. Should any taxpayer feel aggrieved by any decision, then matters will be dealt with through the Council's complaints procedure. Full details are available on the Council's website.

4.0 How the Council Tax Rebate will be paid

- 4.1 Where the Council determines that all of the eligibility criteria are met in full, a single one-off payment of £150 will be made to the household. It should be noted that **only one payment** will be made per household, regardless of the number of occupants or liable Council Taxpayers.
- 4.2 Government has stated that only one mandatory payment should be made to a household and therefore if, for whatever reason a household receives more than one payment (for example if they move to another Council area), then the payment will be reclaimed.

Direct Debit payers

- 4.3 Where the Council holds a current direct debit instruction for a liable Council Taxpayer of an eligible household, payment will be made using the bank account details held. Payments will be made as soon as practicable.
- 4.4 The Council is required to verify that the bank details held are those of the eligible household and where multiple residents of an eligible household are jointly and severally liable for Council Tax, the full payment will be made to the account for which the direct debit is held only. Payment of the rebate, however, is for the benefit of the household as a whole.
- 4.5 No payment will be made where the name on the bank details does not match a liable party. Should the Council require additional information in order to establish the correct person to receive the payment, it is expected that the household provides all necessary details as soon as possible. Further details of how this request will be made and responsibilities to supply such information are detailed below.
- 4.6 It should be noted that the rebate will be paid on the assumption that the person receiving the payment is the liable Council Taxpayer (or would have been if the property were not exempt) and that the property meets the criteria on 1 April 2022 as defined with section 3 above.

Where the Council does not hold current a direct debit instruction for an eligible household

- 4.7 Where the Council does not hold a current direct debit instruction for an eligible household, it will make reasonable efforts to contact the household and obtain the necessary bank details.
- 4.8 Where the Council is unsuccessful in contacting the household but where it is of the opinion that the household meets the eligibility criteria, the Council Tax Rebate will be credited to the Council Tax account.

- 4.9 In all cases, the Council must ensure that payments are made correctly and where appropriate, require households to verify that that they are eligible for the payment. Where no such verification can be made or where a household fails to respond to the Council's request, no payment whatsoever shall be made.

5.0 Provision of information to the Council

- 5.1 Residents, owners and managing agents should note that the Council has powers available to it under Regulation 3 (1) (c) of the Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1992, to request such information to determine the correct liable person for Council Tax purposes. Government has stated that these powers may also be used for Council Tax Rebate purposes.
- 5.2 Failure to respond to such a request, without a reasonable excuse, within 21 days could lead to penalties being imposed. The Council therefore encourages all such persons to provide any requested information as soon as possible.

6.0 Scheme of Delegation

- 6.1 The Council has approved this scheme. The Council's Section 151 Officer is authorised to make technical policy amendments to ensure the scheme meets the criteria set by the Government and the Council.

7.0 Notification of Decisions

- 7.1 All Council Tax Rebate payments shall be made by the Revenues and Benefits Service.
- 7.2 All decisions made shall be notified to the liable person either in writing or by email.

8.0 Reviews of Decisions

- 8.1 The Council will operate an internal review process and will accept a taxpayer's request for a review of its decision.
- 8.2 All such requests must be made in writing to the Council and should state the reasons why the taxpayer is aggrieved with the decision of the Council. New information may be submitted at this stage to support the taxpayer's review
- 8.3 The case will be reconsidered by a senior officer as soon as practicable, and the taxpayer informed in writing or by email of the decision. That decision shall be final.

9.0 Taxation and the provision of information to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

9.1 The Council does not accept any responsibility in relation to a taxpayer's HMRC tax liabilities and all taxpayers should make their own enquiries to establish any tax position.

10.0 Managing the risk of fraud

10.1 The Council will not accept deliberate manipulation of this policy or fraud. Any person caught falsifying information to gain a Council Tax Rebate will face prosecution and any amount awarded will be recovered from them.

11.0 Recovery of amounts incorrectly paid

11.1 If it is established that **any** Council Tax Rebate has been made incorrectly due to error, misrepresentation or incorrect information provided to the Council by a taxpayer or any other person, the Council will look to recover the amount in full.

12.0 Data Protection and use of data

12.1 All information and data provided by applicants shall be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Data Protection policy and Privacy Notices which are available on the Council's website.

Appendix C

West Devon Borough Council - Additional Financial Support Schemes

1. Existing Council Tax Support Scheme

- 1.1. Council Tax Reduction (CTR also known as Council Tax Support CTS) was introduced in 2013 and replaced the national Council Tax Benefit Scheme. The CTR scheme for working-age residents is a local scheme that has been designed to support people back into work.
- 1.2. Residents can apply for CTR by completing a claim form on-line. For those in receipt of Universal Credit we automatically receive notification of their award direct from the DWP. We accept this as their claim form and apply CTR accordingly. For those customers that don't have access to the internet, Customer Services will complete an on-line form with them over the phone.
- 1.3. It should be noted that the scheme for pensioners is, still a national scheme prescribed by regulations and cannot be varied locally.
- 1.4. To date we have 1,849 working age claims in payment with a cost of £1,943,034 and 1,436 pensioner claims with a cost of £895,112.

2. Existing Discretionary Schemes

- 2.1. The Council currently administers two other discretionary schemes to assist those suffering hardship, and we are in the process of setting up a further scheme for the second round of the Governments Household Support Fund (HSF) The schemes are detailed below.

2.2. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

- 2.2.1. For the financial year 2022/23 we have been awarded £126,207 this will be further increased in October 2022 but as yet we don't know by how much. This fund is to assist those that are in receipt of Housing Benefit or the Housing Element within Universal Credit. It is mainly used to assist those that are struggling with the shortfall between their rent and housing benefit, for rent in advance, rent deposits and rent arrears etc. The main criterion for this fund is that you have to be in receipt of housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit to qualify for any assistance.

2.3. Exceptional Hardship Fund (EHF)

- 2.3.1. For the financial year 2022/23, we have £19,000 in the fund. This fund is available to assist residents who are in receipt of CTR and facing exceptional hardship. The fund provides further assistance where the resident is in receipt of CTR but the level of support being paid does not meet their full Council Tax liability.
- 2.4. To make a claim from either of the above funds claimants generally have to complete an on-line claim form, the form includes a section on income and expenditure, this detail enables Officers to gauge how much financial hardship the claimant is suffering and therefore allows them to make the decision on how much they need to award. In certain circumstances, the Officer may feel the need to refer the claimant to Homemaker for further financial or budgeting assistance.
- 2.5. The fund is also used to make direct awards following recommendations from the Job Centre and the Housing.

Appendix C

West Devon Borough Council - Additional Financial Support Schemes

- 2.6. DCLG Council Tax Funding - in 2021 DCLG awarded the Council £102,868 as an additional Hardship Fund to meet the additional costs of the Council Tax Reduction scheme due to the additional caseload resulting from increased unemployment.
- 2.7. The Council allocated this funding to the existing EHF fund to award additional help to those most in need. At the end of 2021/22 the Council still has £62k in the fund, this is being carried forward into this new financial year to assist more people in arrears.

3. Household Support Fund

3.1. On 23rd March 2022, the Government announced in the spring statement that the household support fund would be extended from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. As previously, the fund was made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need. DCC is to receive funding of £5,064,876.12. At least one third of the funding must be spent on families with children and at least one third must be spent on pensioners. The extension of the fund should be used in a similar way to the original fund but greater emphasis should be put on supporting households with energy bills, although food and water bills also remain priorities.

3.2. Household Support Fund – First Scheme (2021/22).

3.2.1. The first scheme funding was split two ways, 50% had to be spent on families with children and 50% could be spent on anyone else. The families with children element was covered by Devon County Council (DCC). We received £91,747.70 this figure includes 10% administration costs. The funding was used to assist anyone that required assistance with;

- essential repairs or replacement white goods
- increased energy bills
- meter top-ups
- water bills
- warm clothing or duvets
- food

3.3. The Scheme for 2022/23

3.3.1. The second scheme is slightly different to the first one, the DWP have split the fund into three,

- 33% to families with children
- 33% to Pensioners
- 33% to everyone else.

3.3.2. Like the first scheme, Devon County Council will fund the cost of free school meals holiday vouchers out of the 33% for families with children at a cost of £1.7m.

3.3.3. Team Devon has agreed that all authorities will make a payment of £90 to all pensioners that are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. For West Devon we would receive £129,510 to distribute to 1439 claimants.

3.3.4. Once these payments have been made we will receive a further award of £42,782.76 to use at the Council's discretion as per the first scheme.

Report to: **Hub Committee**

Date: **7th June 2022**

Title: **Contact Centre Service Review Update**

Portfolio Area: **Maximising Resources – Cllr Cheadle & Cllr Edmonds**

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:

Author: **Dale Cropper** Role: **Head of Operations and Support Services**

Contact **dale.cropper@swdevon.gov.uk**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee:

- 1. Endorse the approach taken with the Contact Centre review, and the subsequent and ongoing Improvement Plan.**
- 2. To recognise the performance of the Contact Centre and how in recent months total calls answered, and calls answered within 5 minutes has improved.**
- 3. To note the timescales of the Contact Centre Improvement Plan as set out in Appendix A, with a further update on progress in six months' time recommended to be brought to the committee.**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the service review that was undertaken across the Contact Centre. This review covers both West Devon and South Hams as the Contact Centre is a shared resource.
- 1.2 Within the Council's A Plan for West Devon strategy, "Maximising resources" is a key theme and the purpose of the review is to improve this vitally important front facing service. It is important that we make contacting our Council as easy as possible, with clearly defined access options and in the most efficient way, whilst supporting those who can to access our services online.
- 1.3. The scope of the Contact Centre Service Review has been:

- To review the overall aim of the Contact Centre and its purpose.
- To ensure that we are delivering an effective and efficient service that meets the needs of the council and its customers.
- Ensuring emphasis on supporting operational delivery to achieve the Council's wider strategic priorities.
- To be transparent to our customers about what they can expect when they contact us.
- To consider service design changes to improve performance and the customer experience.
- Consider, consult and implement policy changes to support delivery as necessary.
- To support the formulation and implementation of the customer access strategy to support the above, including considering the best methods for consulting on service change and engagement.

1.4. As part of the review it was identified that there are some key operational areas which need development:

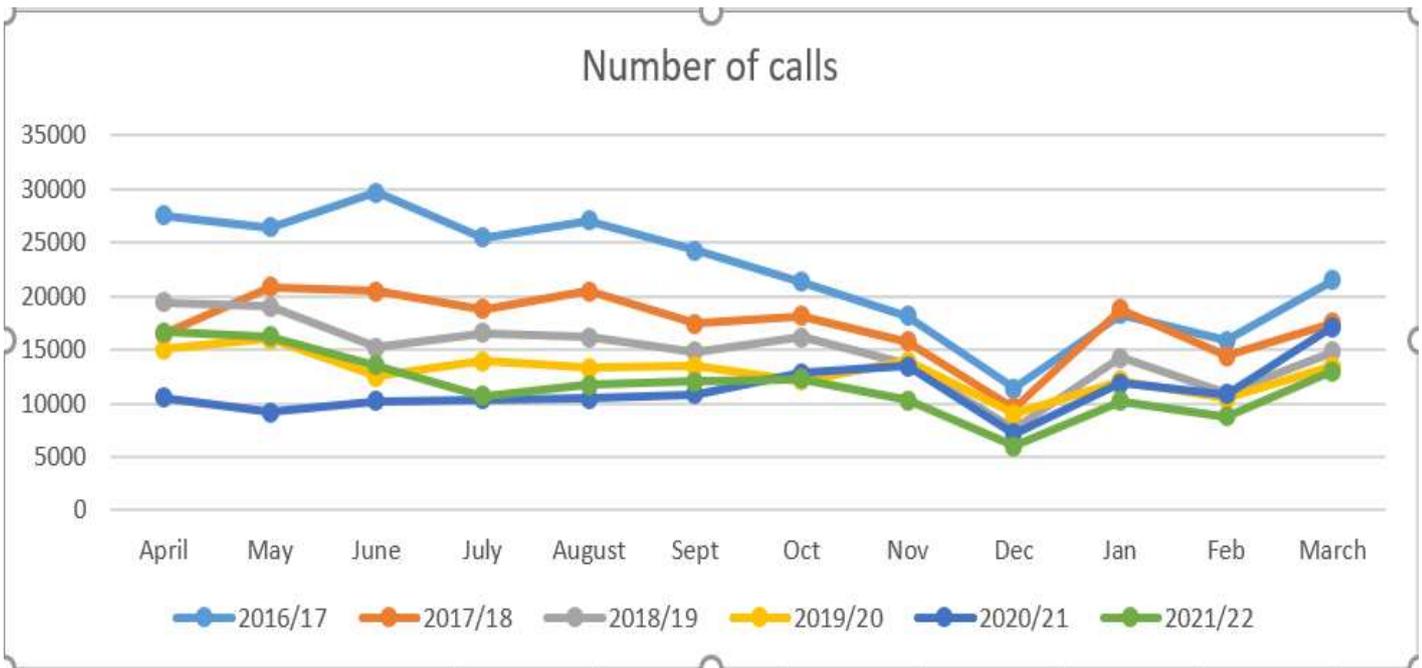
- The opportunity to increase training and coaching for Contact Centre staff so customers get the best opportunity of first point resolution.
- How we can flex resource when needed from the wider teams to support call taking in busy times to allow a more flexible use of resource.
- The increased complexity of calls coming through as a result of "simpler" activities being carried out online – increasing the average call time.
- The planned reopening of reception with a staff force reduced from pre pandemic levels due to reallocation of staff.

2. Background

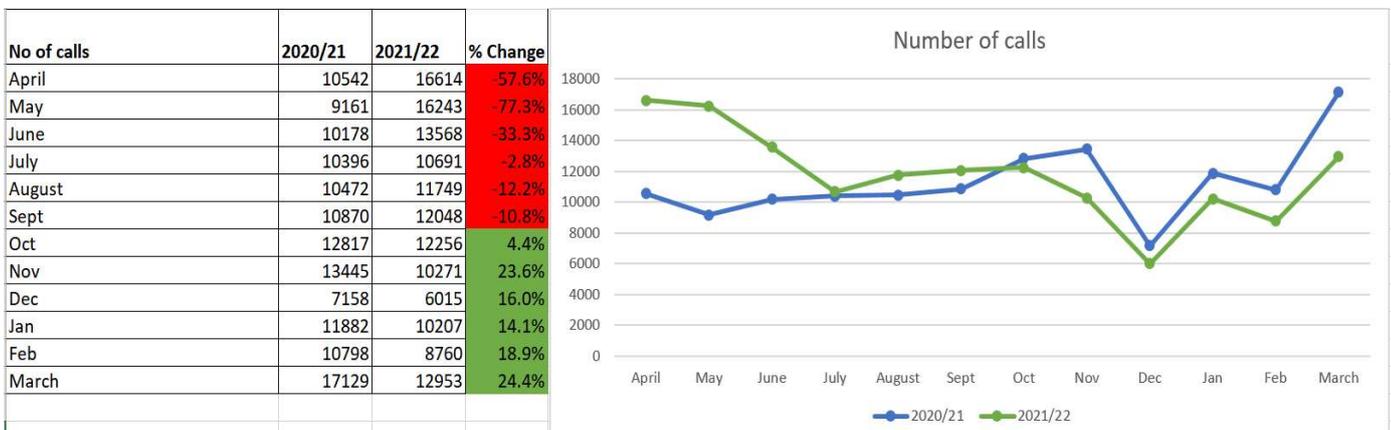
- 2.1 The Contact Centre take calls for most departments in the Council. They also directly manage and answer social media enquiries and web chats. Service requirements for all these lines vary in terms of how much detail and input is required.
- 2.2 The Contact Centre aims to answer 80% of calls within 5 minutes but this has not been delivered consistently.
- 2.3 Currently the call centre is fully staffed with 10.5 full time equivalents (there are 17 staff in total, many of whom are part time). There are currently 6 vacant posts in the establishment which are currently being filled by agency staff.
- 2.4 For South Hams the budget for this is £306,700 and for West Devon £158,300. The Contact Centre operates as a shared service so calls volumes can be influenced separately by both Councils.
- 2.5 Queue buster is available on all lines to reduce call abandon rates and to offer greater flexibility to our customers. This allows the customer the option to leave their details and be called back rather than wait in a queue. 184 customers used this March and 94% customers then answered when the system called them back.

- 2.6 For the last two years reception has been closed through the pandemic and the majority of the staff who managed this have been redeployed to other areas to support other areas of work.
- 2.7 A review was requested of the Contact Centre in November 21 namely to assess its performance, and ability to meet customer needs and look at how we could improve this moving forward.
- 2.8 Graph 1 below demonstrates the ongoing trend of reducing calls as seen over the last 5 years as people use alternative channels is visible below in green.

Graph 1



- 2.9 Performance continues to be challenging in the Contact Centre (set against the background of resourcing levels). The table and graph below shows the impacts of Covid and Business Grants caused large call volumes however, call volumes have reduced in the last 6 months comparative to last year also show as a % decrease in green.



2.10 The reason for the comparative reduction in calls is likely as a result of:

- The reduction in calls for business grants following the pandemic.
- A reduction in South Hams Waste calls following suspension of Garden Waste.

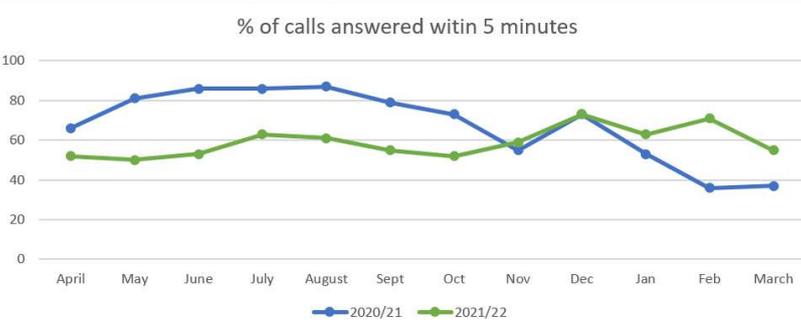
2.11 The reduction in calls has led to an increase in the % of the total calls answered compared to last year.

% Calls answered	2020/21	2021/22	% Change
April	83	64	-22
May	90	64	-28
June	92	71	-22
July	89	80	-10
August	90	75	-16
Sept	85	70	-17
Oct	82	65	-20
Nov	68	76	12
Dec	84	87	4
Jan	63	78	23
Feb	64	83	29
March	58	71	22



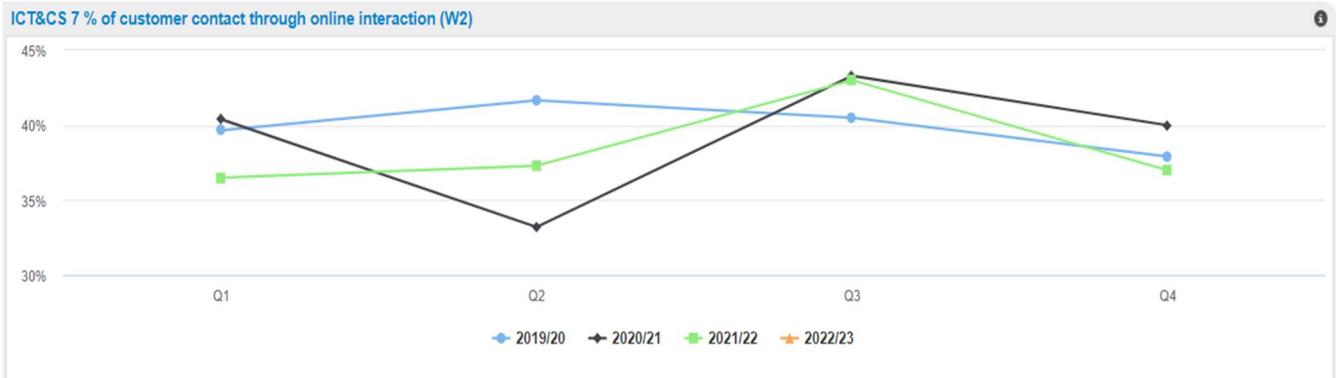
2.12 The reduction in calls has also supported the work we are doing in increasing of the % of calls answered within 5 minutes in the last five months compared to last year. Again the last five months have seen more calls answered within 5 minutes compared to last year.

% of calls ans within 5 minutes	2020/21	2021/22	Increase/Decrease
April	66	52	14
May	81	50	31
June	86	53	33
July	86	63	23
August	87	61	26
Sept	79	55	24
Oct	73	52	21
Nov	55	59	4
Dec	73	73	0
Jan	53	63	10
Feb	36	71	35
March	37	55	18



2.13 Moving forward we would expect call volumes to continue to follow the downward trend we have seen in recent months (and years) as the Council continues to improve its online services and more residents use this contact method.

2.14 Average handling time for calls and the average wrap time for calls (time spent after a call making notes and updating systems) have increased over the last 12 months demonstrating that the complexity of the calls being delivered is now higher. In essence more and more residents will go online if they can, but when they do ring us it is because it's a more complicated issue that they need support with.



- 2.15 The graph above shows how year on year we are seeing how much customer contact through online interaction is increasing, in line with calls reducing. The last quarter is skewed slightly due to the increased number of Council tax calls.
- 2.16 As part of the review, 9 key areas were identified as areas to be improved made up of 34 specific recommendations.

3. Key Deliverables

3.1. Following the review these are the key outcomes can be summarised as the below.

3.1.1. Corporate Ownership. Improve the involvement and support from all the services that the Contact Centre supports in regards to capacity planning, training and provision of supporting staff. This needs to be improved via the Contact Centre Team Leader and Head of Operations & Support Services. There is also the need to define the requirements of these services as “users” of the Contact Centre.

3.1.2. Training and Development. Technical training of staff must be delivered by the service areas to improve quality and engagement with the obvious improvement in customer experience and first point resolution. ‘Soft skills’ development such as call control and call management, would remain within the Contact Centre.

3.1.3. Customer Excellence. The Contact Centre needs to be more of an area of professional excellence rather than a stepping stone for officers to new roles. Working closely with the Institute of Customer Service to deliver a place of work that encourages pride, ownership and teamwork where the customer is at the heart of what we do and this forms part of us delivering the impact behaviours.

3.1.4. Performance Management. Training, quality checking and coaching of the team all needs improvement in terms of frequency and structure which needs to be delivered by the Contact Centre Team Leader as defined by the Head of Operations & Support Services. This complements the mandatory training we do and forms part of a plan for professional development.

3.1.5. Proactive management. Day to day running of the Contact Centre needs more active involvement from the Contact Centre Team Leader to

drive these changes and take a more progressive approach in managing of call and agent performance and overall performance monitoring.

3.1.6.Utilising Technology. Continuing to explore ways in which technology can improve our performance both in how we utilise what we have, and how we can add to this. For instance we took 35,133 switchboard calls in the last 12 months which required officer involvement that could be automated.

3.1.7.Workflow. Proxy teams (an additional group of officers outside of the call centre) are required to flatten out call arrivals by residing to call peaks and must be provided by all the relevant service areas. This will require a cultural change to so that calls are seen as a priority by all officers.

3.1.8.Resourcing. Service measures and staffing levels need formally reviewing and the impact of the Revenues and Benefits team ring-fenced to take calls needs to be reviewed.

3.1.9.Delivery and Transparency. Change the way we report on stats to a more clear and transparent approach, and feedback on customer satisfaction and overall quality. Proactively share with customers our performance and how long it will take to contact us depending on what day/time they call us. Use the website to make this more visible.

3.2. It is expected that delivery of these changes and the requirement for the support of other services to deliver them, will take 6-12 months but will continue to be something to review on continual basis.

3.3. Success should be measured both by a comparison of SLA's against resourcing levels but also by the encouragement of a peer review.

3.4. Contact Centre staff will start a hybrid approach to working from June where groups will return to the office for a few days a week to support team working and training. It is expected they will retain the flexibility to also partly work from home where appropriate.

4. Progress to date

- 4.1 A implementation plan and timeline has been drafted which incorporates the recommendations from the Review
- 4.2 A Project Team has been initiated comprising the Head of Operations & Support Services, Contact Centre Team Leader and the Service Improvement Manager.
- 4.3 Communications and staff engagement have already seen some improvement through monthly face to face team meetings with the Contact Centre, which has the outcome of improved team morale and given consistent & timely messages.
- 4.4 The completion of a service delivery plan setting out the key aims and objectives for the Contact Centre supporting the thematic delivery plan has been completed.
- 4.5 Initial meetings have been held with some services leads around training delivery and support of call taking with more scheduled over the coming months.

- 4.6 A draft plan of how to reopen reception has been initiated with KP currently open two days a week.
- 4.7 A business case is being prepared for additional technology to deliver further performance improvements.
- 4.8 Meetings with Netcall (who provide the telephone system) have been set up to see how we can further utilise our existing technology as well as learning from their best practice.
- 4.9 The ICT service desk staff management has moved from the Contact Centre Team Leader to the Head of ICT to free up management capacity.

5. Key Outcomes

- 5.1 To reduce call waiting times and increase our speed to answer to be consistently hitting the calls answered within 5 minutes KPI. This will support delivery of "Maximising Resources".
- 5.2 To improve the customer satisfaction results.
- 5.3 To support the delivery of the wider Customer Access Strategy.

6. Proposed way forward

- 6.1 To adapt the improvement plan as per the Contact Centre Review.
- 6.2 To review staffing levels and the impact of reopening receptions and what impact this may have with staff moved from phone lines to manage this.
- 6.3 To bring a follow up report in 6 months to update on the progress.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	The Contact Centre Review supports the strategic aims of maximising and making the best use of the Council's resources to enable delivery of the strategic aims and, at the same time, enhancing the customer experience, access and engagement.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money		There are no expected cost savings as a result of this review.
Risk	Y	That the Council fails to implement the recommendations of the Contact Centre Service Review. That the Council fails to deliver a Contact Centre that meet the expectations of Members and our customers
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact Consultation and Engagement Undertaken or Proposed	N	
Safeguarding Equality and Diversity Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications Climate Change - Carbon /	Y	By reopening receptions and by adopting the hybrid working approach for the Contact Centre, staff will be required to travel to work more frequently.

Biodiversity Impact		
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder Safeguarding Equality and Diversity Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications	N	
Health, Safety and Wellbeing Community Safety, Crime and Disorder Safeguarding Equality and Diversity		
Other implications Health, Safety and Wellbeing Community Safety, Crime and Disorder Safeguarding	N	
Other implications Health, Safety and Wellbeing		
Other implications		

Supporting Information

Appendices:

A – Contact Centre Improvement Plan

Background Papers:

None

This page is intentionally left blank

	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
Leadership & Management													
Accountability and Results													
Corporate Ownership													
Training													
Resourcing													
Performance Management													
Customer & Ownership													
Workflow													
Performance Delivery													
Delivery & Transparency													
Review													
Reopening of Reception?													

This page is intentionally left blank