

WEST DEVON HUB COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Hub Committee** held
on
Tuesday, 27th September, 2022 at 12.00 pm at the
Chamber - Kilworthy Park

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Jory
Vice Chairman Cllr Edmonds

Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Leech
Cllr Ratcliffe

Cllr Crozier
Cllr Mott

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Southcott(via Teams)
Cllr Yelland

Cllr Wood (via Teams)

Officers:

Chief Executive
Section 151 Officer
Director – Place & Enterprise
Monitoring Officer
Democratic Services Manager
Deputy Section 151 Officer
Head of Strategy, Corporate Projects & Partnerships
Head of Housing
Private Sector Housing Officer

31. **HM Queen Elizabeth II**

*HC 31/22

Since this was the first formal Member meeting since Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had sadly passed away, Members proceeded, as a mark of respect, to stand and observe a moment's reflection in her memory

32. **Apologies for absence**
*HC 32/22
Apologies for this meeting were received from Cllrs Vachon and Wood (who had joined the meeting via Teams in a non-voting capacity)
33. **Declarations of Interest**
*HC 33/22
Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be discussed but there were none made.
34. **Confirmation of Minutes**
*HC 34/22
The Minutes of the Hub Committee meeting held on 14 July 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.
35. **Public Questions - a period of up to 15 minutes is available to deal with issues raised by the public**
*HC 35/22
It was noted that no Public Questions had been received in accordance with the Hub Committee Procedure Rules.
36. **Hub Forward Plan**
*HC 36/22
Members were presented with the latest version of the Hub Committee Forward Plan that set out items on the agenda for Hub Committee meetings for the next four months and duly noted its content.
- In so doing, a Member made the point that the Homes for Ukraine Scheme agenda item (Minute *HC 39/22 below refers) had been incorrectly labelled on the Forward Plan as being within the 'Leisure, Health and Wellbeing' portfolio area when in fact it fell within the 'Housing' portfolio area.
37. **2021/22 Revenue and Capital Outturn**
*HC 37/22
Members were presented with a report that provided the draft Revenue and Capital Outturn position for 2021/22 and which also provided a schedule of the Reserve balances at 31 March 2022
- In discussion, lead officers were thanked for the production of a comprehensive report and the reliance on achieving savings and income generation to reach the outturn position was recognised.
- It was then **RESOLVED** that the draft Revenue and Capital outturn figures for the 2021/22 financial year, including the overall Revenue outturn position of an underspend of £196,000 for 2021/22 (2.7% of the total Budget £7.302 million), be noted.

38. **Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 to 2025/26**

HC 38/22

Consideration was given to a report that presented the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy from 2023/24 to 2025/26.

In discussion, Members were of the view that the recommendations constituted a sensible set of proposals for the three-year period from 2023/24 to 2025/26.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. Council be **RECOMMENDED**:

- i. to continue to respond to Government consultations on Business Rates Reform;
 - ii: to continue to actively lobby and engage with the Government, Devon MPs, South West Councils and other sector bodies such as the District Councils' Network and the Rural Services Network, for a realistic business rates baseline to be set for the Council for 2024 onwards, when the business rates reset is predicted to happen (NB. this is the earliest date it might happen);
 - iii: to continue to lobby in support of the Government eliminating Negative Revenue Support Grant in 2023/24 (and thereafter) and continues to lobby for Rural Services Delivery Grant allocations which adequately reflect the cost of rural service provision;
 - iv: to note the Council's strategic intention with its Council Tax setting strategy (as set out in paragraph 3.6 of the published agenda report). (NB. the actual council tax for 2023/24 will be decided by Council in February 2023);
 - v: to approve the use of the Revenue Grant Earmarked Reserve to fund the Council's share of the costs of a two-year fixed term post that will be responsible for driving improved customer service and operational efficiency by exploiting technology and transformation (as set out in Appendix D, section 1.9 of the presented agenda report). (The total cost for West Devon is £80,000); and
2. the forecast budget gap for 2023/24 of £269,296 (3% of the projected Net Budget of £8.72million) and the position for future years be noted

39. **Homes for Ukraine Scheme Update**

*HC 39/22

Members were presented with a report that provided an overview of how the Council was responding to the needs of people escaping the War in Ukraine and its role in not only delivering the Homes for

Ukraine scheme but wider support to other Ukrainian people settling in the Borough area.

In discussion, the following points were raised: -

- (a) A Member queried whether or not any further guidance from the Government had been received regarding an increased 'thank you' payment rate being available for host families. In response, it was thought that further information would be available in the coming week. Members wished to put on record their thanks to the host families within West Devon who had welcomed and offered help to those fleeing the War in Ukraine;
- (b) It was confirmed that positive feedback had been received from Ukrainian families about the service that they had received from representatives of the Council; the Council for Voluntary Service; and Citizens Advice
- (c) Officers stated that the shortage of suitable available local accommodation presented some challenges and the issue of longer-term resettlement required detailed consideration;
- (d) When questioned, officers informed that the end of the initial six-month placement period was fast approaching and some arrangements were either breaking down or would not be renewed. As a result, the Council was working on a case by case basis to help resolve each arrangement.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the progress that the Council has made under the Homes for Ukraine scheme be noted
2. the Leader be instructed to write to the Minister for Refugees seeking clarity of the future of the Homes for Ukraine scheme and to request a more permanent solution; and
3. the significant contribution that our voluntary and community sector had already played in welcoming Ukrainian guests to the area be noted

40. **Housing Crisis - Energy Efficiency in Homes**

*HC 40/22

The Hub Committee was presented with a report that provided an update on the Schemes that the Council was able to promote, enable and administer to assist householders and landlords with improving energy efficiency, improving the thermal comfort of homes and reducing energy usage.

In the ensuing debate:

- (a) it was stressed that the Council was working with a range of local Community Energy Groups and organisations to help ensure that the households most in need were made aware of the Grants available. However, it was noted that this was an ongoing challenge to reach the most hard-to-reach households;
- (b) it was suggested that the number of Schemes and associated contractors were causing some residents to be confused and unsure but a partnership of Local Authorities was operating a Code of Practice amongst the contractors to help inform residents of an 'approved' accredited list. Once completed, it was agreed that the accredited list would be circulated to all Members;
- (c) it was essential that the Contractors were providing good advice to local residents, particularly concerning home insulation. In response, it was confirmed that the new technical accreditation that was required of contractors should ensure that the best advice was given.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the content of the presented report and the progress to date on the schemes be noted and that the continuation of the council's energy efficiency work be supported.

41. **Cost Of Living Crisis**

*HC 41/22

Members were presented with a report that considered the support that the Council had already put in place and proposed further steps to be taken to ensure our residents were supported over the coming months.

In debate, concern was expressed for local residents and it was stressed that community leadership from Members was essential in order to help ensure that those who were most in need were identified.

It was also confirmed that the Council was doing all it could to ensure that the help available was clearly signposted for those who needed it and that, as part of this, Members would be key conduits within the community.

Members also considered the merits of re-establishing the Community Clustering arrangements that had been successful during the recent COVID pandemic. In conclusion, the majority of Members felt that it should be further explored and an initial meeting should be arranged in order to gauge the views, appetite and potential benefits amongst local community groups.

It was then **RESOLVED** that

1. Cllr Leech be appointed as the Council's lead Member to respond to the cost of living crisis;

2. the Council be requested to mobilise its resources and work with partners to ensure a responsive, co-ordinated approach to the cost of living challenges faced by residents; and
3. the Leader of Council lobby Central Government to substantially increase the funding provided to address the cost of living crisis and to support the Local Government Association in its call for a solution to address the cost of living crisis to reduce the need for emergency support.

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM THURSDAY 6 OCTOBER 2022, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MINUTE HC 38/22 PART 1 (i-v) WHICH IS A RECOMMENDATION TO THE COUNCIL MEETING TO BE HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2022 UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 18)

The Meeting concluded at 1.10 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
