

WEST DEVON HUB COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Hub Committee** held on **Tuesday, 30th January, 2024 at 2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Ewings
Vice Chairman Cllr Renders

Cllr Bridgewater
Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Moody

Cllr Daniel
Cllr Jory
Cllr Mott

In attendance:
Councillors:

Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Kimber
Cllr Oxborough
Cllr West

Cllr Elliott
Cllr Mann
Cllr Viney

Officers:
Senior Leadership Team
Head Of Democratic Services
Assistant Director – Strategy
Head of Finance
Head of Housing
Head of Revenues & Benefits
Head of Communications

36. **Apologies for absence**

*HC 36/23

An apology for absence had been received from Cllr Leech.

37. **Declarations of Interest**

*HC 37/23

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

38. **Confirmation of Minutes**
*HC 38/23
The Minutes of the Hub Committee meeting held on 21 November 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

39. **Public Questions**
*HC 39/23
It was noted that no Public Questions had been received in accordance with the Hub Committee Procedure Rules.

40. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**
*HC 40/23
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 proceeded to note its content.

41. **The Council Plan 2024/28**
HC 41/23
The Hub Committee considered a report that set out the progress made in the preparation of the draft Council Plan for the period 2024-28.

During the ensuing debate, reference was made to:

- (a) the importance of these Plans. In recognition that the annual Delivery Plans and the overriding Council Plan would underpin the work of this Council administration, Members welcomed its content and wished to record their thanks to the wider membership for their input and contributions via the Hub Advisory Group meetings. In addition, the Committee set out its thanks to the Assistant Director Strategy for his tireless efforts in producing such comprehensive Plans that were reflective of the views of the membership;
- (b) the evolving nature of the Plans. It was recognised that the Plans would evolve and there was sufficient flexibility built in to enable this to happen. With regard to performance monitoring, it was also noted that reports would be considered at regular intervals by both the Hub and Overview and Scrutiny Committees;
- (c) reference to capital expenditure. Members felt it very pleasing that the Plans referenced and set aside monies for capital projects.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That 'The Council Plan 2024-2028' (as set out in Appendix A of the presented agenda report) and 'Year 1 (2024/25) Delivery Plan' (as

set out in Appendix B of the presented agenda report) be noted;
and

That Council be **RECOMMENDED** to:

2. adopt 'The Council Plan' and 'Year 1 (2024/25) Delivery Plan' at its meeting on 20 February 2024; and
3. approve the funding for the 2024-25 Delivery Plan in accordance with section 5.4 of the presented agenda report.

42.

Draft Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals for 2024-25

HC 42/23

Members considered a report that outlined a series of draft revenue and capital budget proposals for 2024/25.

At the invitation of the Leader, the Section 151 Officer informed that, since the agenda papers had been published, there had been further announcements made from Central Government in response to the consultation on the Local Government Finance Settlement and clarification over the Rural Services Delivery Grant. The impact of these updates (which were likely to be minimal) would be included in the report to be presented to Full Council on 20 February 2024.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- (a) Thanks were extended to the Section 151 Officer and her finance team for producing a set of such detailed and understandable budget papers. Given the number of local authorities that were really struggling to set a balanced budget for 2024/25, the Committee wished to record its thanks to all Members (past and present) and officers for their prudent financial management of the Council's budget;
- (b) In respect of the town and parish council precepts, some disappointment was expressed at the number of parish councils that were proposing significant percentage increase in their precepts for 2024/25;
- (c) The Council's treasury management performance was recognised as being absolutely vital in supporting the Council's budget.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That Council be **RECOMMENDED**:

- i) to increase Council Tax for 2024/25 by 2.99% (This would increase a Band D Council Tax for 2024/25 from £254.00 to £261.59 – an increase of £7.59 per year or under 15 pence per week);

- ii) the financial pressures shown in Appendix A of the presented agenda report (amounting to £1,655,500);
- iii) the savings/additional income of £(705,000) as shown in Appendix A of the presented agenda report;
- iv) the revenue expenditure (£337,500) and capital expenditure (£50,000) for the Year 1 Delivery Plan of the Council Plan (2024/25), totalling £387,500, as set out in section 3.30 of the presented agenda report;
- v) the net contributions to/(from) Earmarked Reserves of £(45,500) as shown in Appendix A of the presented agenda report, including using £150,000 from the Business Rates Retention Earmarked Reserve as set out in section 3.14 of the published agenda report;
- vi) the proposed use of £309,180 of New Homes Bonus funding to fund the 2024/25 Revenue Budget as set out in section 3.20 of the published agenda report;
- vii) the proposed two capital bids (total of £140,000) set out in section 8.4 of the published agenda report and the proposal to finance these from New Homes Bonus funding;
- viii) that Unearmarked Reserves should continue to have a minimum level of £900,000 (as set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy in September 2023), but an operating level of a minimum of £1.25million.

43. **Housing Crisis update - Housing & Homeless Strategy Action Plan**

*HC 43/23

The Hub Committee considered a report that sought approval for the refreshed Housing and Homeless Strategy Action Plan.

In discussion, the following points were raised: -

- (a) Thanks were recorded to those Council officers who had worked tirelessly on the Corporate Parenting agenda;
- (b) Notwithstanding the fact that the requirement for a minimum of 30% affordable housing for schemes of 11 or more dwellings was being achieved across the Joint Local Plan area, some Members were interested in seeing the figures for the West Devon Borough area alone. In reply, officers informed that an update in this regard was to be presented to a future Hub Committee meeting;
- (c) Members referenced on a number of occasions their views that the housing market was fundamentally broken and cited examples that included:

- the desperate need for additional provision of smaller (one bedroom) affordable units in the Borough;
- the difficulties of finding suitable land for development;
- the massive challenges (including serious budgetary implications) associated with temporary accommodation. It was recognised that this was one of the single largest issues facing all tiers of local government;
- the need to bring empty homes back into use;
- the need to add greater subtlety and sophistication to the Council's planning policies.

It was agreed that such matters would be considered in more detail at future meetings of the Housing Hub Advisory Group.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the progress on the previous Housing Strategy Action Plan be noted; and
2. That the refreshed Action Plan be agreed.

44. **Support for Care Leavers**

*HC 44/23

Members considered a report which provided an update on the Council's activity in supporting care leavers including a proposal for the Council to become a signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant.

During debate, particular reference was made to:

- (a) the commitment of the Council. It was noted that the range of measures that were set out in the published agenda report demonstrated the Council's commitment and emphasis to supporting Care Leavers;
- (b) widespread support was expressed for the proposals. In emphasising the importance of this agenda item, the leading role that the Council and Chief Executive continued to take in this subject area was recognised and commended;
- (c) the work being undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA). Since the LGA was implementing similar measures to those set out in the agenda report, Members asked that officers report back to that organisation on the work of the Council in this regard.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the measures implemented to support care leavers into employment be noted

2. That the intention for the Council to sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant be noted; and
3. That the steps taken to support Council employees who are seeking approval to be a foster carer and following the placement of a child be noted.

45. **Council Tax Discounts and Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024/25**

HC 45/23

Members considered a report which provided a summary of the findings of the recent consultation on changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and sought a decision on a Scheme for 2024/25.

The report also provided details of the current Council Tax Discounts and reaffirmed the Council's intention to levy a 100% premium on Second Homes as permitted in the Levelling-UP and Regeneration Act 2024

During debate, the following points were raised:

- (a) In reply to a question, officers confirmed that a version of this agenda item had also been presented to the South Hams District Council Executive at its meeting held on 25 January 2024;
- (b) Officers confirmed that they would inform those residents newly affected by the empty homes premium via letter and would work closely with colleagues in Housing and Environmental Health.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the contents of the report be noted; and

That the Hub Committee **RECOMMENDS** to Council:

2. a local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 as follows:
 - Make no changes to the bands of the current banded scheme;
 - Removes the Minimum Income Floor (MIF) for self-employed Claimants; and
 - Disregards 100% of the of the 'Limited Capability for Work' element of Universal Credit.
3. the adoption (with effect from 1 April 2024) of the following Council Tax discounts:
 - (a) The discount for unoccupied and substantially unfurnished properties is 100% for a maximum period of 1 month;
 - (b) The discount for unoccupied and substantially unfurnished properties for 1 month to 1 year is zero;

- (c) The discount for properties which require major repair work to render them habitable is 50% for a maximum period of 12 months;
 - (d) The discount for unoccupied furnished properties (second homes) is zero;
 - (e) An empty homes premium of an additional 100% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and unfurnished for at least one year, but less than five years;
 - (f) An empty homes premium of an additional 200% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and unfurnished for at least five years, but less than ten years; and
 - (g) An empty homes premium of additional 300% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and unfurnished for at least ten years; and
4. the adoption of a Second Homes Premium of 100%, with effect from 1 April 2025.

46. **Discretionary Rate Relief and Corporate Debt Policies**

*HC 46/23

The Hub Committee considered a report that sought approval for four revised and updated policies in respect of key areas impacting on the Council's financial position.

With no questions or discussion ensuing, it was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy (as attached at Appendix A of the presented agenda report) be approved;
2. That the Business Rates Relief: 2024/25 Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Scheme Policy (as attached at Appendix B of the presented agenda report) be approved;
3. That the Corporate Debt Policy (as attached at Appendix C of the presented agenda report) be approved; and
4. That the amendment to the Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates (Business Rates) and Housing Benefit Overpayments Write-Off Policy, to incorporate Sundry Debt (as attached at Appendix D of the presented agenda report) be approved.

47. **Month 7 Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/2024**

HC 47/23

Members considered a report that provided a forecast for the year end budget position and that also enabled them to monitor income and expenditure variations against the approved budget for 2023/24.

In discussion, the projected surplus of £54,000 was welcomed.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the forecast income and expenditure variations for the 2023/24 financial year and the overall projected surplus of £54,000 (0.6% of the total Budget £8.588 million) be noted; and
2. That Council be **RECOMMENDED** to update the current virement limits within the Constitution, as shown in paragraph 10 of the presented agenda report.

48. **Capital Programme Monitoring as at 31 October 2023**

HC 48/23

Members were presented with a report providing details of the Capital Programme financial position as at 31 October 2023.

In the ensuing debate, a question was asked as to whether replacement waste vehicles would be either electric or hydrogen powered. In response, officers advised that, whilst technology continued to advance, at the present time, environmentally friendly waste vehicles were both incredibly expensive and inefficient.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the contents of the report be endorsed;
2. That the addition of a budget for LAHF (Local Authority Housing Fund) 2 (as approved by the Hub Committee at its meeting held on 19 September 2023) be noted;
3. That the addition of 20 Plymouth Road (as detailed in section 2.8 of the presented agenda report) be noted; and
4. That Council be **RECOMMENDED** to use £180,000 of the Vehicle Replacement Reserve in 2023/24 to finance replacement vehicles currently on order, in accordance with the waste vehicle forward plan.

49. **Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 Write-Off Report 2023/24**

*HC 49/23

A report was considered that informed Members of the proposal to write-off a series of debts with a value of more than £5,000 for the period from 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023.

In discussion, the greater corporate emphasis now being given to debt collection was noted. As a result of this increased emphasis, Members were reassured that the Council was not seeing a spike in the amount of debt that was being written off.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That it be noted that, in accordance with Financial Regulations, the Section 151 Officer had authorised the write-off of individual debts totalling £76,408.49 as detailed in paragraph 3 of the presented agenda report;
2. That the write-off of the individual debts totalling £54,049.72 (as shown in Appendix A of the presented agenda report) be approved; and
3. That the write-off of a sundry debt (as set out in Exempt Appendix B of the presented agenda report) be approved.

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS, WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM 5.00PM ON THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2024, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MINUTES HC 41/23 (Parts 2 & 3), HC 42/23, HC 45/23 (Parts 2, 3 & 4) HC 47/23 (Part 2) AND HC 48/23 (Part 4) WHICH ARE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL MEETING TO BE HELD ON 20 FEBRUARY 2024, UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES)

The Meeting concluded at 4.05 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
