

At a Meeting of the **HUB COMMITTEE** held in the **Council Chamber, Kilworthy Park, Tavistock** on **TUESDAY** the **7th** day of **December 2021** at **2:00 pm**

Present: Cllr N Jory – Chairman
Cllr R Cheadle – Vice Chairman

Cllr P Crozier	Cllr L Daniel
Cllr C Edmonds	Cllr A Leech
Cllr C Mott	Cllr B Ratcliffe

In attendance: Chief Executive
Monitoring Officer
Section 151 Officer
Director of Strategy and Governance
Director of Place and Enterprise
Democratic Services Manager
Head of Development Management
Deputy Section 151 Officer
Head of Housing
Senior Specialist – Housing
Senior Specialist – Place Making
Senior Specialist – Climate Change

Other Members also in attendance in a non-voting capacity:
Cllrs Ball, Pearce (remotely), Renders and Yelland

***HC 44/21 APOLOGIES**

There was an apology for absence received for this Meeting from Cllr T G Pearce.

***HC 45/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

***HC 46/21 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Hub Committee meeting held on 2 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

***HC 47/21 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

***HC 48/21 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.

In discussion, it was agreed that the Leader would discuss with officers the need to schedule in further reviews of the thematic delivery plans that would underpin the recently adopted 'Plan for West Devon' and that this would be reflected in the next published iteration of the Forward Plan.

HC 49/21 PLANNING IMPROVEMENT PLAN – PHASE 3 CASE MANAGEMENT RESOURCES AND ENFORCEMENT

Consideration was given to a report that sought to provide a further update on progress against the Planning Improvement Plan. In particular, the report requested consideration of the need for additional administrative / business support (case management) for the service and management arrangements to deliver the best outcomes and service performance.

In debate, a number of Members provided examples of demonstrable improvements in the Planning Enforcement service and wished to put on record their thanks to those responsible officers. In recognition of the success of the enforcement meetings with local Ward Members, a commitment was given to schedule in a forward programme of additional meetings to continue the dialogue on local cases.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the changes proposed within Administration / Business Support (Case Management) for Development Control and the progress that had been made within the Planning Enforcement service be noted;
2. Council be **RECOMMENDED** to delegate authority to the Head of Paid Service, in consultation with the lead Hub Committee Member for Adapting Our Built Environment and the Director of Strategic Finance, to recruit additional staffing where there is a clear and demonstrable increase in planning applications and/or demand on the service, provided that the increase in staffing can be adequately covered by the additional income generated.

HC 50/21 MONTH 7 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2021/2022

A report was considered that enabled Members to monitor income and expenditure variations against the approved Budget for 2021/22 and provided a forecast for the year-end position.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the annual staff pay award. It was confirmed that, whilst the pay award was still subject to negotiations, provision had been set aside as part of the Budget Setting process;
- (b) the reduced car parking income. The lead Member confirmed that the reduced income had been largely attributed to the months of April 2021 and May 2021;
- (c) the gratitude of Members being extended to the Section 151 Officer and Finance Team for producing such a comprehensive report.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the forecast income and expenditure variations for the 2021/22 Financial Year and the overall projected deficit of £33,000 (0.5% of the Total Budget of £7.302 million) (which is very close to a break-even position) be noted; and

2. Council be **RECOMMENDED** to apply up to £80,000 from the Salary Savings Earmarked Reserve in 2021/22 to support additional salary costs in 2021/22 (as set out in section 3.3 of the published agenda report).

***HC 51/21 CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2021/22**

For the purposes of budget monitoring, consideration was given to a report that advised Members of the Capital Budget financial position as at 31 October 2021.

In debate, the following points were raised:-

- (a) With regard to the moveable floor at Parklands Leisure Centre, Okehampton, whilst the solution was welcomed to what had been a longstanding issue, the Section 151 Officer was of the view that it was currently prudent to retain the monies within the Capital Programme;
- (b) With regard to only £622,526 of the profiled Capital Budget having been spent to date for 2021/22, officers advised that this was largely attributed to the initial slow take up of Disabled Facilities Grants during the COVID-19 Pandemic and supplier chain issues associated with the Green Homes Grant;
- (c) Given that increased energy prices could result in more and more residents entering fuel poverty, the potential for Green Homes Grants and similar support schemes to help households was noted. For clarity, officers advised that there was no deadline, at this stage, before which these Grant monies had to be spent.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the contents of the report be endorsed.

HC 52/21 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2022/23 TO 2024/25

Consideration was given to a report that outlined the draft revenue and capital budget proposals for 2022/23 to 2024/25.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the forecast budget gap for 2022/23 of £40,296 (0.6% of the Net Budget of 2021/22 of £7.3 million) and the position for future years be noted;
2. the timescales be noted for closing the budget gap in 2022/23 and future years to achieve long-term financial sustainability;
3. the current level of Unearmarked and Earmarked Reserves (as set out in Section C of the presented agenda report) be noted;
4. the forecast Capital Programme Proposals for 2022/23 of £780,000 and the proposed financing of the Capital Programme (as set out in Appendix D of the presented agenda report) be noted;
5. the views of the Committee be requested on the draft Revenue Budget Proposals and the draft Capital Budget Proposals for 2022/23;

6. the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be sought on the draft Revenue Budget Proposals and the draft Capital Budget Proposals for 2022/23 at the 18 January 2022 meeting;
7. Council be **RECOMMENDED** to continue to be part of the Devon Business Rates Pool for 2022/23, subject to there being no announcements within the Finance Settlement (expected to be announced in mid-December), which in the opinion of the Section 151 Officer (in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Hub Committee Member for Finance), would change this recommendation.

***HC 53/21 WEST DEVON HOUSING CHALLENGES**

The Committee considered a report that set out a series of issues that related to the housing challenges currently facing the West Devon Borough area.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) Officers confirmed that, as part of the upcoming Joint Local Plan (JLP) review, the matter of the current JLP affordable housing threshold would be included. Furthermore, some Members believed that the actual definition of 'affordable' should also be revisited;
- (b) It was noted that a further contributory factor to the housing challenges in the Borough that was not referenced in the published agenda report were the increased numbers of Air bnb properties in West Devon;
- (c) Members were of the view that the Housing crisis in the Borough was currently the single biggest challenge facing the Council. In particular, the need for good quality rental accommodation and intermediate affordable products was recognised;
- (d) Members acknowledged the excellent work of the outreach officer, who had been tasked with homelessness and rough sleeper prevention and intervention and welcomed that this role had recently become a permanent member of staff;
- (e) In respect of Section 106 agreements, some Members made the point that off-site contributions were often a locally emotive subject that required careful messaging.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the amendments to the Tenants Incentive Downsizing Scheme (as set out at Appendix 1) be approved;
2. the Director of Place and Enterprise be asked to write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to lobby for the changes to the broad market areas; the second homes business rate loophole; and supported exempt accommodation regulations (as identified in the presented agenda report);
3. the work of the five-year Housing Strategy be supported and the importance of partnership working be reinforced;

4. agreement be given to commencing preparation of a new South Hams and West Devon Homeless Strategy for 2022-27;
5. the new Homelessness Strategy be focused on four specific client groups:
 - single households;
 - families;
 - households with additional needs; and
 - rough sleepers; and
6. the proposed consultation approach be approved in addition to the adopted Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

***HC 54/21 CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report that provided the second update on progress against the Climate Change and Biodiversity Action Plan since its adoption.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- (a) For future iterations of the Action Plan, Members requested that the colour coding was defined;
- (b) A Member questioned the stringent requirements for private landlords in relation to rental properties being let no more than a 'Class C' in terms of heating and insulation that was to come into effect in the next few years. In reply, officers highlighted section 4.3(a) of the published agenda report that referenced the fact that the Council had benefited from a funding opportunity to either initiate or enhance enforcement procedures in association with the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) regulations;
- (c) It was highlighted that there was growing evidence that heat pumps were both less energy efficient than gas boilers and were not a cost effective solution. In response, it was acknowledged that this was a particularly complex area of work and there were a number of alternative options (e.g. neighbourhood heating systems) that required consideration;
- (d) Some Members stated that the Council should not make progress against its Action Plan at the expense of marginalising or alienating its residents. As a consequence, there was a need for both strong leadership and a good Communications Strategy that Members, officers and the local community could adhere to;
- (e) In the future, it was intended that the Action Plan reviews would be incorporated within the wider Natural Environment Thematic Delivery Plan reviews. Moreover, it was noted that the Natural Environment Hub Advisory Group would have a key role to play in this regard and reviewing the feedback from the Citizens Panel.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the updated Climate Change and Biodiversity Action Plan (as set out at Appendix A of the presented agenda report) be approved.

(The meeting terminated at 3.10 pm)

Chairman

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM THURSDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2021, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MINUTES HC 49/21 PART 2, HC 50/21 PART 2, HC 52/21 PART 7 WHICH ARE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL MEETING TO BE HELD ON 15 FEBRUARY 2022, UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 18)