

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday, 23rd June, 2020 at 12.00 pm** at the **Remote - Skype Meeting**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Ewings
Vice Chairman Cllr Kimber

Cllr Bolton
Cllr Crozier
Cllr Hipsey
Cllr Moyse
Cllr Ratcliffe
Cllr Spettigue

Cllr Coulson
Cllr Daniel
Cllr Kemp
Cllr Musgrave
Cllr Southcott
Cllr Wood

In attendance:

Councillors:
Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Jory
Cllr Moody
Cllr Pearce
Cllr Yelland

Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Leech
Cllr Mott
Cllr Samuel

Officers:
Strategic Leadership Team
Head of Strategy & Projects
Head of Housing, Revenue & Benefits
Monitoring Officer
Head of Communications
Business Manager (Case Management)
Democratic Services Manager

88. **Welcome & Introductions**

*O&S 88

In light of the recent changes in the political composition of the Council (Minute CM 95 refers), the Chairman wished to welcome Cllrs Crozier and Hipsey to their first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny

Committee since their respective appointments. In addition, the Chairman wished to thank Cllrs Ball and Ridgers for their service and contributions to the Committee prior to becoming Members of the Audit Committee

89. **Apologies for Absence**

*O&S 89

Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllr N Heyworth

90. **Confirmation of Minutes**

*O&S 90

The minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 February 2020 were confirmed by the Meeting as a true and correct record.

91. **Declarations of Interest**

*O&S 91

Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of this meeting but there were none made.

92. **Public Forum**

*O&S 92

The Chairman informed that no formal requests had been received in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

93. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**

*O&S 93

It was noted that no prior requests had been received for updates on any future Hub Committee agenda items at this meeting.

94. **Draft Annual Work Programme 2020/21**

*O&S 94

The Committee considered its draft Annual Work Programme for 2020/21 and, in discussion, reference was made to an additional Committee meeting. The Chairman advised that, since the next scheduled Committee meeting (to be held on 1 September) would be focusing on the Draft Recovery and Renewal Plan and the Draft Amended Budget 2020/21, she had requested that an additional Committee meeting be scheduled to be held on 4 August 2020.

In terms of agenda items to be considered at the additional meeting, it was agreed that the following should be included:

- an update on rural broadband provision. At the request of the Committee, it was agreed that a meeting of the Rural Broadband Working Group would be held in the upcoming weeks, with the outcome of this meeting being reported to the next Committee meeting;
- an update on the A386 Transport infrastructure provision; and
- the Committee draft Annual Report for 2019/20.

95.

Coronavirus (COVID -19) Response and Draft Renewal and Recovery Plan

O&S 95

The Committee was presented with a report that summarised the work undertaken by the Council in delivering a highly effective response to the challenges of the Covid-19 Pandemic. In addition, the report also outlined some initial thoughts with regard to the challenges that the Council would face and provide an initial opportunity for Members to input to the way forward.

At this point, the Chairman informed that it was her intention for the meeting to first consider the Response element of the agenda item before then providing some initial thoughts on the draft Renewal and Recovery Plan.

(a) Response

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- (i) A number of Members commended the work of the Community Response Team that had been formed in response to the Pandemic. Members found the initiative to have been very useful and a model that could be adapted in the draft Renewal and Recovery Plan, with town and parish council representatives also becoming involved.

In respect of the relationship between town and parish councils and the Borough Council, it was acknowledged that this had been varied during the Pandemic. In such instances, it was recognised that local Ward Members had a key role to play in ensuring that all town and parish councils were engaged with the Borough Council;

- (ii) With regard to the £69,000 that had been secured from Devon County Council (DCC) towards the provision of emergency financial assistance to residents, officers committed to circulating a copy of the DCC Policy that set out the criteria for funding to be allocated;
- (iii) A Member referred back to the earlier request for the Committee to receive an update on Rural Broadband provision (Minute *O&S 94 above refers) and emphasised the importance of good connectivity (e.g. mobile phone signal and Broadband provision) during these difficult times;
- (iv) A number of tributes were paid to the work of the Council and its officers and Members during the Pandemic. Several examples of officers and Members going the extra mile to maintain service delivery were highlighted to the meeting and particular credit was paid to those officers who had been involved in the payment of Discretionary Grants to local businesses;

- (v) By way of an update, it was noted that an all Member Leisure Briefing was to be held at the Informal Council session to be held on 1 June 2020;
- (vi) The meeting was informed that the Council operated a very flexible way of working and those staff with school aged children could use the flexitime scheme to help manage their caring responsibilities during the school holidays;
- (vii) The Section 151 Officer provided an update on the financial position and made specific reference to:
- a. the decision-making cycle for an amended Budget for 2020/21. Members were informed of the intention for a draft Budget setting Workshop to be held during August, before a draft amended Budget was then considered by:
 - the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting to be held on 1 September 2020;
 - the Hub Committee meeting to be held on 15 September 2020; and
 - the Full Council meeting to be held on 22 September 2020;
 - b. Central Government listening to the financial plight being faced by District Councils and the latest information being that a comprehensive package was to be announced imminently; and
 - c. the latest financial situation for the Council being set out in the Budget Monitoring Report that was to be presented to the Hub Committee meeting on 30 June 2020.

(b) Draft Recovery and Renewal Plan

In providing some initial thoughts on the draft Renewal and Recovery Plan, the Committee made particular reference to:

General Thoughts:

- There was a need to recognise that Health and Wellbeing underpinned each of the Plan Themes and should be given significant prominence in the Plan;
- A Member questioned whether climate and environmental factors were so significant that they merited their own standalone theme; and
- The view was also expressed that the Plan needed to anticipate the potential for a 'Local Lockdown'.

Residents Theme:

- Members highlighted the need to identify those vulnerable persons who may have been missed or overlooked during the Pandemic. As a potential solution, the ability to create a Register for vulnerable persons to sign up to was questioned;
- The role of the Council in supporting Food Banks was stated; and
- The importance of information sharing across partner organisation(s) was also recognised.

Business Theme:

- A number of Members emphasised the importance of the Plan reflecting a renewed urgency to improve the Borough's poor Broadband and Mobile Phone coverage; and
- It was felt that the Plan needed to reflect the anticipated increase in unemployment across the Borough.

Community and Partnerships Theme:

- The Committee reiterated that the Pandemic had presented a unique opportunity for the Council to build strong relationships with its partners (including town and parish councils) and the community;
- The importance of the ability to harness the funding streams that had presented themselves during the Pandemic being reflected in the Plan was recognised;
- Some Members considered there to be a need for proper meaningful funding to be allocated to local Community Groups;
- The view was expressed that the Plan needed to take into account that there were varying levels of capability and capacity within town and parish councils;
- Members considered there to be potential to expand upon the work of the Community Response Team concept. Moreover, the importance of Outreach was highlighted and there was felt to be scope to build upon the role of local Ward Members as community leaders;
- The meeting was of the view that the importance of the Tavistock / Bere Alston rail link and current and future Section 106 projects that supported 'greener' solutions should be reflected in the Plan; and
- Some Members questioned whether the Council's Link Committees should be given added emphasis and/or decision-making powers.

Financial Stability Theme:

- Members stated that the format of previous Budget Setting Workshops had been very well received.

Communications Theme:

- The meeting felt that there was a need to consider improving Public Participation at the formal Member meetings of the Council.

Governance Theme:

- The Committee made reference to the increased number of remote meetings being held and highlighted the potential impact on the future use of Kilworthy Park; and
- There would be a need to review Member IT provision to reflect the change in working processes.

Service Recovery Theme:

- Members were of the view that the 'Build Back Better' concept must be more environmentally sustainable; and
- The need to promote the benefits of the Locality Service were recognised.

It was then **RECOMMENDED** that the Hub Committee be **RECOMMENDED** to:

1. note and endorse the Councils response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic to date and thank and congratulate the Town and Parish Councils and other Community Groups for their response and actions to the COVID-19 Pandemic;
2. request that Officers develop a Recovery and Renewal Plan in-line with the Framework and Objectives that are outlined in Appendix 1 of the presented agenda report;
3. take into account the conclusions of the meeting on the priority areas for the Strategic Framework for Recovery and Renewal (as summarised in the detailed minutes below); and
4. request that an update on progress against development of the Plan be presented back to a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 1 September 2020.

The Meeting concluded at 3.35 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
