

SOUTH HAMS JOINT DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE AND OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL



Minutes of a meeting of the **South Hams Joint Development Management Committee and Overview & Scrutiny Panel**
held on
Thursday, 23rd January, 2020 at 10.00 am at the **Council Chamber - Follaton House**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Birch
Vice Chairman Cllr Smerdon

Cllr Brazil
Cllr Hodgson
Cllr Pennington
Cllr Rowe
Cllr Austen
Cllr Jackson
Cllr McKay
Cllr Pannell
Cllr Rose
Cllr Sweett
Cllr Thomas

Cllr Foss
Cllr Holway
Cllr Pringle
Cllr Abbott
Cllr Chown
Cllr Long
Cllr O'Callaghan
Cllr Reeve
Cllr Spencer
Cllr Taylor

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Baldry
Cllr Hawkins
Cllr Pearce

Cllr Bastone
Cllr Hopwood

Officers:

Senior Leadership Team
Head of Practice Development Management
Senior Specialist – Democratic Services

1. **Declarations of Interest**

Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting and these were recorded as follows:-

Cllr P C Smerdon declared a Personal Interest in Items 5: 'Public Forum' and 7: 'Revenue Budget Proposals for 2020/21' (Minutes OSDM.2/19 and OSDM.3/19 below refer) specifically in relation to the funding recommendations to the South Hams Community and Voluntary Service (CVS) by virtue of being a trustee of the South Hams CVS. Since there was to be no debate during the Public Forum agenda item, Cllr Smerdon proceeded to remain in the meeting during consideration of this matter. With regard to the 'Revenue Budget Proposals for 2020/21', Cllr Smerdon made a statement on the CVS funding proposal and then proceeded to leave the meeting room during consideration of this aspect of the agenda item.

2. **Public Forum**

In accordance with the Public Forum Procedure Rules, the Chairman informed that one question had been received for consideration during the agenda item.

1. **Question from Penny Elghady**

'Every district in Devon funds their local CVS (Community and Voluntary Services), helping to support their priorities in building resilient, safe and connected communities with the well-being of residents at their heart. The support of the District Council to South Hams CVS over many years has been invaluable, also in reinforcing the trust in the sector and the CVS with other funders and partners. The total withdrawal of the grant to South Hams CVS, proposed in the budget, would therefore put the CVS at significant risk of closure and the safe future of the voluntary sector in South Hams at risk. What thoughts have the Council given to how support will be provided to the voluntary and community sector in the South Hams without the core services of South Hams CVS?'

In reply, the Chairman of the Panel advised that this matter was to be considered at this meeting in conjunction with the Revenue Budget Proposals for 2020-21 agenda item (Minute OSDM.3/19 below refers). It was his intention at the appropriate time to recommend an alternative proposal whereby the £10,000 grant to the CVS should be reinstated. In the event of this proposal being approved at this meeting, then the Chairman informed that this recommendation would be considered by the Executive at its next meeting on 6 February 2020 before being presented to the Council meeting on 13 February 2020. Finally, the Chairman advised that there was further provision for public questions to be submitted to the Executive.

Ms Elghady welcomed the response given and asked a supplementary question regarding what measures the CVS could undertake in order to improve its working relations with the Council. In response, the Chairman was of the view that this was likely to become apparent during the debate at this meeting.

3. **Revenue Budget Proposals for 2020/21**

Members considered a report that asked for their views on the content of the draft Revenue Budget Proposals report for 2020-21.

In discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- (a) a Community Transport scheme being developed in Kingsbridge. Whilst there had been no requests made for funding for 2020-21, if such a scheme was developed in Kingsbridge, then representatives would be encouraged to submit a request to the Council that would be considered during the 2021-22 draft budget setting process;
- (b) Employment Estates Income of £25,000. A Member sought confirmation that this income was for the Ermington Business Units. In reply, officers confirmed that this was the case;
- (c) the budget pressure derived from Housing Benefit Overpayment recoveries. When questioned, the Section 151 Officer confirmed that, as a consequence of the Universal Credit scheme and the Department of Work and Pensions Real Time Information Referrals, there were now fewer Overpayments being generated in real time and this had created a budget pressure. However, the Section 151 Officer also confirmed that this budget pressure would have no detrimental impact on claimants and was purely due to less Overpayments being generated;
- (d) the Marine Infrastructure Reserve. Officers confirmed that the delay in the Batson project would result in the allocated £68,000 being retained within the Marine Infrastructure Reserve;
- (e) an alternative set of Revenue Budget recommendations were **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** as follows:-
 - '1. *That a fund of £400,000 be set up for Emergency Climate Change projects in order to give effect to the Action Plan being produced by the Council. It is proposed that part of the fund be open to bids from Community Groups with proposals for Climate Change projects. The mechanism for providing such funds to be established as well as the extent of the expenditure by the Council and that awarded to Community Groups;*
 - 2. *That car parking charges for all car parks be frozen (cost £80,000);*

3. That the budget gap of £51,543 be closed.

(NB. the total additional expenditure of the above points 1, 2 and 3 is £531,543).

This additional expenditure to be funded from:

1. The anticipated income from planning fees being increased by £75,000;

2. The anticipated income for car parking fees being increased by £50,000;

3. That an additional sum of £406,543 be used from the New Homes Bonus fund,

(NB. the total of the above to support the additional expenditure is £531,543).

In respect of Partnership Funding, the £10,000 being sought by the South Hams Community and Voluntary Service (CVS) be reinstated. (There is already £7,000 to cover this expenditure in the budget and it is proposed that the remaining balance of £3,000 be taken from the remainder of the unallocated New Homes Bonus; and

As to the remainder of the unallocated New Homes Bonus (totalling £289,616), it is proposed that this funding be earmarked as a contribution towards a reduction in the funding gap for 2021/22.

The meeting proceeded to consider each aspect of the alternative budget proposals as follows:

Emergency Climate Change Projects Fund – there was widespread support expressed for this proposal which it was felt reflected the seriousness of the Climate Change agenda and the fact that the Council had declared a Climate Change and Biodiversity Emergency.

Whilst it was recognised that the mechanism to allocate monies from the Fund was still to be developed, it was noted that the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group would have a key role to play in this process.

When put to the vote, this proposal was declared **CARRIED**.

Freezing Car Parking Charges – the proposer of the motion advised that the main purpose of a freeze would be to support the viability of town centres in the South Hams.

During the debate, it became apparent that there were contrasting views over this proposal with supporting views including:

- a wish to revisit the proposal to introduce car parking charges at Follaton House;
- charges being less in a number of other local authority areas; and
- the public transport links in the South Hams being so poor that car usage was a necessity.

In contrast, other Members expressed their opposition to the proposals and stated that:

- there was no proven direct linkages between car parking charges and town centre viability. Some Members were of the view that the key factors that were harming the viability of town centres were the significant increase in online shopping activity; high rents; and business rates;
- the proposed 4% increase not being a significant amount and, when considering that a commitment had been made by the Leader for this to be the only increase during the four year Council administration, this would constitute a below inflationary increase; and
- by encouraging increased car usage, a freeze in charges would contradict the Council's Climate Change Emergency Declaration.

When put to the vote, this proposal was declared **CARRIED**.

Closing the Budget Gap of £51,543 – the meeting recognised the need to set a balanced budget and, when put to the vote, this proposal was declared **CARRIED**.

Additional Income from Planning Fees – the proposer made reference to the trend over the last two years whereby planning income had been over and above the forecasted target. As a result, the proposer felt that there was scope to increase the anticipated income from planning fees by £75,000.

During the subsequent debate, reference was made to a Briefing Paper that had been produced by the Head of Development Management Practice that had cast some doubt on the ability for the Council to achieve an additional income of £75,000. In particular, the Paper had set out that, since the Council now had an adopted Joint Local Plan, it was able to set income projections with more certainty and it was deemed unlikely that the Council would be able to deliver on such a revised target.

Notwithstanding this advice, the proposal, when put to the vote, was declared **CARRIED**.

Additional Income from Car Parking Charges – with no debate ensuing, the proposal, when put to the vote, was declared **CARRIED**.

Additional Monies from the New Homes Bonus Fund – with no debate ensuing, the proposal, when put to the vote, was declared **CARRIED**.

Reinstating the CVS Funding Proposal – in discussion, Executive Members advised that their original recommendation to reduce the grant funding to the CVS had been generated through a lack of information and clarity that had been provided by the organisation. Whilst there was a lack of clarity over the services that were provided by the CVS and how they used the grant funding provided by the Council, reference was made to a meeting that was to take place on Thursday, 30 January 2020 with Council representatives and the CVS when it was hoped that this matter would be overcome.

A number of Members paid tribute to the work that was undertaken by the CVS and it was hoped that a closer partnership working relationship could now be developed between the organisation and the Council.

Some Members also made the point that the CVS should be asking that other partner agencies (e.g. LiveWest and Fusion Lifestyle) make a funding contribution for the services that it delivered on its behalf.

The proposal, when put to the vote, was declared **CARRIED**.

Using the Unallocated New Homes Bonus Funding towards reducing the Budget Gap – with no debate ensuing, the proposal, when put to the vote, was declared **CARRIED**.

- (f) the proposed inclusion of an Economy Officer post. Whilst there was general support for inclusion of this additional post, the meeting requested that, as part of the agenda papers presented to the Executive at its meeting on 6 February 2020, a draft Job Description and the associated outcomes and targets for the role also be included.

It was then:

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive **RECOMMEND** to Council that the joint meeting supports:-

1. the increase in Council Tax for 2020/21 of £5 (Band D of £170.42 for 2020/21 – an increase of 10 pence per week or £5 per year – equating to a 3.02% increase);
2. the financial pressures amounting to £1,578,640 (as shown in Appendix A of the presented agenda report);

3. the net contributions to/from Earmarked Reserves amounting to £63,243 (as shown in Appendix D of the presented agenda report);
4. the proposed savings of £959,477 for 2020/21 (as shown in Appendix A of the presented agenda report);
- 5 the proposed funding levels (as set out in section 2.38 of the presented agenda report), subject to the reinstatement of the £10,000 funding to the South Hams CVS;
- 6 the proposed use of £509,543 of New Homes Bonus funding to balance the 2020/21 Revenue Budget (as shown in Section 2.25 of the presented agenda report);
- 7 the use of £400,000 of New Homes Bonus funding to set up an Emergency Climate Change projects Earmarked Reserve; and
- 8 the inclusion of an Economy Officer post (shared with West Devon Borough Council within the staffing establishment as set out in Section 1.7 of the presented agenda report), subject to the Executive being in receipt of a draft Job Description and the associated outcomes and targets for the role.

4. **Capital Budget Proposals for 2020/21**

Members considered a report that set out the Capital Bids to the 2020/21 Capital Programme and outlined a suggested way that these Bids could be funded.

It was then:

RECOMMENDED

That the Joint Meeting **RECOMMEND** that the Executive **RECOMMEND** to Council that:-

1. the content of the Capital Programme Proposals for 2020/21 that totals £2,480,000 (as set out in Appendix A of the presented agenda report) be supported;
2. the content of the Capital Programme Proposals for 2020/21 that totals £1,250,000 (as set out in exempt Appendix B of the presented agenda report) be supported; and
3. the proposed financing of the 2020/21 Capital Programme of £3,730,000 from the funding sources (as set out in Section 4 of the presented agenda report) be supported.

The Meeting concluded at 12.10 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
