

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday, 9th July, 2019 at 2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman
Vice Chairman Cllr Kimber

Cllr Coulson
Cllr Kemp
Cllr Musgrave
Cllr Spettigue

Cllr Daniel
Cllr Moyse
Cllr Ridgers
Cllr Wood

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Renders
Cllr Yelland

Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Samuel

Officers:

Chief Executive
Group Manager – Customer First & Support Services
Head of Place Making Practice
Section 151 Officer
Senior Case Manager - Community Housing
Support Services Specialist Manager
Projects Specialist
Senior Specialist -Democratic Services

1. **Apologies for Absence**

*O&S 9

Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllrs K Ball, T Bolton, M V L Ewings, N Heyworth, B Ratcliffe and T Southcott.

2. **Confirmation of Minutes**

*O&S 10

The minutes of the Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 April 2019 and 11 June 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

*O&S 11

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 was none made.

4. **Public Forum**

*O&S 12

There were no issues raised during the Public Forum session at this meeting.

5. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**

*O&S 13

During consideration of the most recently published Hub Committee Forward Plan, formal requests had been made for updates on the following future agenda items:-

(a) Coastal Concordat – Explanation

The Head of Place Making Practice advised that the Coastal Concordat was an agreement between the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA); the Marine Management Organisation; the Environment Agency; Natural England; and the Council.

Once signed by all agencies, the agreement would provide a framework within which the separate processes for the consenting of coastal developments in the Borough could be better co-ordinated.

The Committee was also informed that the delay on the Hub Committee Forward Plan for consideration of this agenda item was attributed to DEFRA guidance still being awaited.

During the subsequent discussion, the following points were raised:-

(i) In response to some very specific issues, it was agreed that lead officers would meet with a Committee Member outside of this meeting;

(ii) The close linkages with the work of the Tamar Estuary Consultative Forum were acknowledged;

(iii) Once the DEFRA guidance had been published (and prior to the Hub Committee formally considering the matter), the Committee requested that all Members be in receipt of a

Briefing Note and a map that highlighted the affected area within the Borough.

(b) Community Housing – Presentation on Progress Made to Date

The Senior Case Manager – Community Housing conducted a presentation that provided Members with:

- a short history of the Community Housing initiative;
- details on what the Council was doing at present to support the initiative;
- information on the current direction of travel; and
- the Design Principles and Building Standards.

In debate, particular reference was made to:-

- (i) the £250,000 award from Central Government. Such was the cost of delivering Community Housing schemes, that Members noted that the £250,000 award would only enable the Council to focus on the development of relatively small scale sites;
- (ii) the availability of willing landowners. It was acknowledged that the availability of willing landowners to offer up potential sites was often a barrier to this initiative;
- (iii) local housing need. Officers stated that the top priority that underpinned the Community Housing agenda was local housing need;
- (iv) design and build standards. A number of Members felt that greater pressure should be exerted on to large housing developers to ensure that housing was built to the highest possible sustainability standards;
- (v) establishing a housing company. Members acknowledged that they would need to make a decision in the upcoming months regarding whether or not the Council should establish a housing company to manage properties developed through this initiative. Some Members also made the point that a significant advantage of the Council taking on the management role would be to ensure that a greater level of control was retained over the allocation of these properties;
- (vi) bringing development sites forward. In addition to the Community Housing agenda, officers also reminded the Committee that there were other means of bringing development forward that included the adoption of a local Neighbourhood Plan and Community Land Trusts.

6.

A386 Transport Corridor/Tavistock Rail Update

*O&S 14

The lead Hub Committee Member for Prosperity presented a report that provided an update on the A386 Transport Corridor / Tavistock Rail issue.

In the ensuing discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) an addition to part 1 of the recommendation was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** to read as follows:

“That it be noted that the Council will continue to work with partner organisations to lobby for funds to reinstate the railway from ***Tavistock to Bere Alston.***”

When put to the vote, this addition was felt to add clarity to the recommendation and was therefore declared **CARRIED**;

- (b) regular updates being presented to the Committee. There was unanimous support expressed for the proposal for regular updates to be presented to the Committee and the need for the Council to be more proactive and vigorous in its lobbying on this issue was emphasised. In addition, Members were supportive of the suggestion that a Devon County Council led presentation be scheduled for consideration at the next Committee meeting on 3 September 2019;
- (c) the likely trend for increased rail use in the future was acknowledged;
- (d) the Okehampton to Exeter rail route. A local Ward Member informed that she was hopeful that a start date for the route would be released soon;
- (e) the economic regeneration aspect to this subject matter. The lead Hub Committee Member for Enterprise advised that the Enterprise Working Group (formerly known as the Economy Working Group) would also be taking an increased interest in this matter.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That it be noted that the Council will:

1. continue to work with partner organisations to lobby for funds to reinstate the railway from Tavistock to Bere Alston;
2. pursue with partner organisations, as a priority, an alternative major public transport scheme between Tavistock and Plymouth;
3. continue to work with partner organisations and other stakeholders to deliver smaller scale interventions to

improve safety and reduce congestion on the A386 and in Tavistock Town; and

4. continue to engage with the community with respect to highway and transport matters.

7. **Financial Stability Review Group - Overview of Progress Made to Date: Presentation**

*O&S 15

The Section 151 Officer conducted a presentation to Members that outlined the history behind the establishment of the Financial Stability Review Group (FSRG) and the progress that had been made to date.

As part of the presentation, reference was made to:-

- the FSRG being set up in November 2017 in direct response to the 'One Council' vote;
- the objectives of the FSRG being to:
 - o examine all aspects of the Council's finances in order to ensure that the Borough Council had a sustainable and secure future and was able to continue to deliver services to residents;
 - o re-examine all Council expenditure to ensure that best practice was employed and value for money achieved; and
 - o promote and support the implementation of new ideas, especially in the area of income generation.
- the seven principles of the FSRG being that:
 - o statutory services should be protected and, if possible, improved;
 - o current staffing levels should be maintained;
 - o the views and opinions of staff members at all levels would be sought;
 - o no line of expenditure was to be considered sacrosanct or protected;
 - o in order to ensure a sustainable future, it be recognised that the Council would have to accept higher levels of risk than had previously been the case;
 - o the importance of shared services in saving costs be recognised; and
 - o leadership from both Members and senior officers would be vital.
- the items previously considered by the FSRG included:
 - o the Council's Pensions Strategy;
 - o the Waste Procurement process;
 - o the Council's Accommodation Strategy;
 - o car parking charges;
 - o Commercial Property;
 - o Business Rates Pilot; and
 - o New Homes Bonus;
- the first meeting in the 2019/20 Municipal Year of the FSRG to be held in September 2019.

During the subsequent debate, the following points were raised:-

- (a) The Committee was advised that the Council had now established an Invest to Earn Committee with formal decision-making powers and the close relationship with the work of the FSRG was noted;
- (b) Members commented that the work of the FSRG had ensured that the annual budget setting process was now a far more smoother exercise;
- (c) The Section 151 Officer advised that the Council continued to lobby Central Government with regard to the extent of the cuts that had been imposed on local authorities. Furthermore, at the recent Local Government Association Annual Conference, delegates had been very vocal to the Central Government Ministers in attendance that Councils could not continue to absorb such cuts to their core funding;
- (d) In respect of the upcoming Member Budget Setting Workshops, officers confirmed that the projections would reflect what they considered to be the worst case scenario.

8. **Peer Challenge Progress Update**

*O&S 16

Members were presented with a report that provided an update on the progress that had been made to date on the delivery of the Peer Challenge Action Plan.

In discussion, Members welcomed the intention for closer working relations to be reinstated with South Hams District Council Members.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Committee:

1. agree the progress to date on delivery of the Peer Challenge Action Plan; and
2. welcome the intention for closer working relations to be reinstated with South Hams District Council Members.

9. **Waste Procurement Closedown Report**

*O&S 17

The Committee considered a report that presented the closedown report for the recent Waste Procurement project.

In discussion, Members were of the view that the Waste Procurement project had been an exemplar piece of work.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Frontline Services Waste Procurement Project Closedown Report be endorsed.

10. **Overview and Scrutiny: Draft Annual Report**
O&S 18
A report was considered that presented the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2018/19.
- With no questions or issues being raised, it was then:
- RECOMMENDED**
- That the Council be **RECOMMENDED** that the Annual Report for 2018/19 (as outlined at Appendix A of the presented agenda report) be approved.
11. **Task & Finish Group Updates (if any)**
*O&S 19
Members noted that there were no active Task and Finish Groups at this present time.
12. **Annual Work Programme 2019/20**
*O&S 20
The Committee considered the latest version of its Work Programme for the 2019/20 Municipal Year. In discussion, it was highlighted that:
- Devon County Council representatives would be invited to attend the next Committee meeting on 3 September 2019 (Minute *O&S 14 above refers); and
 - The next three monthly update on the Peer Review Action Plan should be scheduled for consideration by the Committee at its meeting on 8 October 2019.
13. **Member Learning and Development Opportunities Arising from this Meeting**
*O&S 21
The Committee was reminded of the request for all Members to be in receipt of a Briefing Note and a map that highlighted the affected area of the Coastal Concordat within the Borough (Minute *O&S 13(a) above refers).

The Meeting concluded at 3.50 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
