

WEST DEVON HUB COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Hub Committee** held
on
Tuesday, 20th October, 2020 at **2.00 pm** at the **Via Skype**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Jory
Vice Chairman Cllr Samuel

Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Leech
Cllr Moody
Cllr Sellis

Cllr Mott
Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Pearce

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Bolton
Cllr Crozier
Cllr Ewings
Cllr Hipse
Cllr Kimber
Cllr Ratcliffe
Cllr Southcott
Cllr Vachon
Cllr Yelland

Cllr Bridgewater
Cllr Daniel
Cllr Heyworth
Cllr Kemp
Cllr Moyse
Cllr Renders
Cllr Spettigue
Cllr Wood

Officers:

Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Governance & Assurance
Director of Place & Enterprise
Section 151 Officer
Democratic Services Manager
Deputy Monitoring Officer
Head of Housing, Revenues & Benefits
Head of Strategy & Projects
Senior Specialist Accountant Business Partner
Specialist – Democratic Services

21. **Apologies for absence**
*HC 21
No apologies were received.
22. **Declarations of Interest**
*HC 22
Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be discussed and none were made.
23. **Confirmation of Minutes**
*HC 23
The Minutes of the Hub Committee meeting held on 15 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.
24. **Public Questions**
*HC 24
There were no questions submitted by the Public
25. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**
*HC 25
Members were presented with the Hub Committee Forward Plan setting out items on the agenda for Hub Committee meetings for the next four months.

The contents of the Forward Plan were agreed.
26. **Capital Budget Monitoring Quarter 1 and Quarter 2**
*HC 26
The Lead Member for Resources and Performance gave an update on the attendant report. There were no questions to this report.

Proposed by Cllr Edmonds and seconded by Cllr Cheadle.

It was then **RESOLVED** to endorse the contents of the attendant Report.
27. **Medium Term Financial Strategy for the five years 2021/22 to 2025/26**
HC 27
The Leader presented Members with a report that outlined the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2021/22 to 2025/26.

The budget gap for 2021/22 was estimated at £176,000. It was noted that the Amended budget this year had used some of the reserves but it would not be expedient to use for next year's budget gap, therefore there may be a need to look at a structured approach to tackle the gap. Options for closing the gap would be reported to Hub Committee at the meeting on the 1st December which would be the start of the normal round of budget review that would culminate in Full Council being asked to adopt the budget at its meeting on 16 February 2021. It was confirmed that lobbying of Central Government for more funding would continue. The recommendations asked for the Hub Committee to note the gaps and the timetable to tackle them.

During the debate it was clarified that the anticipated income from Leisure Centres had been based on the current renegotiated situation. The S151 Officer confirmed that the Members Locality Fund had now been built into the base budget and that it was still available for Members to use, with any unspent carried forward. However, monies could not be rolled over at the end of a four year Council administration.

Following a discussion regarding the cumulative budget gap, it was agreed that this aspect of the Medium Term Financial Strategy would be discussed at the next Financial Stability Review Group meeting to determine whether this figure should still be included.

It was noted that no council tax collection fund surplus was assumed. The collection rates within West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) remained at one of the highest levels within Devon, however, the Revenues Team were monitoring the situation with reminder notices going out in early November and a review on collection rates would be held thereafter. Any deficit or surplus would be highlighted to the precepting authorities as they would also be impacted.

Following a Member's enquiry, the S151 Officer confirmed that representatives from the Community Safety Partnership were due to present their annual report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 10th November which would detail the current contribution (just under £17k) in staffing costs from the Council. In the event of any Members wishing to recommend any increase in funding to the Partnership, then this would be considered during the normal budget setting process as follows:

- Hub Committee meeting: 1 December 2020;
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting: 19 January 2021;
- Hub Committee meeting: 2 February 2021; and
- Council meeting: 16 February 2021.

It was acknowledged that although WDBC has a good pictorial pie chart of where Council Tax was spent, it was felt that more could be done to show this, perhaps outlining how much a teacher costs, as an example. The Communications Team were tasked with working on this request.

The Leader moved the recommendations which were then seconded by Cllr Cheadle (and carried by a Unanimous vote).

It is **RECOMMENDED** that the Hub Committee has considered the Medium Term Financial Strategy and **RECOMMEND** to Council:

Recommendation 1: To set the strategic intention to raise council tax by the maximum allowed in any given year, without triggering a council tax referendum, to endeavour to continue to deliver services. The actual council tax for any given year would be decided by Council in the preceding February.

Recommendation 2: To continue to respond to Government consultations on Business Rates Reform

Recommendation 3: To continue to actively lobby and engage with the Government, Devon MPs, South West Councils, and other sector bodies such as the District Councils' Network and the Rural Services Network, for a realistic business rates baseline to be set for the Council for 2022 onwards, when the business rates reset would happen.

Recommendation 4: That West Devon Borough Council continued to lobby in support of the Government eliminating Negative Revenue Support Grant in 2021/22 (and thereafter) and continued to lobby for Rural Services Delivery Grant allocations which adequately reflected the cost of rural service provision.

Recommendation 5: That the Council maintained an Upper Limit on External Borrowing (for all Council services) as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy of £50 million.

The Hub Committee also **RESOLVED** to note:

- i) the forecast budget gap for 2021/22 of £0.175 million (2.2% of the current Net Budget of £7.7million) and the position for future years.
- ii) the current options identified and timescales for closing the budget gap in 2021/22 and future years, to achieve long term financial sustainability.

28.

Housing Strategy 2021 to 2026

*HC 28

The Lead Member for Homes gave an update on the Housing Strategy progress, aiming for adoption in 2021 for a 5 year strategy linking in with South Hams District Council. The draft strategy would go out for public consultation in December 2020. Better homes better lives – suggested strategy. It was noted that

the Housing, Revenue and Benefits Team had been under pressure to develop processes to deal with the Covid-19 situation and attendant grants. It was noted that a further spike in Covid may impact on the team's ability to stay on target but refocusing attention from recovery phase back to response phase may impact on this project.

The recommendations were moved by Cllr Sellis and seconded by Cllr Samuel, and carried by a unanimous vote.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the progress of the Housing Strategy to date be acknowledged; and
2. the proposed way forward be endorsed and for all Members to continue to contribute to this key policy development

29. **Springhill Update**

HC 29

The Lead Member for Homes then presented a report that updated on the Spring Hill project. This was outlined as an exciting opportunity with the best option to demolish the existing building and then rebuild using material salvaging, to produce 1 or 12 units.

In discussion, it was confirmed that energy efficiency measures would be at the forefront of the project design. A number of Members welcomed this assurance and reiterated the importance of the Council's Climate Change and Biodiversity Emergency declaration.

Cllr Sellis moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Cllr Pearce, and carried by a unanimous vote.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the Hub Committee **RECOMMEND** to Council to:

1. Note the project aims and objectives as detailed in Section 3 of the attendant report.
2. Support the current design direction, as detailed in Section 4 of the attendant report, recognizing the opportunities for external funding, and
3. Note the draft business case in the Exempt Appendix B of the attendant report.

30. **Emergency Powers**

*HC 30

The Committee considered a report presented by the Leader that outlined the need for urgency powers to respond to the track and trace hardship payments scheme, as the scheme was required to be set up by 12th October with a very short lead time. Therefore the Chief Executive had exercised his urgency powers to enable the

Council to adopt a scheme: the attendant appendix detailed the arrangements that had been put in place.

Cllr Jory proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Cllr Leech and carried unanimously.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the Hub Committee noted the urgency action taken by the Head of Paid Service, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Hub Committee, to approve the discretionary element of the Track and Trace Support Payment.

31. **Green Homes Grant**

*HC 31

The Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing introduced the Green Homes Grant report. The grant is to be used to raise energy efficiency of low income homes. It was acknowledged that a large amount of the housing stock in WDBC was old houses which were hard to treat. The grant would allow for 14 external wall installations and six heat pumps and the work needed to be done by end of March 2021.

During discussions, it was confirmed that there were several Government schemes running concurrently which would impact on the availability of companies able to perform the upgrades, and potentially also on the availability of the hardware. However, officers confirmed a good working relationship with a provider and that they were confident this work could be accomplished in time.

Officers confirmed they would be taking forward leads raised during previous grants but would ensure good coverage across the whole Borough. Members acknowledged the Officer's work in achieving this grant.

Cllr Leech then proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Cllr Mott and unanimously approved.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the Hub Committee **NOTED** the successful bid and award of the sum of £224,500 from the Government's Green Homes Grant Scheme.

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MINUTES HC 27 AND HC 29 WHICH ARE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING ON 8 DECEMBER 2020, WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM WEDNESDAY 28 OCTOBER 2020 UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 18).

The Meeting concluded at 3.21 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
