

WEST DEVON HUB COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Hub Committee** held
on
Tuesday, 27th April, 2021 at **2.00 pm** via **Teams**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Jory
Vice Chairman Cllr Samuel

Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Leech
Cllr Moody

Cllr Mott
Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Pearce

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Crozier
Cllr Ewings
Cllr Hipsey
Cllr Kimber
Cllr Spettigue
Cllr Yelland

Cllr Daniel
Cllr Heyworth
Cllr Kemp
Cllr Southcott
Cllr Wood

Officers:

Senior Leadership Team
Monitoring Officer
Democratic Services Manager
Head of Strategy & Projects
Head of Housing, Revenues & Benefits
Head of Environmental Health
Head of Place Making
Head of Development Management
Business Manager (Specialists)
Business Manager (Case Management)
Head of Practice – Commissioning & Contracts

74. **Apologies for absence**

*HC 74

An apology for absence was received from Cllr D K A Sellis.

75. **Declarations of Interest**

*HC 75

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

76. **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

*HC 76

The Chairman advised that he had agreed for one urgent item to be raised at this meeting that related to supporting our business communities. This item was considered urgent in light of the associated time constraints and would be considered immediately.

(a) ARG POLICY – SUPPORTING OUR BUSINESS COMMUNITIES

The lead Hub Committee Member proceeded to introduce this urgent item and presented a report that recommended an approach to provide more support to businesses through grant payments.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) A Member questioned whether grant payments could also be made available to local Community Groups. In response, officers advised that each application was considered on a case-by-case basis and it was agreed that a specific example raised would be discussed with the Member outside of this meeting;
- (b) Members welcomed the opportunity to obtain the further funding that amounted to £543,260 to support hard pressed local businesses. Furthermore, the Members hoped that all of the existing monies could be allocated to ensure that these monies could be then accessed.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the revised approach to the ARG Policy (as set out at Section 4 of the presented agenda report) to support the business community, local economy and local place be approved in response to further funding (£543,260) being made available from Central Government, subject to the existing allocation being spent by the end of June 2021 ; and
2. the administration of the ARG scheme continue to be delegated to the Director for Place and Enterprise, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer; the Leader of Council; and the Lead Hub Committee Member for Enterprise, including the decision as to how to fund wider business support measures, once the further guidance on the ARG scheme has been clarified.

77. **Confirmation of Minutes**

*HC 77

The Minutes of the Hub Committee meeting held on 16 March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

78. **Public Questions -a period of up to 15 minutes is available to deal with issues raised by the public**

*HC 78

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

79. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**

*HC 79

Members were presented with the Hub Committee Forward Plan setting out items on the agenda for Hub Committee meetings for the next four months and the Plan was duly noted without any further comment.

80. **Lead Hub Committee Member Update - Cllr Leech**

*HC 80

Cllr Leech introduced his update and focused on the following specific areas of his portfolio:

- Revenues and Benefits; and
- Environmental Health and Licensing.

In light of the amount of statistical information that was contained within his update, Cllr Leech agreed that his discussion paper would be circulated to all Members. Throughout his update, Cllr Leech also paid tribute to the work of officers within both Revenues and Benefits and Environmental Health and Licensing and emphasised the key role that both had played during the Council's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

During the ensuing discussion, the emergence of digital poverty as a detrimental issue for local residents and communities was highlighted. The lead Member advised that he longstanding concerns over this issue and the lead officer gave assurances that the Council attempted to make all of its processes and systems as accessible as was practically possible.

81. **Future Localities Service**

*HC 81

The Committee was presented with a report that set out a series of proposed changes for the Committee to consider to delivery on the recent Task and Finish Group Review recommendations and also included the associated costs of the new Operating Model.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the Service being the single biggest success story arising from the Council's Transformation Programme. In addition, particular credit was paid to the role undertaken by the Mobile Locality Officers and some Members hoped that the new Operating Model would not lead to excessive management and bureaucracy. In response, officers gave assurances that this would not be the case;
- (b) the scheduling of a Member Workshop. The lead Member advised that it was his intention for a Member Workshop to be convened in the upcoming weeks that would focus on introducing the Service Implementation Plan and the members of staff in the Team;

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. an additional £13,000 be approved to be built into the Establishment base budget each year to meet the additional costs of the new service structure; and
2. the new service structure and approach (as set out in Appendix A of the presented agenda report) be noted and the implementation of the new service be agreed.

82. **Write-off Report for 2020/21**

*HC 82

A report was considered that presented the write-offs for the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) An additional recommendation was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** that read as follows:

'That the Committee be in receipt of future write-off reports on a six-monthly basis instead of the current three-monthly reporting basis.'

When put to the vote, this addition was declared **CARRIED**;

- (b) Members welcomed the figures contained within the presented agenda report and informed that, in light of the severity of the Pandemic, they had anticipated these would be far higher. In the likelihood for the impact of the Pandemic to continue to be severe, the Section 151 Officer advised that she had considered it to be prudent to build in an additional 5% bad debt provision into the Council's Base Budget.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. in accordance with Financial Regulations, it be noted that the Section 151 Officer has authorised the write-off of individual West

Devon Borough Council debts totalling £114,226.37 (as detailed in Tables 1 and 2 of the presented agenda report);

2. the write-off of individual debts in excess of £5,000 (totalling £23,183.50 and set out in Table 3 of the presented agenda report) be approved; and
3. the Committee be in receipt of future write-off reports on a six-monthly basis instead of the current three-monthly reporting basis.

83. **Tavistock BID Renewal**

*HC 83

Members considered a report that set out the Tavistock Business Improvement District (BID) renewal process.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) support for businesses in the other towns within the Borough. Some Members expressed their concerns that the Council was providing financial support for the Tavistock BID whilst not doing similarly for the other towns in West Devon. Furthermore, there was a perception amongst the other towns that Tavistock was provided with more support from the Borough Council than they were. In reply, other Members highlighted the benefits that the BID brought to Tavistock and felt that it would be unfair to effectively penalise the town because they had been able to establish a BID. However, the need for support to be given to all towns in the Borough was recognised and officers confirmed that they were committed to achieving this objective;
- (b) an amendment to the report recommendation. An amendment to the recommendation was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** as follows:

'That the Council review its collection charges to the BID on an annual basis.'

In debate on the amendment, the majority of Members felt that it would more be appropriate for the Council to review its charges on an annual basis as opposed to setting them for the five year term as had been proposed in the presented agenda report.

When put to the vote, the amendment was declared **CARRIED**;

- (c) an additional recommendation was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED**. In recent years, Members felt that the Council had not been obtaining sufficient feedback on the performance of the BID and the following additional recommendation was therefore included:

'That BID representatives be requested to report back to the Council (via its Annual Report) on how the organisation has spent its allocated funding.'

When put to the vote, the addition was declared **CARRIED**.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. The Tavistock Business Improvement District (BID) renewal process be supported;
2. the use of £20,000 of the ARG funding to support the BID renewal be noted;
3. a further £13,241.90 be approved of revenue funding in total (up to March 2026);
4. the Council review its collection charges to the BID on an annual basis; and
5. BID representatives be requested to report back to the Council (via its Annual Report) on how the organisation has spent its allocated funding.

84. **Enhancing the Democratic Decision-Making Process**

*HC 84

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval to bring forward changes to the Calendar of Meetings and to review the role and number of Working Groups with the intention for the new arrangements to be recommended to the Annual Council meeting on 25 May 2021.

In discussion, it was confirmed that, in the event of Annual Council concluding that groups such as the Political Structures Working Group and Waste Working Group should be disbanded, then the work undertaken by these would still be carried out by Members but in an alternative means.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. The changes set out in Section 4 of the presented agenda report be supported, with any consequent amendments being made to the Council Constitution and the draft Calendar of Meetings, with these to be reported to the Annual Council Meeting on 25 May 2021; and
2. The Chief Executive and Director of Governance and Assurance be instructed to continue working on any further changes to enhance the democratic decision-making process (as set out in Section 3.2 of the presented agenda report) during the course of the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

85. **Planning and Planning Enforcement Improvement Plan**

*HC 85

A report was considered that informed the Committee of the intention to undertake a review into the Development Management / Planning Enforcement Services.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the work undertaken by the Services during the Pandemic. Some Members wished to put on record their thanks for the work that had been undertaken during such a difficult time;
- (b) the Terms of Reference of the Review. The lead Member invited any Members who felt that the Terms of Reference did not include specific important aspects that should be considered to contact her direct outside of this Committee Meeting;
- (c) the proposal to report back to the Hub Committee within the next three months. Whilst noting the proposal to bring back a report and service improvement plan to the Hub Committee within the next three months, officers advised that some changes and improvements would be made before the report was presented;
- (d) the role of the Development Management and Licensing Committee. In proposing the recommendation, the lead Hub Committee Member highlighted the existing performance role that was undertaken by the Development Management and Licensing Committee. As a result, the Member **PROPOSED** a revision to part 3 of the recommendation whereby the Development Management and Licensing Committee (as opposed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee) should receive ongoing performance monitoring reports. This proposal was subsequently **SECONDED** and when put to the vote was declared **CARRIED**.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

- 1. the review of the Development Management and Planning Enforcement Services (as set out in sections 3.2 to 3.11 in the presented agenda report and the subsequent development of a service improvement plan) be endorsed; and
- 2. officers be instructed to bring back a report and service improvement plan to the Hub Committee within the next three months; and
- 3. the Development Management and Licensing Committee be asked to monitor the ongoing performance of the service against the improvement plan on a six-monthly basis.

86. **Waste Collection Frequency Trial**

*HC 86

The Committee considered a report that detailed the findings of the Council's three-weekly waste collection trial.

During discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) Some Members expressed their disappointment at the proposal to delay further (to Spring 2022) a final decision as to whether or not to implement a three-weekly refuse collection throughout the Borough. Whilst acknowledging the concerns, the lead Member advised that the Pandemic had unfortunately distorted the original project timescales and emphasised the importance of ascertaining sufficient data to reach an evidence-based decision;
- (b) In light of the proposed delay, the Section 151 Officer informed that this would be reflected in the 2021/22 Budget Monitoring Report;
- (c) Members wished to put on record their thanks to officers for continuing to deliver such a high quality service during the Pandemic.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

- 1. the findings of the trial of three-weekly refuse collections to around 1,000 households in the Borough be endorsed;
- 2. a further report be presented to the Hub Committee in September 2021 that details the potential income / costs and national waste strategy impacts so that a final decision can be made on whether a three-weekly refuse collection should be implemented throughout the Borough from Spring 2022; and
- 3. during the interim, the Council continue to collect on a three-weekly basis from the trial households.

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM THURSDAY, 6 MAY 2021 UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 18)

The Meeting concluded at 4.50 pm

Signed by:

Chairman

