

WEST DEVON HUB COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Hub Committee** held
on
Tuesday, 21st September, 2021 at **2.00 pm** at the **Chamber**
- Kilworthy Park

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Jory
Vice Chairman Cllr Cheadle

Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Leech
Cllr Crozier

Cllr Mott
Cllr Pearce
Cllr Ratcliffe

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Ball
Cllr Moyse

Cllr Hipsey
Cllr Yelland

Officers:

Chief Executive
Monitoring Officer
Section 151 Officer
Director – Governance & Assurance
Director - Place & Enterprise
Head of Strategy & Projects
Democratic Services Manager
Senior Specialist – Place Making
Specialist – Place Making
Senior Specialist – Car Parks
Head of Practice – Commissioning & Contracts

19. **Apologies for absence**

*HC 19/21

There was an apology for absence received for this Meeting from Cllr L Daniel.

20. **Declarations of Interest**
*HC 20/21
Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be discussed and there were none made.
21. **Confirmation of Minutes**
*HC 21/21
The Minutes of the Hub Committee meeting held on 13 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.
22. **Public Questions**
*HC 22/21
It was noted that no Public Questions had been received in accordance with the Hub Committee Procedure Rules.
23. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**
*HC 23/21
Members were presented with the Hub Committee Forward Plan that set out items on the agenda for Hub Committee meetings for the next four months.
- In discussion, it was agreed that the Leader would discuss with officers the need to schedule in further reviews of the thematic delivery plans that would underpin the 'Plan for West Devon' once it had been adopted by Full Council at its 28 September 2021 meeting. In so doing, it was recognised that the recently established Hub Advisory Groups and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would also have a key role to play in this regard.
24. **A Plan for West Devon**
HC 24/21
The Committee was presented with a report that summarised the responses to the public consultation exercise and recommended adoption of the 'A Plan for West Devon' Strategy. Moreover, the report also set out the resource implications that would be required to deliver the Plan.
- In discussion, reference was made to:-
- (a) the role played by Members and officers in reaching this point. A number of Members commented on the quality of the final draft version of the Strategy and wished to thank the lead officers and Members for their efforts in producing such a good document;
 - (b) the number of consultation responses received. Members thanked those residents and stakeholders who had submitted representations during the public consultation exercise. When

questioned, officers confirmed that all of the consultation responses would be made available to Members in advance of the Full Council meeting to be held on 28 September 2021;

- (c) the consultation response received from Devon County Council (DCC) informing that the draft Strategy was very closely aligned to the equivalent plan being developed by DCC. Members felt that this was very encouraging;
- (d) the comparisons with the equivalent Strategy being developed by South Hams District Council. Officers confirmed that, whilst there was a high degree of alignment between the two draft strategies, there were also some subtle differences. This was felt to be appropriate given the differences between the two Council areas and their respective communities.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

- 1. the results of the consultation on the draft 'A Plan for West Devon' Strategy be noted;
- 2. Council be **RECOMMENDED** to adopt 'A Plan for West Devon' and the thematic deliver plans (as set out at Appendices A and B of the published agenda report respectively);
- 3. the allocation of existing funding (as set out in paragraph 7.2 of the presented agenda report) be noted;
- 4. Council be **RECOMMENDED** to approve the additional £122,000 of cost pressures for 2022/23 and £168,000 for 2023/24 (NB. the £168,000 includes the £122,000, therefore an additional £46,000 in 2023/24); and
- 5. Council be **RECOMMENDED** to approve the use of £246,000 of Earmarked Reserves for the content of the Delivery Plans (as set out in Section 7 of the presented agenda report).

25. **ORCS Funding - Electric Car Charging Points**

HC 25/21

Consideration was given to a report that sought to recommend that the Council agreed to enter into a collaboration agreement with the Devon and Torbay Residential Chargepoint Scheme for the installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the opportunity for town and parish councils to obtain grant funding. Members highlighted the reference in the published agenda report to Town and Parish Councils having the ability to apply for funds during the next bidding round to install Charging Points on their own land and encouraged the wider membership to promote this opportunity amongst their local town and parish

councils. With regard to some specific questions in relation to site ownership, officers agreed to discuss with their Devon County Council colleagues the criteria that would be set for the next bidding round;

- (b) support for the proposals. A number of Members welcomed the proposals and highlighted the close linkages to the 'Plan for West Devon' (Minute HC 24/21 above refers).

It was then **RESOLVED** that Council be **RECOMMENDED** to:

1. enter a collaboration agreement with the Devon and Torbay Residential Chargepoint Scheme for the installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points;
2. approve the potential sites (as listed in paragraph 1.3 of the presented agenda report) as the location(s) for the installation of Electric Charging Points; and
3. enter a lease with the appointed supplier for a ten year period.

26.

Section 106 Agreement Expenditure

*HC 26/21

Consideration was given to a report that provided details of Section 106 contributions received by the Council and how it was proposed to spend these contributions to enable the delivery of affordable housing, open space, sport and recreation and community facilities.

In debate, the following points were raised:-

- (a) The Section 151 Officer confirmed that Section 106 contributions had to be spent by the Council before the expiry date of the Agreement;
- (b) To ensure that Members were kept informed and could continually monitor the Section 106 contributions, it was agreed that the most up to date summary spreadsheet would be appended to the quarterly Capital Programme Monitoring reports at the time they were presented to the Committee;
- (c) With regard to public perception, Members felt it important for the Council to increase public awareness of the projects that were being funded via Section 106 contributions in order to highlight that many new developments contributed towards new and improved community infrastructure.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the amount of Section 106 contributions held at 31 March 2021 as set out in Appendix A (totalling £1,091 million) and the future expenditure proposals be noted;

2. the process for consulting and informing Town and Parish Councils regarding Section 106 contributions be noted; and
3. all Members be actively encouraged to continue to engage with their Town and Parish Councils to facilitate the expenditure of Section 106 contributions to enable the delivery of affordable housing, open space sport and recreation and community facilities in their areas.

27. **Medium Term Financial Strategy for the Three Years 2022/23 to 2024/25**

HC 27/21

Consideration was given to a report that presented the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy from 2022/23 to 2024/25.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) The importance of lobbying Central Government to ensure that the anticipated volatility in business rates income was smoothed out was recognised;
- (b) The lead Member for Resources highlighted that the contents of the Medium Term Financial Strategy would be a key document for the Resources Advisory Group to consider;
- (c) A Member highlighted the much documented anticipated financial burdens that were facing local residents in the upcoming winter months and felt that the strategic intention to raise Council Tax by the maximum allowed in any given year, without triggering a Council Tax Referendum, would constitute a further pressure;
- (d) Members wished to put on record their thanks to the Section 151 Officer and her finance colleagues in developing an excellent Medium Term Financial Strategy.

It was then **RESOLVED** that Council be **RECOMMENDED** to:

1. 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. (NB the actual council tax for any given year will be decided by Council in the preceding February);
2. adopt the principle of using funding in the Business Rates Retention Reserve, to smooth out the anticipated volatility in business rates income over the next three years (as set out in section 3.19 of the published agenda report). (NB. the volatility is due to the business rates baseline reset anticipated in 2023/24 (this will mean that the Council will have negative revenue support grant) and the predicted loss of business rates pooling gains at the same time);

3. continue to respond to Government consultations on Business Rates Reform;
4. 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 2023 onwards, when the business rates reset happens;
5. continue to lobby in support of the Government eliminating Negative Revenue Support Grant in 2022/23 (and thereafter) and continues to lobby for Rural Services Delivery Grant allocations which adequately reflect the cost of rural service provision; and
6. note the forecast budget gap for 2022/23 of £78,731 (1% of the current Net Budget of £7.3million) and the position for future years.

28. **Month 4 Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/2022**

HC 28/21

The Committee considered a report that enabled Members to monitor income and expenditure variations against the approved budget for 2021/22 and provided a forecast for the year end position.

In discussion, the Committee was of the view that the overall projected deficit of £37,000 was an excellent outcome given the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Finance Team was thanked for its financial stewardship.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. The forecast income and expenditure variations for the 2021/22 Financial Year and the overall projected deficit of £37,000 (0.5% of the total Budget of £7.302 million), which is very close to a break-even position; and
2. Council be **RECOMMENDED** to utilise funding of £190,000 from the COVID-19 Losses Earmarked Reserve in 2021/22 to fund COVID-19 expenditure in 2021/22 and the projected net losses on car parking income in 2021/22.

29. **Capital Budget Monitoring 2021/2022**

HC 29/21

Consideration was given to a report that advised Members of the financial position as at 31 July 2021 for the purposes of Capital Budget Monitoring.

Some Members expressed their concerns over reference in the published agenda to the Council's Community Grants programme being able to support large scale tree planting. Members were of the view

that there were a number of alternative funding streams available to support such planting and therefore felt that the Grants programme should not be used for this purpose.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the contents of the report be endorsed; and
2. Council be **RECOMMENDED** to increase the 2021/22 budget for Community Project Grants from £15,000 to £30,000, with the additional £15,000 being funded from the New Homes Bonus Reserve.

30. **Planning Improvement Plan**

HC 30/21

A report was considered that:

- provided an update to Members on the progress of the Development Management and Planning Enforcement Review;
- sought adoption of the Planning Improvement Plan ('the Plan'); and
- sought to secure a recommendation to Council to approve the use of the additional planning income to cover the cost of temporary staff within the Development Management Service.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) Whilst recognising that there were limitations associated with the recruitment of temporary agency staff who were not familiar with the West Devon Borough area, it was noted that this action had been taken to mitigate the great pressures and demands on the service. In further recognition of the service demands, Members expressed their support for the recommendation to Council to provide additional temporary resources;
- (b) In respect of the proposal in the Plan for six-monthly reports to be presented to the Development Management & Licensing Committee that set out benchmarking information against the performance of other councils, it was noted that all Members (irrespective of being Committee Members) could attend and take part in the debate on these reports;
- (c) The Committee highlighted the number of inadequate planning applications that were being submitted to the Council. In recognising the detrimental impact that such applications were having on the service, some Members called on the Council to be less accommodating to planning agents. Furthermore, support was expressed from some Members for the concept of the Council retaining a proportion of the fee for an invalid planning application to be explored further.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the Planning Improvement Plan ('the Plan') be adopted as set out at Appendix A of the published agenda report;
2. performance of the Plan be monitored on a six-monthly basis with an update report being presented no later than March 2022;
3. Council be **RECOMMENDED** to fund the cost of temporary planning staffing resources of £60,400 (the Borough Council share of the cost), from the additional planning income generated in 2021/22 (as set out in Section 2.6 of the presented agenda report).

31. **Waste Collection Frequency Trial**

*HC 31/21

The Committee considered a report that set out the findings of the trial of three-weekly residual (black sack) collections.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) Officers confirmed that there would be no need for a further trial to be undertaken should the Council wish to introduce a three weekly residual collection service in the future;
- (b) Members emphasised the need for the Council to focus its efforts on increasing its recycling rates and it was felt that this should be a key area of focus for the Natural Environment Advisory Group;
- (c) Whilst Members expressed their disappointment that the trial was not to be extended or made permanent at this time, they also understood the reason for this decision.

It was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. the findings of the trial of the three-weekly residual (black sack) collections be endorsed;
2. it be agreed that the service is not extended to the whole of the Borough in spring 2022 and the potential impact of making a major service change at a time when significant structural changes are expected in the waste industry and other external pressures, including the national LGV driver shortage, be recognised;
3. thanks be extended to the residents on the trial and these residents collections revert to fortnightly in line with the rest of the Borough;
4. the Head of Communications be instructed to develop a Communications Strategy for 2021/22 and beyond which builds upon the findings of the trial with the aim being to improve the Borough's recycling rate and reducing domestic residual waste; and
5. three-weekly residual collections be revisited once the outcome of the Government Consultation on the National Waste Strategy is known.

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM THURSDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2021, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MINUTES HC 24/21 PARTS 2, 4 AND 5, HC 25/21, HC 27/21, HC 28/21 PART 2, HC 29/21 PART 2, HC 30/21 PART 3 WHICH ARE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL MEEITNG TO BE HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2021, UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 18)

The Meeting concluded at 3.45 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
