

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday, 19th January, 2021 at 2.00 pm Via Teams**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Ewings
Vice Chairman Cllr Kimber

Cllr Coulson	Cllr Crozier
Cllr Daniel	Cllr Heyworth
Cllr Hipsey	Cllr Kemp
Cllr Moyse	Cllr Musgrave
Cllr Ratcliffe	Cllr Southcott
Cllr Spettigue	Cllr Wood

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Cheadle	Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Jory	Cllr Leech
Cllr Mott	Cllr Pearce
Cllr Renders	Cllr Sellis
Cllr Yelland	

Officers:

Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Section 151 Officer
Director – Governance & Assurance
Head of Strategy & Projects
Monitoring Officer
Head of Housing, Revenues & Benefits
Democratic Services Manager
Livewest Chief Executive

49.

Apologies for Absence

*O&S 49

Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllr T Bolton

50. **Confirmation of Minutes**
*O&S 50
The minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 November 2020 were confirmed by the Meeting as a true and correct record.

51. **Declarations of Interest**
*O&S 51
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 were none made.

52. **Public Forum**
*O&S 52
The Chairman informed that no formal requests had been received in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

53. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**
*O&S 53
At the invitation of the Chairman, a Member questioned whether the draft Procurement Strategy contained localised incentives. In reply, officers confirmed that such incentives were demonstrated in the draft Strategy.

54. **Livewest - Mr Paul Crawford (Chief Executive of Livewest) to provide a presentation on the latest challenges facing the organisation and respond to Member Questions**

*O&S 54
At the invitation of the Committee, Mr Paul Crawford (Chief Executive of Livewest) was in attendance to provide a presentation that focused on:

- A brief history of the organisation;
- Development activity within the organisation; and
- The Customer Services ethos of the organisation.

Furthermore, Members had been invited to submit their questions in advance to Mr Crawford and 5 had been received and these were also responded to as part of the presentation.

During the ensuing discussion, reference was also made to:-

- (a) copies of the presentation being delivered by Mr Crawford. A number of Members thanked Mr Crawford for delivering such an informative presentation and it was agreed that it would be circulated to all Members after this Committee meeting;
- (b) the supply and demand for rental housing. Mr Crawford advised that demand outstripped supply for rental housing by four / five-fold in the South West region;

- (c) contacting Livewest. In response to some specific questions, Mr Crawford highlighted the contact details at the end of his presentation and encouraged Members to contact their respective local housing officers. In the event that Members did not receive responses from their local housing officers, then Mr Crawford asked that issues be then escalated to senior officers;
- (d) the draft Housing Strategy. With regard to challenges in relation to affordable housing stock and key worker housing, Mr Crawford highlighted the importance of the Council's draft Housing Strategy that was currently subject to a public consultation exercise;
- (e) high insulation standards. When questioned, Mr Crawford assured the Committee that Livewest was committed to both high insulation standards and the de-carbonisation agenda. Furthermore, the Committee noted that increased national lobbying was required to ensure that there were greater affordable energy solutions available;
- (f) customer satisfaction. Mr Crawford confirmed that customer satisfaction was captured in a number of ways and informal resident feedback was obtained on a rolling monthly basis;
- (g) incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour. The Committee was advised that incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour were particularly labour intensive for Livewest officers to investigate. In addition, the organisation had seen an upward trend in instances of Anti-Social Behaviour since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

In conclusion and, on behalf of the Committee, the Chairman proceeded to thank Mr Crawford for both his excellent presentation and detailed responses to Member questions.

55. **Draft Revenue Budget Proposals 2021/22**

O&S 55

The Committee considered a report that asked for its views on the content of the draft Revenue Budget Proposals report for 2021-22.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) The Committee wished to put on record its particular thanks to the Section 151 Officer, the lead Hub Committee Member for Finance and the Financial Stability Review Group for all of their efforts in producing this set of Revenue Budget proposals;
- (b) Some Members expressed their concern over the Council's reliance upon the proposed annual increases in Council Tax to ensure that a balanced Budget was achieved. Furthermore, a Member expressed his specific concerns over the funding imbalance between urban and rural areas. In accepting the point, it was noted that the Rural

Services Network did strongly lobby Central Government and this had proven to be quite successful in recent years;

- (c) Officers informed that the latest assumptions underpinning the Leisure Contract were set out at Appendix A of the presented agenda report. Furthermore, it was confirmed that the extension of the CIVICA IT contract had been funded via the project contingency fund.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Committee **RECOMMEND** to the Hub Committee to **RECOMMEND** to Council that it supports:

1. the proposed increase in Council Tax for 2021/22 of £5 (Band D of £241.63 for 2021/22 – an increase of 10 pence per week or £5 per year – equating to a 2.11% increase);
2. approval of the financial pressures (as set out in Appendix A of the presented agenda report) amounting to £434,000;
3. the net contributions to/(from) Earmarked Reserves of £42,500 (as shown in Appendix A of the presented agenda report);
4. the proposed use of £192,772 of New Homes Bonus funding to fund the 2021/22 Revenue Budget (as set out in section 4.24 of the presented agenda report);
5. the savings of £344,200 (as set out in Appendix A of the presented agenda report); and
6. the noting of the further business case to be received on Partnership Funding for the Community Safety Partnership (as detailed in section 5.2 of the presented agenda report).

56. **Verbal Update from the Rural Broadband Working Group - standing agenda item**

*O&S 56

In his update, the lead Hub Committee Member highlighted that:

- Funding had been secured by Connecting Devon and Somerset to recruit to an additional post that would be tasked with increasing rural broadband provision. Since the funding had only been recently secured, the recruitment and selection exercise had not yet commenced;
- There remained a need for a consistent approach to the erection of phone masts between the Borough Council and the Dartmoor National Park Authority. In recognition of this viewpoint, the

Committee was advised that a positive meeting had been recently held between officers from the two authorities;

- Since this had been the first Committee meeting since the Hub Committee had considered the report titled: 'Broadband Community Support' (Minute HC 40 refers), Members were advised that the contract between Sydenham Damerel Community Fibre Partnership and BT Openreach had now been signed. In addition, since the Hub Committee meeting on 1 December 2020, a number of other Community Groups that were suffering from a similarly poor standard of Broadband provision had made contact with the Council.

The Committee proceeded to thank the lead Member for his comprehensive update and the progress that was being made was welcomed.

57. **Task & Finish Group Verbal Updates (if any)**

*O&S 57

(a) Consultation and Engagement Strategy

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group highlighted that a concluding report was to be presented to the Committee Meeting to be held on 2 March 2021.

(b) Localities and Clusters

The Group Chairman informed that the outcome of the review was to be presented to the Committee Meeting to be held on 2 March 2021.

58. **Preparation for Fusion Representatives Attendance at Next Committee Meeting**

*O&S 58

In preparation for the attendance of Fusion Representatives at the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting, it was agreed that advanced questions should be sought from the wider membership before their onward circulation to the Representatives.

59. **Draft Annual Work Programme 2020/21**

*O&S 59

The Committee considered the latest version of its draft Annual Work Programme for 2020/21 and noted its contents without any further debate.

60. **Member Learning and Development Opportunities Arising from this Meeting**

*O&S 60

The Committee was reminded of the importance of representations being made on the Council's draft Housing Strategy during the current public consultation exercise.

The Meeting concluded at 4.25 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
