

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday, 5th October, 2021 at 2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Ewings
Vice Chairman Cllr Kimber

Cllr Coulson
Cllr Hipsey
Cllr Samuel
Cllr Southcott
Cllr Vachon

Cllr Heyworth
Cllr Moyse
Cllr Sellis
Cllr Spettigue
Cllr Wood

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Crozier
Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Pearce

Cllr Daniel
Cllr Jory
Cllr Yelland (via Teams)

Officers:

Deputy Chief Executive
Director – Place & Enterprise
Specialist – Democratic Services
Specialist – IT
Specialist - Communications

10. **Apologies for Absence**

*O&S 10

Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllrs C Kemp and J Moody. It was acknowledged that, with effect from 30 September 2021, Cllr R Musgrave had resigned from the Office of West Devon Borough Council and therefore this Committee was carrying a vacancy until a new Member was elected.

11. **Confirmation of Minutes**
O&S 11
The minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 June 2021 were confirmed by the Meeting as a true and correct record.
- The informal notes and recommendations arising from the Informal Meeting held on 27 July 2021 were reviewed and noted. With regard to the informal recommendations
- a) Devon Home Choice Review:**
- RECOMMENDED**
The Committee **RECOMMEND** to the Hub Committee that the Council continues to be a Member of Devon Home Choice.
- b) Performance Management Report:**
RESOLVED
The Committee **RESOLVES** to note:
1. the performance figures shown in the Pentana report.
 2. that Members have reviewed the information provided in the dashboards and provide feedback to the portfolio holder on any additional measures required to scrutinise performance.
12. **Declarations of Interest**
*O&S 12
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.
13. **Public Forum**
*O&S 13
The Chairman confirmed that no formal requests had been received in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.
14. **Traffic Congestion in West Devon**
*O&S 14
The Committee were given a presentation by Cllr Stuart Hughes, the Portfolio Holder for Highways, and Mr John Fewings, Neighbourhood Highways Manager (South), both of Devon County Council (DCC). During the presentation, the following points were made:
- There were two main types of works on the highway: road works (road maintenance works) and street works (mainly utilities works).
 - Road works were generally known well in advance for budget, design, and consultation purposes. Utility works tended to be more problematic because there was less time to plan and it was a

legal requirement to concur with the organisation's needs if at all possible. It was noted that utility organisations were now required to apply for a permit for street works.

- Meetings were held with Utility organisations at the beginning of the year to try to plan what activities there would be around the area throughout the year, to try to co-ordinate works, but it was accepted that unforeseen emergency works would always need to be dealt with quickly.
- Planning guidelines altered in recent years making it much more difficult to refuse a planning application for highways reasons.
- It was acknowledged that many major highways were close to capacity so any small event, eg road works, could inevitably cause long delays and added congestion.
- The Strategic planning team annually reviewed its local transport plan, which included cycle routes and bypasses. Following a question asked by the Chair for an overview of strategic planning and any correlation between that and Local Plans to see any impact on roads, the Officer offered to send a link to Devon County Council's (DCC) strategic documents.
- Cllr Hughes confirmed that officers from West Devon Borough Council would discuss all new proposed developments with their DCC planning colleagues to review the potential impacts on nearby roads.
- Following a question regarding speeding within the Dartmoor National Park area, the officer outlined the process required for the introduction of a speed limit on the Moor and the need to request for individual speed signs to be erected on the road.
- It was confirmed that DCC held a capital drainage budget and a revenue drainage budget: both budgets were described as limited. DCC would soon be asking local Town and Parish Councils what were their priorities and the responses received would be used to determine which schemes could be implemented. Many under highway drains were at capacity, therefore Cllr Hughes encouraged Members to canvas their local MPs, following a reduction of £20 million from the Highways budget last year. Any construction on the roads would look at drainage issues at that point.
- Following a question regarding the severe traffic congestion in Okehampton Town Centre, it was confirmed that three large shopping centres had been built just off the main street which had impacted on vehicular movements. The re-opening of the rail station should help in this regard. Medieval towns like Okehampton were trying to cope with modern traffic which was very difficult. Signals in middle Okehampton were synchronised to try to ensure movement through the town centre as quickly as possible but these were restricted.
- Clarification was given on how capacity was defined for roads and it was stated that most town centres were very close to their capacity. The Officer offered to send the definitive figures to the Committee but pointed out that the figure was often lower in towns as the street layout would impact, eg bus stops.
- Single track and narrow roads should be limited to 30mph was one Member's view. It was confirmed that a blanket policy of 30mph was not possible

- Following several questions from Members, the Officer confirmed he would be happy to pass on any queries to his colleague in Highways Planning. It was agreed that any questions would be sent to the Democratic Services Specialist for forward transmission.
- It was agreed that the Officer would circulate details relating to the 'Doing What Matters' budget changes.
- Although the Officer confirmed there was a disconnect between highways planning and function areas, it was confirmed that the two areas held regular meetings to review up and coming developments and to review Section 106 monies and their potential uses.
- Following a question regarding the Council's declaration of a climate change and biodiversity emergency, it was confirmed that DCC had been actively promoting cycling and walking for many years. It was acknowledged that it was harder for those living in rural areas to access public transport as often provision did not exist. Cllr Hughes agreed to update the Committee on the A386 cycling route proposals.
- One Member queried what measurements determined responses on planning applications after being informed that there was only one yardstick used, and that was how many accidents, major or minor, and number of deaths had occurred in the vicinity of the application. The DCC Officer agreed to find out and update the Committee outside of this meeting.
- It was explained that roads were prioritised for repairs through information garnered from Neighbourhood Officers, and by using two types of scanning device: one for road deformation and another that registered cracking and surface deterioration. The collation of this information produced a county wide map highlighting road conditions which would be used to prioritise repairs. Major roads were prioritised over minor roads. Further to a question from a Member, it was confirmed that workers should be filling all nearby potholes and not just the one that had been assigned for filling. The Officer stated that he would remind the contractor of this requirement. The reduction in the Highway's budget meant that the repairs were severely limited.
- Following a question about speed limits in the Borough, it was outlined that a Borough wide speed limit of 20mph would not be possible but specific areas could be added to the list waiting for review. It was requested that any such areas should be highlighted with the relevant County Councillor.

The Chair thanked Cllr Hughes and Mr Fewings for their time, and confirmed that the Democratic Services Specialist would send a list of the items to be investigated further following this Meeting.

15. **Lamerton Housing Report**

*O&S 15

The Lead Hub Member for Housing introduced the report and explained the report was as had been presented to the Hub Committee Meeting on 16 March 2021 and therefore opened up to questions.

In response to questions, the following points were made:

- The strong local opposition to this proposal was, in part, due to opposition to the developing Neighbourhood Plan.
- The formation of a new Neighbourhood Planning group was being supported by officers, and it was hoped that a proposal could be developed that could be supported by all in Lamerton.
- The viability of the project would also now be impacted by the increase in construction costs in recent months which would counter the recent rise in house prices.
- It was confirmed that £135,000 had been spent on developing the project which would not be recoverable.
- One Member suggested looking at the option of zed pod housing.
- The Officer was requested to circulate the figures showing the relationship of salary to house prices across Britain.
- Homes was a significant part of the new 'Plan For West Devon' and officer resources would be reviewed to ensure housing had sufficient resource.
- The housing situation was exacerbated by many houses in West Devon being purchased for second homes and/or letting purposes. It was agreed that there was insufficient social housing provision in the Borough.
- It was confirmed that officers would soon be meeting with the Chief Executive of Live West to discuss the recent sales of affordable housing.
- Homes was agreed to be the first corporate theme to be reviewed by the Committee.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1) **NOTE** the follow up report on the Lamerton Scheme;
and,
- 2) **RECOMMEND** that the Hub Committee **RECOMMEND** to Council that, we, as a Council, adopt a position to lobby Central Government, and our local MPs, to close the loophole which allows Small Business Rates Relief to second home owners who rent their home out for more than 140 days a year.

16.

Verbal Update from the Community Digital Specialist

*O&S 16

The Community Digital Specialist was unable to join the meeting so her bullet point update was circulated after the meeting.

17. **Task and Finish Group Updates (if any)**

*O&S 17

There were no updates.

18. **O&S Annual Work Programme including preparation for the next meeting**

*O&S 18

It was noted that the next meeting (to be held on 16 November) would include Cllr Davies and Mr Jones from Devon County Council to update the Committee on the Okehampton Rail line and public transport. The agenda would also include:

Review of Localities: Annual Report

Community Safety partnership

Council delivery on housing

Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report: 2020/21

Work programme

It was agreed to consider setting up a task and finish group to look at Housing provision and the role of Live West.

Following the questions raised in this meeting regarding Highways and Planning, it was agreed to invite DCC's Portfolio Holder for Planning and a senior officer to the meeting on 15 February 2022 to give a strategic overview of Planning and to review the impact of the environmental crisis.

The Police and Crime Commissioner had replied that they were unable to attend.

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

*O&S 19

Members referred to the earlier interesting discussions on both the housing and strategic planning issues facing the Borough and recognised that these would be subject to a great deal of ongoing consideration by the Borough Council.

The Meeting concluded at 4.08 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
