

SOUTH HAMS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Minutes of a meeting of the **South Hams Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held
on
Wednesday, 13th October, 2021 at 2.00 pm at the **Repton Room - Follaton House**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Birch
Vice Chairman Cllr Smerdon

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| Cllr Abbott (as Substitute) | Cllr Brazil (as Substitute) |
| Cllr Jones | Cllr Long (as Substitute) |
| Cllr McKay | Cllr O'Callaghan |
| Cllr Pennington | Cllr Reeve (as Substitute) |
| Cllr Rowe (as Substitute) | Cllr Spencer |

In attendance:

Councillors:

| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| Cllr Baldry | Cllr Bastone |
| Cllr Hopwood | |

Officers:
Deputy Chief Executive
Director – Governance and Assurance
Monitoring Officer
Specialist – Democratic Services
Business Manager – Case Management
Customer Service Improvement Manager

18. **Division of Agenda**
O&S.18/21
The Chairman formally started the meeting and advised that it was his intention to exercise his discretion to move Item 7, Waste Service Update, to after Item 12, when it was noted that it might become necessary to divide the agenda.
19. **Minutes**
O&S.19/21

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

20. **Declarations of Interest**

O&S.20/21

Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but there were none made.

21. **Public Forum**

O&S.21/21

In accordance with the Public Forum Procedure Rules, the Chairman informed that no questions had been received for consideration

22. **Waste Service Update**

O&S.22/21

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Committee was addressed by two representatives of the Council's waste and recycling contractor, FCC Environment (FCC).

Following questions from Members, the following points were made by FCC:

- Nationally there was a shortage of about 100,000 HGV drivers, with many Councils suffering similar shortages in refuse truck drivers. This shortage was seen as a direct consequence of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. Vacancies were up 30% in this quarter and up 140% compared to this time last year.
- In response to the shortages, FCC stated that they had increased the basic rate of pay three times since the contract had started and rates were now equitable to other Local Authorities in the area. FCC were funding LGV training for anyone requesting this along with funding apprenticeships. They were offering a bonus to anyone who introduced a new worker, and using agencies for recruitment. Agency workers were made permanent as soon as possible, with part time work available for those who wished it. Overtime was offered at the weekend but was not compulsory. A driver recruitment campaign had been started with a cycle to work scheme, medical advice free of charge, pension scheme, 28 days annual leave, death in service scheme, and the depot crew rooms had been improved, including the addition of free coffee vending machines. These changes had improved figures for driver retention but it was still challenging recruiting new drivers.
- It was confirmed that FCC currently had 55 drivers and 98 loaders, with vacancies for eight LGV drivers, seven 7.5ton drivers, and 18 loaders.
- FCC were advised that the recruitment advert for the South Hams area was not accessible on their website. One of the representatives confirmed that they had found this out and were working to resolve this.
- When questioned, FCC were unable to guarantee when their vacancies would be filled.
- FCC had promised to produce an implementation plan at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10th June which had still not been delivered (Minute O&S.3/21 refers). FCC stated that they were still working on this as it was a complex situation and had required greater analysis of the data, however, this task was nearing completion.
- FCC confirmed that, although their website stated that they worked for 60 Local Authorities, they only did collections for 12.

- Following questions from Members regarding the brown bin collection, it was confirmed that the Executive would be asked to extend the current suspension of this service at its meeting to be held on 14 October 2021. FCC stated that they would soon know of the trigger levels for the brown bin service.
- One Member noted that the street and public convenience cleaning staff were doing a good job and their supervisors were also working hard. However, it was noted that it was not working as well in all areas of the District. FCC confirmed that pay rates for these workers had also been reviewed and increased recently.
- Members confirmed that bin collections were still being missed with a whole village missed earlier this week. South Hams District Council were told by FCC that there were no bins placed outside of properties but residents had told the Member that the bins had been out for six weeks. FCC representatives asked for specific details and this instance would be investigated outside of this meeting.
- It was confirmed that two Council officers were still working on behalf of FCC, collecting missed bins, whilst several senior Council Officers were involved with daily meetings with FCC to discuss any operational issues from the day before or for that particular day. The Executive was also still meeting weekly with FCC to try to iron out issues and to receive weekly progress reports.
- FCC confirmed that members of its management team had been out with the crews and that each crew was debriefed when they returned to the depot.

The Chairman thanked the representatives of FCC for attending the meeting.

23.

South Hams Citizens' Advice Update

O&S.23/21

The Chief Executive of Citizens Advice South Hams gave a presentation to Committee giving an overview of the service they provide. The Chief Executive (CEX) responded to a number of Member questions; with key points below:

- Although Citizens Advice (CA) South Hams had received some funding from the Department of Work and Pensions, the CA did not feel compromised by this funding and continued to speak out on Universal Credit both with Government and publicly.
- CA South Hams received annual funding from Devon County Council and South Hams District Council which covered approximately 65% of its fixed costs. The remainder was covered by various projects which provided specialist support to individuals.
- Video booths had been introduced where the booth was an app on mobile phones and anyone was able to access support via their phone; however, uptake had been disappointing.
- Currently, the leading housing question was from people facing eviction. The CEX would send further information on this to Committee Members after the meeting.
- There were concerns that as people often prioritized Christmas over debts, there would be an increase in personal debt management issues arising in January and February 2022.
- It was noted that reduction in energy use was linked to reduction in emissions and, although CA South Hams did not currently measure emissions, the CEX thought that this could be an interesting measurement to start in the future.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Committee:

1. Thanked the CA South Hams for providing an effective and valued services to those requiring help in the community, and
2. Welcomed the CA South Hams proposal to work closely with the Council on addressing the local housing crisis.

24. Ombudsman Annual Review Letter 2021

O&S.24/21

The Executive Member with responsibility for Customer Satisfaction and Improvement presented the report outlining the 2020 complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

During the ensuing debate, it was confirmed that Members would start to be more involved in the complaint process and that once the new system was fully functioning, Members would be able to follow complaints through the dashboard.

One Member felt that a response time of four weeks was too long. In reply, it was clarified that the plan was to have someone call the complainant within three days to confirm and clarify the complaint, to outline what would happen to resolve the complaint, and response times.

The Planning Improvement Plan had been recently reviewed and was to go before the Executive on 14th October 2021.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Committee has:

1. Reviewed the Ombudsman's Annual Letter for 2020 (attached at Appendix A of the attendant report);
2. Welcomed the high level actions to improve customer experience as set out in 3.14 of the attendant report;
3. Welcomed the proposed future actions as set out in 3.15 of the attendant report;
4. Requested an increase in Members' involvement in the complaint process, and;
5. Requested that a report be presented back to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in six months' time, on the implementation of the future actions.

25. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/21

O&S.25/21

The Committee considered a report that presented its Annual Report for 2020/21. In debate, one Member asked if reports could reach Members seven clear days before Committee meetings as some reports were delayed which made it difficult to read them before a meeting

was held. It was noted that this was a very good report which showed what the Committee had been doing throughout the year.

It was then:

RECOMMENDED

That Council be **RECOMMENDED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2020/21 be approved.

26. Task and Finish Group Updates:
O&S.26/21

a) Climate Change & Biodiversity Action Plan

The Committee received a verbal update on the task and finish group's meetings so far. The latest meeting of the task and finish group had been on the 7th October where they had received presentations from local groups on how they could best work with South Hams District Council on both its declared Climate Change & Biodiversity Emergency and the adopted Action Plan. The final meeting of the group would be 21st October 2021 which would enable the group to complete their task on time. Officers were thanked for their time and support.

The Chairman thanked the task and finish group for the likely achievement of completing their task within the prescribed timescale.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the Committee note the update

27. 2021/22 Panel Work Programme: Latest Version
O&S.27/21

The Committee reviewed the work programme and agreed its content without any further comment nor amendment.

28. The Process for Managing Remedies with FCC
O&S.28/21

It was considered that this agenda item would be likely involve the disclosure of exempt information and it was therefore:

RESOLVED

That in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business as the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Act is involved.

Having heard from officers and considered the advice provided, the Committee agreed to make a recommendation to the Executive and it was then:

RESOLVED

Accordingly.

The Meeting concluded at 5.41 pm

Signed by:

Chairman

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