

WEST DEVON HUB COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Hub Committee** held
on
Tuesday, 31st January, 2023 at 2.00 pm at the **Chamber -
Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Jory
Vice Chairman Cllr Edmonds

Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Mott
Cllr Vachon

Cllr Leech
Cllr Ratcliffe
Cllr Wood

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Crozier (via Teams)
Cllr Ewings
Cllr Pearce
Cllr Sellis (via Teams)
Cllr Yelland (via Teams)

Cllr Daniel
Cllr Kimber
Cllr Renders
Cllr Southcott (via Teams)

Officers:

Chief Executive
Section 151 Officer
Director – Place & Enterprise
Monitoring Officer
Democratic Services Manager
Assistant Director - Strategy & Organisational Development
Deputy Section 151 Officer
Head of Housing
Head of Organisational Development (via Teams)
Head of Revenues & Benefits
Community Digital Connectivity Officer (via Teams)

68. **Apologies for absence**
*HC 68/22
Apologies for this meeting were received from Cllr P Crozier, who joined the meeting via Teams in a non-voting capacity

69. **Declarations of Interest**
*HC 69/22
Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be discussed but there were none made.

70. **Confirmation of Minutes**
*HC 70/22
The Minutes of the Hub Committee meeting held on 13 December 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

71. **Public Questions**
*HC 71/22
It was noted that no Public Questions had been received in accordance with the Hub Committee Procedure Rules.

72. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**
*HC 72/22
Members were presented with the latest version of the Hub Committee Forward Plan that set out items on the agenda for Hub Committee meetings for the next four months and noted its content.

73. **Revenue Budget Monitoring Report to Month 7 2022/23**
*HC 73/22
A report was considered that enabled Members to monitor income and expenditure variations against the approved budget for 2022/23 and that also provided a forecast for the year end position.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the forecast income and expenditure variations for the 2022/23 financial year and the overall projected deficit of £85,000 (0.4% of the total Budget £7.770 million) be noted.

74. **Capital Programme Monitoring Report to Month 7 2022/23**
*HC 74/22
Members considered a report that advised of the progress made on individual schemes within the approved Capital Programme, including an assessment of their financial position.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the content of the Capital Programme Monitoring Report be endorsed.

75. **Draft Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals for 2023/24**

HC 75/22

The Hub Committee was presented with a report that outlined a series of draft revenue and capital budget proposals for 2023/24.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- (a) In respect of the request from the Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) regarding the Princetown Visitor Centre (paragraph 3.23 of the published agenda report refers), the Committee was supportive of contributing £78,500 to ensure that the facility was kept open during the summer months. However, for clarity, an addition to that part of the recommendation was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** that read as follows:

'with the proviso that this Funding be used to ensure that the Visitor Centre at Princetown is kept open until at least 30 September 2023.'

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

- (b) A Member felt that the reductions in car parking income could no longer be attributed to the COVID pandemic but was now more likely as a result of changing shopping habits which were to the detriment of the high street;
- (c) The Committee made reference to the conclusions reached by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee whereby, in recognition of increasing inflationary costs, the annual subscription for the Garden Waste Collection service should be increased to £52 per year (i.e. £1 per week).

In discussion, it was apparent that, whilst recognising the cost of living crisis, there was support amongst the Committee for this recommendation and a revised recommendation was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and when put to the vote declared **CARRIED**.

In response to a question and, in light of similar views being expressed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, it was agreed that clarity would be sought outside of this meeting over the ability to advertise and promote the service on collection vehicles;

- (d) At the invitation of the Leader, the Section 151 Officer set out the reasons behind the recommendation for the dormant company (Servaco) being closed down and Members proceeded to express their support for this proposal.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That Council be **RECOMMENDED:**

- i) to increase Council Tax for 2023/24 by £7.37 (a 2.99% increase) (This would equate to a Band D council tax of £254.00 for 2023/24, an increase of 14 pence per week or £7.37 per year);
- ii) to approve the financial pressures (as shown in Appendix A of the presented agenda report) of £1,928,800;
- iii) to approve the net contributions to/(from) Earmarked Reserves of £(45,567) (as shown in Appendix A of the published agenda report), including the proposed use of £150,000 from the Business Rates Retention Earmarked Reserve (as set out in paragraph 3.17 of the presented agenda report);
- iv) to use £150,000 of New Homes Bonus funding in 2023/24 to fund the Revenue Base Budget (as set out in paragraph 3.22 of the presented agenda report) and to allocate £78,500 of New Homes Bonus funding to the Dartmoor National Park Authority (as set out in paragraph 3.23 of the presented agenda report), with the proviso that this Funding be used to ensure that the Visitor Centre at Princetown is kept open until at least 30 September 2023;
- v) to approve the savings of £1,110,500 (as set out at Appendix A of the presented agenda report);
- vi) to approve the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's recommendation on the increase in the garden waste subscription charge from April 2023, (for the sum of £52.00 per annum) as set out in paragraph 5.3 and Appendix F of the presented agenda report;
- vii) to approve the proposed Capital Programme Proposals for 2023/24 of £910,000 and the proposed financing of the Capital Programme (as set out in Appendix D of the published agenda report) (being £700,000 from the Better Care Fund funding from Devon County Council, £160,000 from New Homes Bonus funding and £50,000 revenue funding from the Vehicles and Plant Earmarked Reserve);
- viii) that Unearmarked Reserves should continue to have a minimum level of £900,000 (as set in the Medium Term Financial Strategy in September 2022), but an operating level of a minimum of £1.25million; and
- ix) that, with effect from 31 March 2023, the Servaco dormant company (which the Council jointly owns with South Hams District Council), be closed down.

76. **Write-off Report 2021/22**

*HC 76/22

A report was considered that informed Members of the proposal to write-off a series of debts with a value of more than 5,000 for the period from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022.

In the ensuing debate, it was confirmed that the supplementary Write-Off Policy (that was to be presented to the next Hub Committee meeting to be held on 7 March 2023) would make reference to matters including when it was deemed no longer financially viable for the Council to pursue debts.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That it be noted that, in accordance with Financial Regulations, the write-off of individual West Devon Borough Council debts totalling £88,750.87 (as detailed in Tables 1 and 2 of the presented agenda report) has been authorised by the Section 151 Officer;
2. That the write-off of individual debts in excess of £5,000 totalling £75,438.97, (as detailed in Table 3 of the presented agenda report) be approved;
3. That, in principle, approval of a supplementary Write Off Policy, be brought to the next Hub Committee meeting (to be held on 7 March 2023) for implementation with effect from 1 April 2023, be agreed

77. **Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24 and Other Council Tax Discounts and Premiums**

HC 77/22

Members considered a report which provided a summary of the findings of the recent consultation on changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and sought a decision on a Scheme for 2023/24.

The report also provided details of the Government's Council Tax Support Fund and the current Council Tax Discounts and any proposed changes resulting from the Levelling up and Regeneration legislation.

In the ensuing debate, particular reference was made to:

- (a) Additional monies received via an Empty Homes premium. When questioned, officers confirmed that the monies were distributed proportionately between each of the precepting authorities. Furthermore, Members noted that this matter was solely a decision for the Borough Council in its capacity as the billing authority;
- (b) the incentives (and range of options) to encourage homeowners to let their properties were both recognised and welcomed;

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the content of the report be noted;

That Council be **RECOMMENDED:**

2. to approve a local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24 that as follows:
 - Makes no changes to Band 1 of the current banded scheme;
 - Uplifts Bands 2, 3 and 4 by 20% (above current inflation) to take into account the Cost of Living crisis;
 - Replaces the current range of earnings disregards with a single £25.00 disregard; and
 - Makes changes to the Minimum Income Floor by adjusting the income calculation for self-employed claimants who receive carer's allowance, personal independence payments or disability living allowance.
3. that delegated authority be given to the Director of Strategic Finance, in consultation with the Lead Member for Benefits and the Head of Revenues and Benefits, to agree the uprating of working age regulations incorporated into the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme in line with those announced by the Department for Work and Pensions;
4. that officers be instructed to take immediate steps to apply the £25.00 Council Tax Support Fund payment to the 2023/24 council tax bills of eligible council taxpayers, as announced by the Government on 19 December 2022, and bring forward proposals for a discretionary scheme in late spring 2023;
5. to adopt the Council Tax discounts as follows (with effect from 1 April 2023):
 - (a) The discount for unoccupied and substantially unfurnished properties is 100% for a maximum period of 1 month;
 - (b) The discount for unoccupied and substantially unfurnished properties for 1 month to 2 years is zero;
 - (c) The discount for properties which are vacant and require major repair work to render them habitable is 50% for maximum period of 12 months;
 - (d) The discount for unoccupied furnished properties (second homes) is zero;
 - (e) An empty homes premium of an additional 100% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least two years, but less than five years;

- (f) An empty homes premium of an additional 200% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least five years, but less than ten years;
 - (g) An empty homes premium of an additional 300% is levied on properties that have remained unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least ten years or more; and
6. That, in principle, the following additional council tax premiums be applied from 1 April 2024, or earlier if allowed, subject to the required legislation being in place:
- 100% premium for properties which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for a period of between 1 and 2 years; and
 - 100% premium for second homes.

78. **Housing Crisis Update - Summary Reports of Actions**

*HC 78/22

Members were presented with a report that provided an update on the actions taken to date regarding the Housing Crisis declared by the Council in February 2022. In addition, the report also provided further information on the proposal considered at the Hub Committee meeting of 1 November 2022 to cease work on the Brentor directly delivered Affordable Housing Scheme (Minute *HC 56/22 (2) specifically refers).

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- (a) The different Housing Need (and planning) requirements and policies between the Borough Council and the Dartmoor National Park Authority were recognised as a prohibiting factor for the Brentor scheme;
- (b) The time lag between the initial Housing Needs Survey being undertaken and the potential Brentor scheme being progressed was noted as unfortunate given that housing need was no longer sufficiently demonstrable;
- (c) The local Ward Member expressed his disappointment at the circumstances that had resulted in the Brentor scheme reaching this point. In expanding upon his disappointment, the Member emphasised the trend of young families having to leave their local parishes because they were no longer affordable to live in. As a result, the Member emphasised the importance of a strategy being adopted whereby all rural parishes were able to develop between 4 and 6 affordable properties for local residents to ensure that they remained sustainable;

It was then **RESOLVED** that

- 1. the progress made against the Housing Declaration of February 2022 be noted; and

2. the additional information on the Housing Need Survey undertaken for Brentor be noted and that work on a directly delivered affordable led housing scheme at Brentor be ceased.

79. **UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund**

*HC 79/22

Members considered a report seeking approval of delivery of the package of support within the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) investment plan

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- (a) With regard to recommendation 2, a Member expressed her concern regarding the proposal to suspend the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. In response, it was confirmed that this was felt to be necessary to allow the two projects to be completed within what was an incredibly tight timescale. It was also confirmed that the majority of projects would be undertaken using the Council's Procurement Framework and that very few exemptions would be needed;
- (b) A Member made reference to some of the communications and social media messaging associated with the Good Food Loop organisation. The Member felt that the lack of empathy within the messaging was unfortunate and a cause for concern given that the Council was proposing to work closely with the organisation and questioned whether contact had been made with an alternative organisation in the area. In reply, officers welcomed the contact details being forwarded of the organisation highlighted and emphasised the importance of an outcome focused approach being adopted;
- (c) Members emphasised the importance of robust governance arrangements being adopted to underpin the themes. In accepting the point, officers detailed the proposed composition, remit and timing of the Steering Group and its meetings and confirmed that project partners, the lead Hub Member and Business and Community representatives would serve on the Project Steering Groups. As these began to be developed, officers committed to consulting with the Hub Committee prior to any final decisions being taken and stated the overall intention for these to be integrated within the governance arrangements for the Plan for West Devon;
- (d) Some Members asked that consideration be given to resurrecting the Hatherleigh cycle route as part of the Active Travel Theme;
- (e) A number of Members wished to put on record their thanks for the excellent work of lead officers in accessing this source of grant funding that will bring numerous benefits to the West Devon area.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the delivery of the package of support within the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) investment plan, agreed with the Levelling-Up Department, be approved;
2. That, to meet the timetable and of the programme as set out by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the requirements of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules to seek tenders if they would otherwise be required, be waived, and an exemption from the Rules be granted to enable a direct award of contracts to the businesses identified in Section 5 of the presented agenda report;
3. That approval be granted to the Rural England Prosperity Fund proposal being submitted to Government, which, if successful, would begin delivery from April 2023.

80.

Q3 Integrated Performance Management Report

*HC 80/22

Members considered a report that set out the Integrated Performance Management report covering the Quarter 3 period. The report also highlighted the strategic risk profile of the Council, performance against key indicators and an overview of the capital programme.

In debate, reference was made to:

- concerns being raised over the negative trend of two identified risks (relating to Business Continuity and Staff Recruitment and Retention) that were set out within the presented performance management report. In response, it was confirmed that actions were being taken to manage, address and mitigate the issues related to these two risks, which included modifications to the pay and reward strategy that were designed to respond to recruitment and retention challenges; and
- In response to a query concerning when the allowance payment for those using oil based heating would be received from Central Government, it was confirmed that the latest information suggested that payments would be received during February 2023.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the progress in delivery of the Plan for West Devon thematic delivery plan and the overall strategic performance of the Council be noted; and

2. That work with lead officers be commenced to make minor amendments to the Year 3 Delivery Plans for consideration at the Hub Committee meeting to be held on 7 March 2023.

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MINUTES HC 75/22 AND HC 77/22 (Parts 2-6) WHICH ARE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL MEETING TO BE HELD ON 21 FEBRUARY 2023) WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM 5.00PM ON THURSDAY 9 FEBRUARY 2023 UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES)

The Meeting concluded at 4.05 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
