

WEST DEVON HUB COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Hub Committee** held on **Tuesday, 7th March, 2023 at 2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Jory
Vice Chairman Cllr Edmonds

Cllr Cheadle
Cllr Mott
Cllr Wood

Cllr Crozier
Cllr Vachon

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Daniel
Cllr Kimber (via Teams)

Cllr Ewings
Cllr Yelland

Officers:
Senior Leadership Team
Monitoring Officer

Democratic Services Manager
Assistant Director – Strategy & Organisational Development
Deputy Section 151 Officer (via Teams)
Specialist – Climate Change
Principal Natural Resources and Greenspaces Officer (via Teams)
Head of Revenues and Benefits
Head of Housing
Head of Assets
Head of Environmental Health & Licensing
Head of Human Resources

81. **Apologies for absence**

*HC 81/22

Apologies for this meeting were received from Cllrs A F Leech and B Ratcliffe

82. **Declarations of Interest**

*HC 82/22

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be discussed but there were none made.

83. **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

*HC 83/22

The Leader advised that he had agreed for one item of Urgent Business to be raised at this meeting that related to a recommendation arising from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14 February 2023 'Draft Electric Vehicle (EV) Strategy Plan' (draft Minute O&S 62/22 refers). This item was deemed urgent in light of the associated time constraints.

In debate, the following points were raised:

- (a) In emphasising that time was of the essence to make progress, a Member requested an update on the installation of EV charging points across the Borough, particularly in view of supply issues. In reply, it was confirmed that the update that was recently provided to Members via the Bulletin was still the most up to date information available;

- (b) A Member raised concerns over the issue of car charging leads stretching across pavements thereby causing trip hazards to pedestrians. Officers replied that Devon County Council was aware of the issue and was developing a range of solutions to address the problem.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the draft EV Strategy be approved and that officers be instructed to undertake a public consultation in line with the Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy.'

84. **Confirmation of Minutes**

*HC 84/22

The Minutes of the Hub Committee meeting held on 31 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

85. **Public Questions - a period of up to 15 minutes is available to deal with issues raised by the public**

*HC 85/22

It was noted that no Public Questions had been received in accordance with the Hub Committee Procedure Rules

86. **Hub Committee Forward Plan**

*HC 86/22

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.

87. **Month 10 Revenue Budget Monitoring 2022/23**

*HC 87/22

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.

During debate, reference was made to the Broadband Community Support Reserve. In light of the balance indicating that no monies had yet been spent from this Reserve, it was agreed that a briefing note would be provided to all Members outside of this Committee meeting.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That the forecast income and expenditure variations for the 2022/23 financial year and the overall projected deficit of £35,000 (0.5% of the total Budget £7.770 million) be noted.

88. **Capital Budget Monitoring 2022/23 (NB. Appendix A is exempt)**

*HC 88/22

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.

In reply to a question, officers confirmed that the Tamar Trails currently ran at an annual deficit to the Council of £25,000 per annum.

It was then:

RESOLVED

- i. That the contents of the presented agenda report be endorsed; and
- ii. That a budget of £35,000 in 2023/24; £10,000 in 2024/25; and £10,000 in 2025/26 be approved for Tamar Trails Infrastructure Renewal (to be funded from the Budget Surplus Contingency Earmarked Reserve) as set out at Appendix C of the presented agenda report.

89. **Write-Off Reports Q1 and Q2 2022/23**

*HC 89/22

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 April 2022 to 30 September 2022.

In addition, the report also sought approval to the adoption of an updated Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rate (Business Rates) and Housing Benefits Overpayments Write-Off Policy.

In discussion, a Member made reference to the near 5% difference in Non Domestic Rates Collection between the Borough Council and South Hams District Council. In acknowledging the differential, the lead officer stated that she had already identified this matter as a priority to be addressed.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That, in accordance with Financial Regulations, it be noted that the Section 151 Officer has authorised the write-off of individual West Devon Borough Council debts totalling £81,644.55 (as detailed in Tables 1 and 2 of the presented agenda report);
2. That the write off of individual debts in excess of £5,000 (totalling £45,884.15 (as detailed in Table 3 of the presented agenda report)) be approved; and
3. That, with effect from 1 April 2023, the Council Tax, Non-Domestic rate (Business Rates) and Housing Benefit overpayments write-off policy (as set out in Appendix A of the presented agenda report) be adopted

90. **Council Tax Discretionary Policy**

*HC 90/22

Members considered a report which sought approval for the Council Tax Discretionary Discount Policy.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the Council Tax Discretionary Discount Policy (as set out at Appendix A of the presented agenda report) be implemented from 1 April 2023; and
2. That authority be delegated to the Director of Strategic Finance (Section 151 Officer) to agree awards of a Council Tax Discretionary Discount, which have been recommended for authorisation by the Principal Revenues Officer, in consultation with the Head of Revenues and Benefits.

91. **Housing Crisis Update**

*HC 91/22

Members considered a report which sought approval for a number of measures in support of action being taken by the Council to help address the Housing Crisis.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- (a) The Committee was informed that, since the agenda had been published, Devon County Council had now confirmed its agreement to the funding proposals contained within the published report;
- (b) Members emphasised the importance of taking full advantage of the funding allocations;
- (c) With regard to finding five suitable properties, officers informed that the preference would be to purchase newer build dwellings and the importance of community integration was fully recognised;
- (d) In response to concerns being raised over the current property disposal strategy of Livewest in the West Devon Borough area, officers advised that they shared these concerns and were intending to raise this point at their next meeting with Livewest representatives;
- (e) By way of an update to the Springhill project, officers informed that the Business Case would be presented to Members at a future meeting and, as part of the pre-application process, the views of local Ward Members regarding the wish for three flats, had been taken into account.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the use of up to £1.4m from the Government's Local Authority Housing Fund and Homes for Ukraine funding allocations be approved for the purchase of up to 5 properties;
2. That the Head of Assets, in consultation with the Head of Housing and Section 151 Officer, be authorised to identify within the available funding, up to 5 suitable properties and to take the necessary steps for the Council to purchase those properties;
3. That subject to positive pre-planning application discussions, the Head of Assets be authorised to prepare and submit a full planning application for the conversion and use of 20 Plymouth Road, Tavistock as temporary accommodation with at-risk costs of up to £30,000 being financed from the Homeless Prevention winter pressure grant; and
4. That the progress on Springhill, Tavistock and Wonnacotts Road, Okehampton be noted.

92. **A Plan for West Devon - Year 3 Delivery Plan**

HC 92/22

A report was considered that set out an updated year 3 delivery plan for the Plan for West Devon Strategy.

In discussion, reference was made to the Internal Audit Progress Report that was due to be considered by the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting to be held on 14 March 2023. As part of this Progress Report, a Member highlighted that the 'Plan for West Devon' had received a finding of 'substantial assurance' which he considered to be testament to the quality of the Plan.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That Council be **RECOMMENDED** to approve the minor amendments to the Year 3 Plan for West Devon delivery plans (as set out in Appendix A of the presented agenda report).

93. **Recruitment and Retention**

HC 93/22

Members considered a report detailing a range of actions being taken to respond to on-going recruitment and retention challenges, which included a comprehensive new organisational development plan. The report also included advice following an independent report undertaken by the Local Government Association on senior officer pay.

(NOTE: the Council's Senior Leadership Team left the meeting room prior to the debate on this agenda item).

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- (a) In support of the proposals and, emphasising the importance of staff retention, Members recognised the importance of remaining (and continuing to remain) competitive on pay in the constantly evolving national employment market, particularly in view of the opportunities delivered by agile working;
- (b) The challenges and additional complexities associated with working across two different local authorities was highlighted and, as a consequence, Members felt that the Senior Leadership Team represented excellent value for money.

It was then:

RESOLVED

1. That the action taken to respond to recruitment and retention challenges, as set out in paragraphs 2.4 to 2.9 of the report be noted; and

2. That Council be **RECOMMENDED** to accept the recommendations of the independent report on senior officer pay, undertaken by the Local Government Association, and approve the revised pay and grading structure for the senior leadership team.

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MINUTE HC 92/22 and HC 93/22 (PART 2) WHICH ARE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL MEETING TO BE HELD ON 28 MARCH 2023 WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM 5.00PM ON THURSDAY, 16 MARCH 2023 UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES)

The Meeting concluded at 3.05 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
