

Report to: **Overview & Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **10 November 2020**
Title: **Locality Service – Annual Update**
Portfolio Area: **Customer First**
Portfolio holder: Cllr Jeff Moody

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: Any recommendations will be presented to the Hub Committee at its meeting to be held on 1 December 2020

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RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee continues to support the adoption of the locality model pending ongoing monitoring and a further report in 12 months.

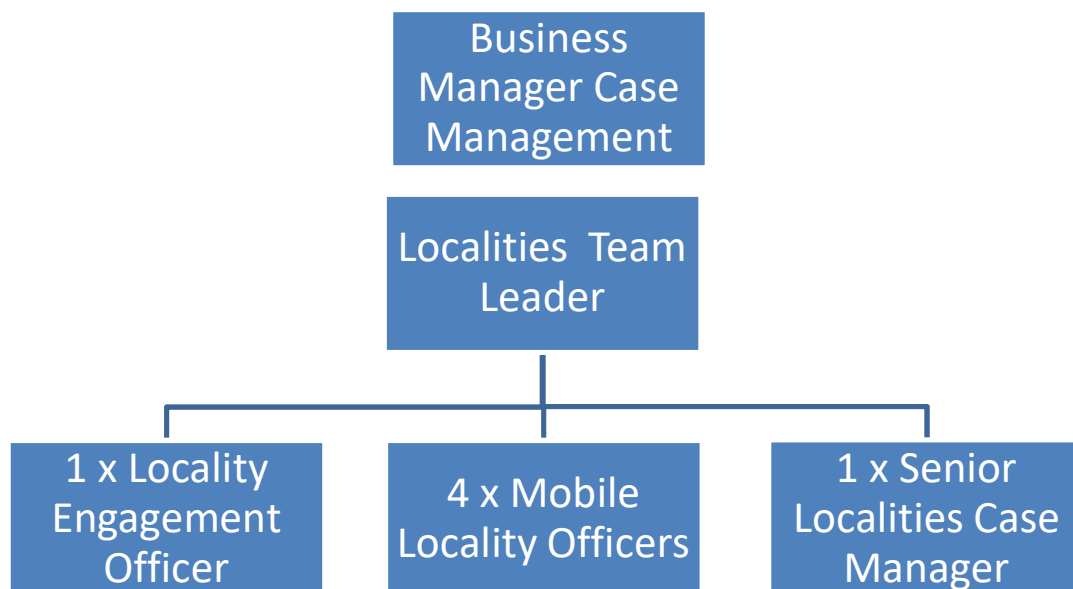
1. Executive summary

- 1.1 A report was presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in November 2019, detailing how the Localities service had been operating in the previous 12 months, and how the service had evolved from initial inception in 2015. Recommendations were presented to the Committee setting out future plans on how to further develop the Locality service to continue to meet Council needs. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommended in November 2016 that the Locality Model should continue to operate pending ongoing monitoring with annual reporting
- 1.2 The Localities Team act as a liaison and support service providing information and support to Members, multi-agency partners, residents and officers on a wide range of Council services.

- 1.3 Locality working was a key and innovative part of the Council's transformation programme, and the Localities Team have been in operation for over five years. The Service continues to evolve and covers service elements previously covered by a number of departments across the Council. Work delivered by the Localities Team continues to be well received both within the Council and by residents and partners.
- 1.4 The South Hams Locality Service is under review by a Member led Task & Finish Group following recommendations from an update report to South Hams Overview and Scrutiny Panel in October 2019.
- 1.5 A West Devon Task & Finish Group has also been formed in October 2020 to review the current working arrangements, and consider the relationship between the Locality service, wider Council teams and the Community Clusters that were established in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Background

- 2.1 The following information provides an overview of how the Localities Team is currently operating. The locality service was formed in June 2015 as a liaison and support service which undertakes work on behalf of a number of services across the organisation. There are four distinct job roles in the locality service as shown in the diagram below, and following the ELT restructure in December 2019 the team are now Managed by the Business Manager for Case Management.



2.2 Mobile Locality Officers

There are four Mobile Locality Officers who cover designated areas across West Devon. These officers are paid a Level 8 salary and are each equipped

with a Council vehicle and an iPad. These officers undertake a wide variety of tasks and receive dedicated training to help them fulfil their roles. Mobile Locality Officers daily tasks are manually issued via email and increasingly through the All on Mobile platform. They receive varied work requests during the course of their day and are often able to respond quickly to cases requiring urgent attention.

2.2.1 Mobile Locality Officer Tasks

Types and range of tasks undertaken by Mobile Locality Officers include:

- a. Regular information gathering (normally the supply of photos or the completion of short forms) for Assets, Council Tax, Elections, NNDR, Planning Enforcement and Environmental Health and Commercial Services, or for escalation to Locality Engagement Officer.
- b. Property inspections including toilet checks and fire alarm testing
- c. Abandoned vehicle reports
- d. Fly-tipping reporting, investigation and collection of small fly tips
- e. Dog patrols
- f. Planning notices (and individual householder notifications)
- g. Private water supply testing
- h. Visual preliminary inspections to assess the condition of the trees
- i. Environmental nuisances
- j. Waste and cleansing issues – meeting with customers to resolve issues and encourage recycling
- k. Disabled Facility Grant Visits
- l. Identifying street defects for repair / replacement
- m. Housing benefit and Council Tax reduction digital assistance visits
- n. Support at community and consultation events
- o. Contract monitoring of all aspects of the FCC contract
- p. Taxi rank inspections to ensure driver and vehicle compliance
- q. Annual Housing site survey relating to the new homes bonus

2.2.2 It is important to note that many of the tasks undertaken by Level 8 Locality Officers were previously undertaken by a range of specialist officers in the organisation who were paid Level 6 and above. The targeted use of Mobile Locality Officers for these tasks is therefore much more cost effective. For example, the average hourly rate of a qualified Planning Officer is over £5 more per hour than a Mobile Locality Officer. When one considers approximately 1,000 planning notices are posted over the course of the year the savings are quickly realised.

2.2.3 The workload of Mobile Locality Officers, whilst varied, is felt to be manageable, and the appointment of the Localities Case Manager, who has been in post for two years, has led to greater consistency and ease in identifying priority work and allocating officers accordingly. The mobile officers receive their work remotely so are able to respond quickly to priority tasks. Team training has been carried out to ensure the quality and consistency of the work carried out by the Mobile Locality Officers.

2.3 **Locality Engagement Officers**

There is currently 1 x Locality Engagement Officer covering West Devon. This Officer uses their own vehicle for travel around the Borough. The LEO 's role is to provide a locality level, face to face point of contact, improving the customer experience by creating a seamless response to customer and member need.

2.3.1 **Locality Engagement Officer Tasks**

Types of tasks undertaken by the West Devon Locality Engagement Officer:

- a. Attendance at a variety of engagement events and Link Meetings to inform residents and Town & Parish representatives of Council services.
- b. Interacting with contractors, special community interest groups and partners.
- c. First point of contact for Members with responsibility for taking ownership of queries/complaints and seeing cases through to the point of resolution
- d. Processing place based cases in W360 & Liberty and dealing with customer correspondence through a variety of methods
- e. Working closely with Mobile Officers to find solutions to long standing/complex cases
- f. Processing and advising on Community Grants and processing the West Devon Member Locality Grants
- g. Contract monitoring of the FCC contract by carrying out regular street inspections in the Borough's high profile zones.

2.4 **Localities Team Leader**

The Localities Service was initially set up and managed by the Level 3 Localities Manager but now form part of the larger case management team within Customer First. Following on from the ELT restructure in December 2019, this large team is now managed by the Business Manager (Case Management), who is responsible for all of the Case Managers across both Councils. The Localities Team is now directly managed (in line with other services within case management) by a Level 5 Team Leader with this post being shared across the two authorities. As well as line managing six West Devon members of staff, the Localities Team Leader directly manages a locality team of nine in South Hams, and the Localities Case Manager who works equally across both authorities.

- 2.4.1 A key part of the Case Management Manager's role is working with the Extended Leadership Team to develop the Locality Service and ensure business demand across the organisation is met. The inherent flexibility of the Locality service has allowed case management to provide additional support in areas experiencing exceptionally high workload e.g. Waste Case Management, Elections, Assets, Planning and Trees.

3. PERFORMANCE & COVID RESPONSE

The West Devon Locality team were heavily involved in the Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic in March 2020. The response from the team was a testament to the wide range of skills and flexibility that they demonstrate each day. Some examples of the team's response are detailed below

- a. Adopted stewardship of the dedicated Covid-19 email inbox, co-ordinating incoming requests from concerned and vulnerable residents as well as partner agencies. This involved daily communication with Devon County, including weekend coverage.
- b. Co-ordinating the scheduling, and carrying out the delivery of food parcels throughout the borough
- c. Carried out welfare visits at identified addresses and arranged emergency support
- d. Assisting businesses in accessing available Government funding
- e. Provided advice on Covid-secure practices for individuals and businesses
- f. Facilitated access to support and assessed legitimacy to ensure it was prioritised where it was needed most
- g. Led and provided support in the Community Cluster groups

3.1 In the past year the West Devon Locality Team delivered the following key outputs, (it should be noted that the team were operating with reduced capacity at 2 x FTE for part of this period due to long term sickness/secondment, and routine work was considerably disrupted due to Covid-19)

- a. Undertook 217 routine public toilet inspections
- b. Affixed over 600 planning notices and delivered over 4000 neighbour notifications
- c. Dealt with 39 abandoned vehicles
- d. Have investigated and collected/reported for collection 150 Fly-tips
- e. Undertook over 200 individual dog patrols
- f. Followed up 550 household election forms to ensure the accuracy of voting information
- g. Carried out 170 private water quality supply tests
- h. Visited over 300 potentially empty properties
- i. Carried out over 100 tree inspections to assess for Ash dieback, provide mapping data and report on the general condition of other species
- j. Carried out 10 Periodic Housing inspections on Council Let properties
- k. Carried out over 500 individual street inspections (since October 2019) to ensure contract compliance

3.2 The Locality Engagement Officer (LEO) has undertaken a variety of engagement events, such as the Dickensian and Edwardian evenings last winter, providing a particular focus on promoting the enhanced plastic recycling service that was launched in the Borough last year. The WD LEO was scheduled to attend the Okehampton and Chagford shows, as well as the Junior Life Skills week, however all of these were unfortunately cancelled this year. The WD LEO was heavily involved in the Covid response and continues to visit towns to engage with businesses on Covid-compliance and secure practices, and also present at the reopening of the high-streets, to assist the town councils in safely welcoming back shoppers.

- 3.3 As well as carrying out engagement work, the WD LEO also assists with locality based enquiries and has resolved 524 in the past 12 months, as well as taking ownership of any formal complaints relating to the waste contract, and works with residents and the contractors to resolve these.

4. STAFF AND WELLBEING

- 4.1 Two Mobile Locality Officers have left the team in the past 12 months. Losing these two officers undoubtedly has led to increased pressure on the rest of the team. We were able to share resources with the South Hams Localities team to ensure that key work was delivered, such as the recent empty homes checks. There is currently one vacancy to recruit to.
- 4.2 Covid-19 has posed new challenges in how we provide support, team meetings and 1-1's in Localities. We have held regular virtual meetings with the whole team and face-to-face meetings in the open air at Kilworthy Park. All staff have received "walking" 1-1's with the Team Leader, with supplementary meetings in various other Covid- safe locations. This direct contact is so important at a time when staff can feel isolated and unsettled, especially when working alone.
- 4.3 Staff safety is paramount at this time and updated risk assessments and PPE have been provided to the team throughout the pandemic. This includes, gloves, masks, task specific guidance and plenty of hand sanitizer.
- 4.4 The Localities Case Manger has temporarily taken on the role as the supervisory officer within the team. This level of responsibility is aligned with best practice across all of case management. The purpose of this role is to manage officer workload, allocate daily tasks and provide and facilitate support to the team on a daily basis.

5. FUTURE LOCALITY SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS

- 5.1 The Locality Officers are well placed to offer a flexible, timely and a wide ranging support function to the entire organisation. Their current responsibilities mean that they work across almost every service area, and are able to re-prioritise their workload at short notice. This was demonstrated during the response to Covid-19, and the team were able to refocus to provide support where it was needed most. In normal times, such is the range of their current responsibilities, it would be difficult to introduce more work into their daily schedules, without impeding on the quality/frequency of existing work, however priorities could be refocussed to align with emerging Council priorities.

There is also scope to formalise close working relationships with other teams to share resources to deliver and prioritise work tasks.

A West Devon Task & Finish group has been established to review the current ways of working, and ensure the team is best placed to meet the future priorities. The recommendations from this T&F group are still being discussed as the current working practices and future needs are still being considered.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is responsible for considering and scrutinising how the Council is performing as an organisation.
Financial	N	There are no direct financial implications of the contents of the report.
Risk	N	Section 3 of the report shows the service is performing well.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity	N	
Safeguarding	N	
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder	N	
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	N	
Other implications	N	

Supporting Information

Appendices:

None