

Report to: **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **16th November 2021**

Title: **LOCALITIES TEAM UPDATE**

Portfolio Area: **Customer First**

Portfolio holder: Cllr Terry Pearce

Wards Affected: **All**

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: **N/A**

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

Date next steps can be taken:

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RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the changes in the structure of the Localities Team and the work undertaken in the past 12 months and continues to support the locality model pending ongoing monitoring and a further report in 12 months.

1. Executive summary

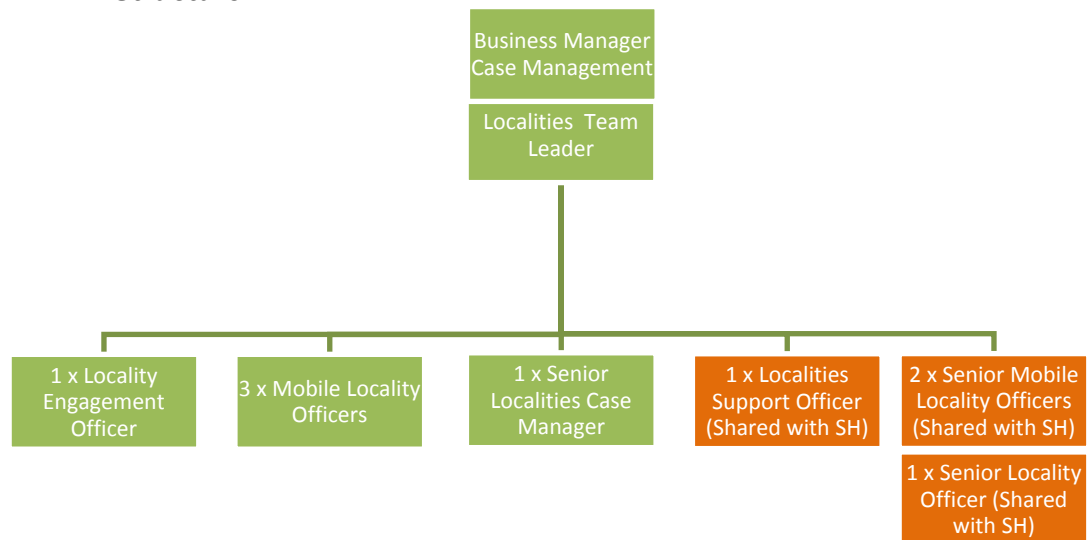
- 1.1 The Localities Team Leader brought a report to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in November 2020, detailing how the Localities Service had been operating in the previous 12 months, and how the service had evolved from initial inception in 2015. In the previous report, the Team Leader set out future 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 and a 12-monthly report.
- 1.2 The Localities Team acts as a liaison and support service providing information and support to Members, multi-agency partners, residents and officers on a wide range of resident-facing 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 six years. The Service continues to evolve, responding to changing priorities and covers service elements previously covered by a number of departments across the Council. The range of services and support delivered by the Localities Team continues to be well received both within the Council and by residents and partners.
- 1.4 In the past year, a review of the West Devon Locality Service was carried out by a West Devon Task & Finish Group. While there were minimal wholesale changes to the structure, there has been more support and a clear escalation route with the introduction of the Senior Mobile Locality Officers.

2. Background

- 2.1 The following background 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 that undertakes work on behalf of a number of services across the Council. The model has now diversified with the addition of officers shared between the Council and South Hams District Council. The model allows the locality officers to have more support, a clear point of escalation and further administrative support to allow the Team to be out in the community for more time than ever before. The current structure is set out paragraph 2.1.4 below.
 - 2.1.2 With the Covid-19 pandemic, the Localities Team have been at the forefront of many of the priority tasks that have been required of the Council, including carrying out many activities to support the communities in their time of need. The localities team have also been involved in some of the statutory duties which have been required of local authorities including Covid-19 compliance visits, and have provided an essential support to the Covid Compliance Officers.
 - 2.1.3 There has been a change of personnel within the Localities Team Leader position as of August 2021, and the new Team Leader is looking to focus on efficiencies within the Service and how we can fine-tune our processes to ensure we continue to improve, respond effectively to changing priorities and provide a value for money and efficient service.

2.1.4 Structure



2.2 Mobile Locality Officers

There are three 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 (see below) and receive dedicated training to help them fulfil their roles. Mobile Locality Officers are issued their workload on a daily basis predominantly via 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.

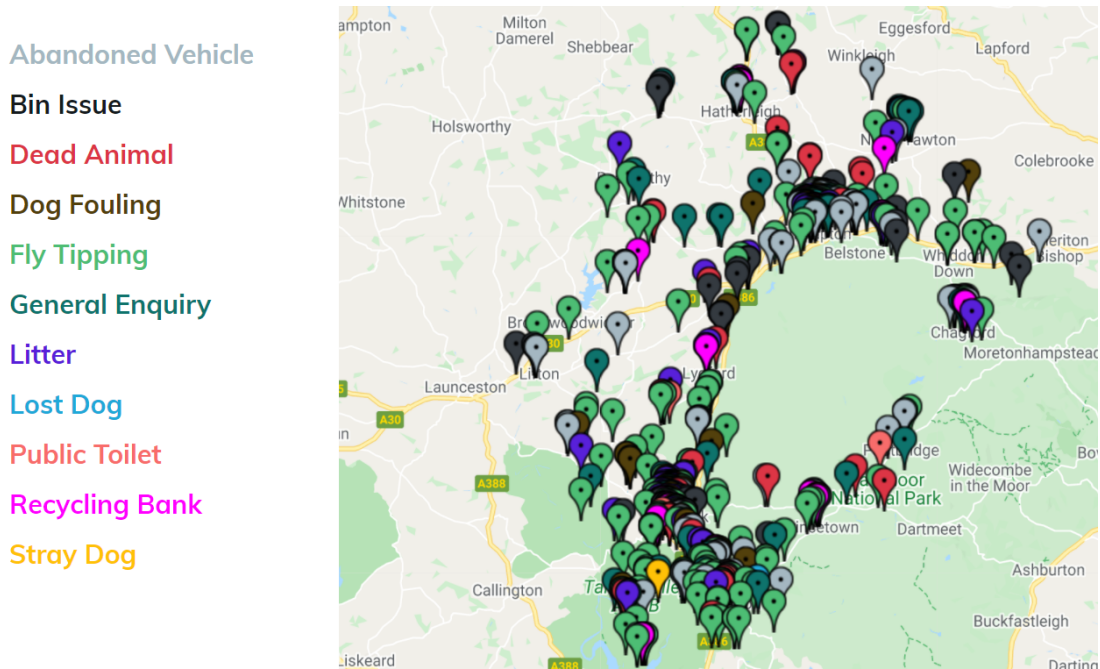
2.2.1 Mobile Locality Officer Tasks

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. Council asset 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

- r. Assist in facilitating events in the area

The below map shows the variety, scope and spread of some of the work the Mobile locality officers carry out. This map shows the work from the start of 2021 up until the start of September 2021.



- 2.2.2 It is important to note that many of the tasks undertaken by Mobile Locality Officers were previously undertaken by a range of specialist officers in the Council 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.
- 2.2.3 The workload of Mobile Locality Officers is ever growing and evolving. The addition of the shared localities support officer has allowed the Mobile officers to do what they do best and spend more time out in the Borough whilst allowing the senior localities case manager to coordinate an efficient and planned approach with the varied and multiple tasks of which the localities service provide.
- 2.2.4 When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the localities team were able to adapt to changing demands. The team helped with tasks from many different services within the Council and the local communities, working closely with Members to reach those most vulnerable in their time of need.
- 2.3 **Locality Engagement Officers**
There is currently one Locality Engagement Officer (LEO) covering West Devon. The LEO's role is to provide a point of contact to members and residents and provides an increased level of outreach to the community.
- 2.3.1 **Locality Engagement Officer Tasks**
Types of tasks undertaken by the LEO:

- 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 on the Council's systems and dealing with customer correspondence through a variety of methods, appropriate to the customer and specifics of the case.
- e. Working closely with Mobile Locality Officers to find solutions to long standing/complex cases
- f. 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 Team is 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. The Team Leader manages a locality team of 15 staff across both authorities with the assistance of the Senior Localities Case Manager who works equally across both authorities. The main purpose of these roles is to lead, manage and motivate a team of staff in the Localities Team and ensure effective deployment of resources.

2.4.1 There has been a change of Localities Team Leader as of August 2021 as the previous team leader has changed roles within the authority. The new team leader is focusing on efficiencies within the service and how we can fine-tune the processes we follow to ensure best value for money and providing a more streamlined, efficient service.

2.4.2 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, Neighbourhood Planning and Trees.

2.5 **Senior Mobile Localities Officers**

There are two Senior Mobile Locality Officers who split their time between South Hams and West Devon. These officers are paid a Level 7 salary and they are shared between the two authorities. The Senior Mobile Locality officers are experienced officers who are able to provide support to the Level 8 officers and are also able to take on more complex cases. They provide a defined escalation route for difficult cases which require resolution. They also provide support to the Level 7 officers and are able to carry out joint visits when there is a need to do so.

2.5.1 **Senior Mobile Localities Officer Tasks**

Types of tasks undertaken by the Senior Mobile Localities Officer:

- a. Act as a point of escalation and provide field based support for Mobile Locality Officers

- b. Lead on resolving complex issues within the communities
- c. Help coordinate and deliver locality project and priority work
- d. Investigate complex fly-tipping and environmental crime cases
- e. Carry out joint patrols
- f. Lead on targeted engagement with residents and businesses

3. Performance

3.1 In the past year the West Devon Locality Team delivered the following:

- a. Undertook over 70 routine public toilet inspections (Many toilets were closed or at reduced capacity due to pandemic)
- b. Undertook 37 routine bottle bank inspections.
- c. Affixed over 750 planning notices and delivered over 4000 neighbour notifications
- d. Dealt with 90 abandoned vehicles
- e. Have investigated and collected/reported for collection 334 Fly-tips with 210 follow up visits.
- f. Carried out 256 private water quality supply tests
- g. Visited 179 potentially empty properties
- h. Carried out 17 Periodic Housing inspections on Council-let properties

3.1.2 In addition to the above tasks, there have also been a significant number of further tasks which the Mobile Localities Officers have been required to carry out due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of these are listed below:

- a. Food parcel deliveries as required for vulnerable members of the community. Also ensuring supermarket deliveries are accessible to those in vulnerable categories.
- b. Covid-19 compliance visits on behalf of PHE & in conjunction with DCC.
- c. Welfare and outreach – reaching out to the vulnerable in the community.
- d. Carried out welfare visits at identified addresses and making safeguarding calls to residents who had been flagged to the team.
- e. Delivering office equipment to members of staff to allow them to work at home throughout the lockdown periods.
- f. Support local businesses and opening up after lockdown periods giving Covid advice and helping them to access available government funding
- g. Delivery of key PPE to different Council departments across the Borough.

3.2 The LEO has undertaken a variety of engagement events, working within Covid guidelines to ensure we still reach out to residents within difficult operational times. Some of these are listed below:

- a. Engagement and outreach at Waitrose store in Okehampton
- b. Outreach engagement event with residents at Livewell property in Tavistock
- c. Okehampton agricultural association show 2021
- d. Chagford community event
- e. Eco Fair, Okehampton

The LEO was also involved in the pre-election health and safety assessments at various locations around the Borough. She was also heavily involved in the Covid response and continues to visit towns to engage with businesses on

Covid compliance and secure practices assisting the Borough and safely welcoming back shoppers and visitors to the area.

- 3.3 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic certain engagement activities have been placed on hold by the organisers. The LEO has managed to still attend the above events and provide outreach to residents within the Borough, a task that should not go un-noticed.
- 3.4 As well as carrying out engagement work, the LEO also assists with locality based enquiries. She also takes ownership of any formal complaints relating to the waste contract, and works with residents and the contractors to resolve these.

4. FUTURE LOCALITY SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS

- 4.1 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 are involved with nearly every service area, and are able to re-prioritise their workload at short notice to provide support wherever it is most needed. The main aim of the Localities service is to ensure that resources are best allocated to align with Council priorities and in the coming months the team will be undertaking a wide range of routine activities in support of departments such as Planning, Waste and Environmental Health, as well as undertaking specific larger scale tasks for departments such as Elections and Revenues and Benefits.

The focus for the next 12 months will be to continue to improve our internal working processes to ensure we have the capacity to meet the ever increasing demand on the Team's resources.

We have introduced vehicle tracking which enables us to better understand the areas of demand the officers are faced with. This should also allow us to better plan the workload, driving efficiencies and productivity. This also provides an added benefit of safety for the officers as we are able to see their locations at all times.

We are looking at how we can improve the amount of foresight going forward to allow a more proactive service and to allow us to better plan the workload of each officer whilst still allowing the reactive element of the role to thrive. This is a task that the new Team Leader will oversee and develop with assistance from the Senior Localities Case Manager. We are also looking to establish tasks which can be shared among different services, to reduce un-needed travel and reduce our carbon footprint.

There have also been discussions about the practicalities of the MLO's using electric vehicles to reduce fuel costs and the environmental impact of their role. Further work is currently being done to understand the challenges and feasibility of such a programme and how this can help achieve net-zero aims.

We will be focusing on ensuring the team are best placed to support the delivery of corporate priorities as set out in "A Plan for West Devon", particularly those relating to rural poverty and providing high quality services.

5. 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