



# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

2020 – 2021



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West Devon  
Borough Council

# Foreword from the Committee Chairman



**Cllr Mandy Ewings**

Chairman of  
West Devon  
Borough Council  
Overview and  
Scrutiny Panel  
2020-21

West Devon  
Borough Council  
Member for  
Tavistock South West

Cllr Mandy Ewings

# Introduction

**We are pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report which outlines our work during the 2020–21 Municipal Year and which provides general information on the Overview and Scrutiny function at West Devon Borough Council.**

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the democratic decision-making process in local councils, where Committee Members can contribute to shaping Council policy, community wellbeing and accountability. This is done by reviewing and making recommendations for improvement to Council services and policies, community issues and key decisions.

The four key principles of Overview and Scrutiny are:

- Provides a ‘critical friend’ challenge to executive policy makers and decision-makers;
- Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard;
- Is carried out by ‘independent minded Members’ who lead and own the scrutiny role; and
- Drives improvement in public services.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members consider these principles when selecting topics to investigate whether it is holding the Hub Committee to account, reviewing policies, policy development or the scrutiny of external bodies.

The Council recognises the importance of the overview and scrutiny function in its governance arrangements and officer support and has established an Overview and Scrutiny Committee that consists of 15 Members. Since almost half of the total membership of the Council serves on the Committee, it is recognised as a powerful and influential Member Body.

The Council’s governance arrangements continued to specify that all 31 Members of the Council were considered to be either a Hub Committee Member (of which there are 9); a Member of the Audit Committee (of which there are 7); or a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (of which there are 15).

The lead officers who were supporting the Overview and Scrutiny function during the 2010/20 Municipal Year were the Council’s Deputy Chief Executive; the Democratic Services Manager and the Democratic Services Specialist.



# Panel Membership

The Committee membership for 2020/21 was as follows:



Cllr Mandy Ewings  
Chairman



Cllr Patrick Kimber  
Vice-Chairman



Cllr Tim  
Bolton



Cllr Andy  
Coulson



Cllr Peter  
Crozier



Cllr Lynn  
Daniel



Cllr Nicky  
Heyworth



Cllr Steve  
Hipsey



Cllr Clare  
Kemp



Cllr Diana  
Moyse



Cllr Robin  
Musgrave



Cllr Barry  
Ratcliffe



Cllr Terry  
Southcott



Cllr James  
Spettigue



Cllr Lucy  
Wood

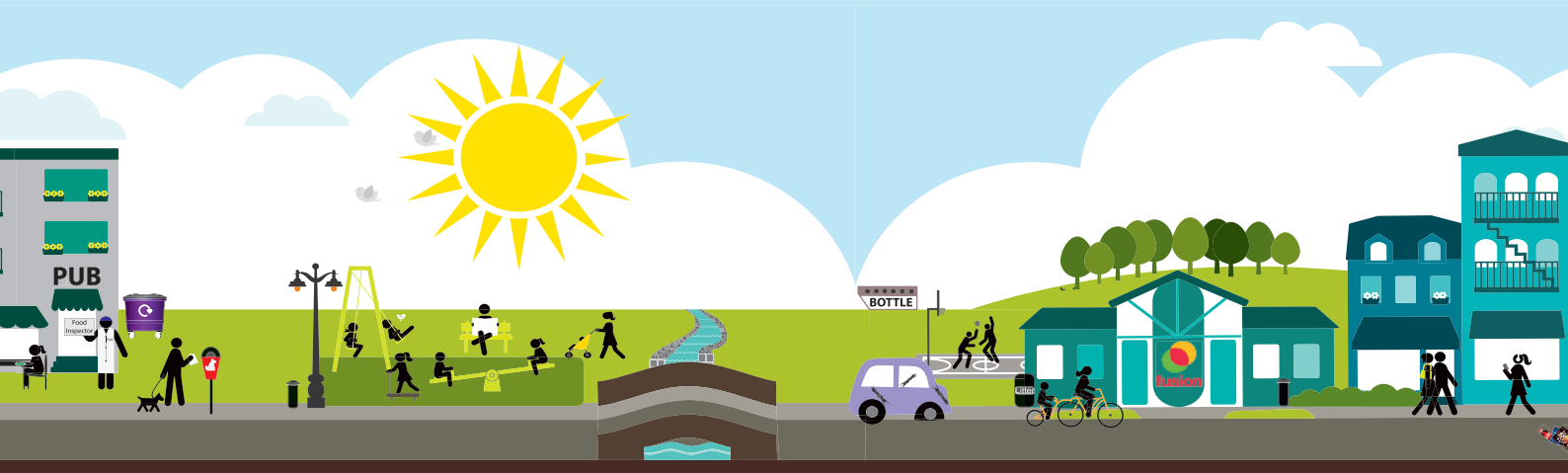
# The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the Council's political structure and it plays a vital role in improving the services that people of the Borough use – whether a resident, employed here or just visiting. Overview and Scrutiny does not just look at the way the Council does things, it can look at anything which affects the lives of people within the Borough and it allows citizens to have a greater say in Council matters.

Overview and Scrutiny allows Members to review and scrutinise decisions, look at existing practices and make recommendations to help ensure the residents of West Devon receive excellent services. The overall aim is to ensure overview and scrutiny adds value to the Council's decision-making process and makes a positive contribution towards policy development.

The approved terms of reference and procedure rules for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be found at: Part 3 – Delegation Scheme; and Part 4 – Rules of Procedure of the Council Constitution. The Council Constitution can be accessed via the following link:

[www.westdevon.gov.uk/article/3691/Our-Constitution](http://www.westdevon.gov.uk/article/3691/Our-Constitution)



# Agenda Items – Corporate Strategy (‘A Plan for West Devon’)

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met formally on eight separate occasions during the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

In considering its work programme, the Committee gave great emphasis to the Council’s Corporate Strategy (the recently adopted ‘A Plan for West Devon’) and the eight strategic themes, which are shown in the image alongside this text.

The Committee has consequently received a number of reports (and made a number of recommendations) which are linked to these strategic themes. Whilst it is acknowledged that a number of these cut across several themes, for the purpose of this Annual Report, they are aligned to the theme that is considered the most relevant.



## Strengthening our communities

An area that our communities can be proud of



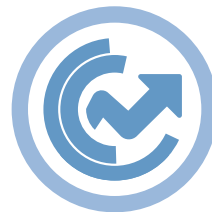
## Enhancing community wellbeing

Every resident is able to live a healthy and active life



## Improving homes

Every resident has access to a quality and safe home



## Stimulating a thriving economy

A Borough that attracts high quality employment opportunities and space for business to grow



## Growing our natural environment

An environment where people and nature thrive together



## Adapting our built environment

Planning for the future, celebrating the past



## Maximising Council resources

Making the best use of our resources



## Delivering inclusive and accessible services

A listening, accessible and caring council

# Strengthening our communities

## An area that our communities can be proud of



Item	Issue
<p><b>Member Locality Fund Review</b></p>	<p>The Committee was presented with a report that considered the progress of the Council's three main Community Funding Schemes: the Member Locality Fund; the Seamoor Lotto; and Crowdfunding and sought the views of Members on the effectiveness of them to date.</p> <p>In debate, Members stated their support for each of these schemes and proceeded to RESOLVE that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the success of the Community Funding Schemes during 2019/20 be noted;</li> <li>2. officers be recommended to produce a user guide that supported and promoted the benefits of the Schemes; and</li> <li>3. all Members be encouraged to promote the existence of these Schemes amongst their local Community Groups and town and parish councils.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Locality Service – Annual Report</b></p>	<p>The Committee considered an annual report that outlined how the Localities Service had been operating in the previous twelve months and how the Service had evolved from its initial inception in 2015.</p> <p>In the ensuing debate, a number of Members expressed their support for the Service and it was subsequently RESOLVED that the Committee endorses continuation of the Locality Model pending ongoing monitoring and a further report being presented to the Committee in November 2021.</p>
<p><b>Consultation &amp; Engagement Strategy Task and Finish Group Review</b></p>	<p>In response to a specific request, the Committee had agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group with the objective of developing a Consultation &amp; Engagement Strategy.</p> <p>The Group met on five separate occasions and provided regular update reports to the Committee. The review culminated in a concluding report being presented to the Committee meeting during March 2021 at which a draft Consultation &amp; Engagement Strategy was recommended for approval. The Strategy was then ultimately adopted by Full Council at its meeting held on 30 March 2021.</p>

Item	Issue
Localities & Clusters Task and Finish Group Review	<p>A Task and Finish Group review was carried out during 2020/21 that considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>options for future partnerships to support the voluntary and community sector;</li> <li>a review into the Locality Officer role;</li> <li>the approach to enforcement and tackling environmental crime;</li> <li>a review into the community clustering arrangements; and</li> <li>a review into the current tasks and roles of both the Locality Engagement and Mobile Locality Officers.</li> </ul> <p>Having considered the concluding report from the Review, the Committee RECOMMENDED to the Hub Committee that the Business Manager for Case Management (in consultation with the lead Hub Committee Member):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>carries out a review of the Locality Service structure in order to deliver the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental Protection Officers being incorporated into the Localities Service;</li> <li>The formalising of closer working relations between the Localities, Parking Enforcement and Waste teams; and</li> <li>Shared officers being introduced to improve the flexibility to meet team demands; and</li> </ul> </li> <li>drafts a new Locality Team structure to support part 1 of the recommendation which will ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clearly defined roles that support the delivery of scheduled tasks and the work of community groups, developing Service Level Agreements where necessary; and</li> <li>improved office based and field support for mobile officers.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

## Enhancing community wellbeing

Every resident is able to live a healthy and active life



Item	Issue
Community Safety Partnership (CSP)	<p>In line with statutory requirements, the Committee considered its annual update from the CSP and raised a number of issues that were to be taken forward. Particular focus in the debate was paid to: the upward trend in instances of radicalisation and extremist behaviour; the annual funding contribution from the Borough Council; and County Lines operations and instances of anti-social behaviour.</p>



Item	Issue
<b>Safeguarding – Annual Update</b>	<p>The Committee considered the annual review of Safeguarding and proceeded to “RESOLVE that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the Committee continue to review Safeguarding on an annual basis;</li> <li>2. the Hub Committee RECOMMEND to Council that the revised Safeguarding Policy be adopted; and</li> </ol>
<b>Fusion Leisure – Annual Report 2020</b>	<p>When presenting their Annual Report for 2020, the Fusion representatives highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• their gratitude for the support provided by the Council during the Pandemic;</li> <li>• the Centres would be re-opened in line with COVID Government guidelines;</li> <li>• their acceptance that there was a need to improve their communications strategy with both the Council and its customers; and</li> <li>• a staff restructure had been undertaken;</li> <li>• Financial projections were currently being developed for 2021/22.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee proceeded to RESOLVE that the contents of the 2020 Annual Report and the proposals for 2021 be welcomed.</p>



## Improving homes

Every resident has access to a quality and safe home

Item	Issue
<b>Livewest</b>	<p>The Livewest Chief Executive provided a presentation to the Committee that focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A brief history of the organisation;</li> <li>• Development activity within the organisation; and</li> <li>• The Customer Service ethos of the organisation.</li> </ul> <p>In the ensuing discussion, reference was made to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the supply and demand for rental housing in the Borough;</li> <li>• the Council’s draft Housing Strategy;</li> <li>• high insulation standards;</li> <li>• customer satisfaction levels; and</li> <li>• anti-social behaviour.</li> </ul>

# Stimulating a thriving economy

A Borough that attracts high quality employment opportunities and space for business to grow



Item	Issue
<p><b>Rural Broadband Provision</b></p>	<p>Representatives from Connecting Devon and Somerset; Airband and the lead Devon County Council Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills attended a Committee meeting to provide an update on Rural Broadband Provision in the Borough.</p> <p>Whilst welcoming the progress that was being made in respect of Superfast provision, the meeting still acknowledged that this was of scant consolation to those 2,378 homes or businesses in the area that were currently not planned to be in receipt of such Connectivity. In reply, the representatives informed that they were committed to doing all that they could for these homes and businesses.</p> <p>Such was the significance of this matter, that the Committee requested regular updates throughout the year on the provision of Rural Broadband.</p> <p>During the year, the Committee also received a Briefing on the work of the Sydenham Damerel Community Fibre Partnership and it was hoped that this approach could be used as a template for other areas.</p> <p>The Committee also welcomed the news that funding had been secured by Connecting Devon and Somerset to recruit to an additional post that would be specifically tasked with increasing rural broadband provision.</p>
<p><b>A386 Transport Infrastructure</b></p>	<p>The A386 Transport Infrastructure was a prominent subject matter for the Committee throughout the 2020/21 Municipal Year.</p> <p>Regular contact was held between the lead Devon County Council Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, Development and Waste and the Committee Chairman and during the course of the year, related updates were given on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the progress of the Beeching Reversal Fund Bid;</li> <li>● potential methods of improving cycling infrastructure along the A386;</li> <li>● the need to improve the dialogue between the Borough Council and the Dartmoor National Park Authority on the proposals;</li> </ul>
<p><b>Economy Working Group Update</b></p>	<p>During its update, the Working Group made reference to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the aim to facilitate a roundtable business meeting with local representatives to ascertain whether there was anything that the Council could do to support businesses in these incredibly difficult times; and</li> <li>● work being ongoing to develop a 'click and collect' service in Tavistock.</li> </ul>

# Growing our natural environment

An environment where people and nature thrive together



Item	Issue
<b>Verbal Update on the Work of the Climate Change &amp; Biodiversity Working Group</b>	The Committee received a verbal update and RESOLVED that the update on the work of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Working Group towards the development of a Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan be welcomed.

# Adapting our built environment

Planning for the future, celebrating the past



Item	Issue
<b>Joint Local Plan: Verbal Update</b>	In light of concerns being raised over the contents of the draft Planning White Paper, it was noted that the Joint Local Plan (JLP) Partnership Board had supported the concept of a collective response being sent on behalf of all 3 partner authorities (West Devon Borough Council; South Hams District Council; and Plymouth City Council) as part of the consultation exercise.
<b>Planning and Planning Enforcement Review – Service Improvement Plan</b>	As part of the update received by the Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It was clarified that all aspects of the planning process were to be reviewed, along with the enforcement service;</li> <li>● Some frustrations were expressed over the delays in determining planning applications;</li> <li>● Members noted the upward trend in planning applications being received by the Council.</li> </ul>



# Maximising Council resources

## Making the best use of our resources

Item	Issue
<b>Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter 2020</b>	<p>The Committee reviewed the Ombudsman Annual Letter for 2020 and welcomed the ongoing improved performance in respect of dealing with customer complaints. In addition, officers committed to giving further consideration to the current position whereby local Ward Member(s) were currently not made aware of complaints to the Ombudsman that were pertinent to their local areas.</p>
<b>Revenue Budget Proposals 2020/21</b>	<p>As part of the draft 2021/22 Budget Setting process, the Committee requested that its support for the following views be taken into account:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the proposed increase in Council Tax for 2021/22 of £5 (Band D of £241.63 for 2021/22 – an increase of 10 pence per week or £5 per year – equating to a 2.11% increase);</li> <li>2. approval of the financial pressures amounting to £434,000;</li> <li>3. the net contributions to/from Earmarked Reserves of £42,500;</li> <li>4. the proposed use of £192,772 of New Homes Bonus funding to fund the 2021/22 Revenue Budget;</li> <li>5. the savings of £344,200; and</li> <li>6. the noting of the further business case to be received on Partnership Funding for the Community Safety Partnership.</li> </ol>
<b>Corporate Key Performance Indicators</b>	<p>Committee Members considered a report that presented a high level overview of performance across the Council and subsequently RESOLVED that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The performance figures shown in the Pentana report be noted; and</li> <li>2. Members have reviewed the information provided in the performance dashboards and provided feedback to the lead Hub Committee Member on any additional measures required to scrutinise performance.</li> </ol>

# Delivering inclusive and accessible services

A listening, accessible and caring council



Item	Issue
Future IT Project	<p>In considering an update report on the Future IT project, the Committee made reference to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● the manner in which the Council had been able to successfully adjust its working practices in light of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic being to the great credit of the IT service; and</li><li>● one of the key aspects of the Future IT Project being to improve the customer experience (and functionality) of the Council website.</li></ul> <p>The Committee then RESOLVED that the progress of both the Future IT Project and the evaluation of risks be noted.</p>

## Agenda Items – Public Forum

In line with its openness and transparency agenda, the Council has adopted provision for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to set aside 15 minutes at the start of each meeting to enable members of the public to raise issues and/or questions in line with its Procedure Rules.

The Public Forum was not utilised during 2020/21.

# The COVID-19 Pandemic

The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic was the most significant issue considered by the Committee during 2020/21. From the uncharted territory of remote meetings to consideration of an amended Budget for 2020/21, the Pandemic dominated the Committee's Work Programme.

Pandemic related issues considered by the Committee included:

## The Council's Response to the Pandemic:

The Committee debated in great detail the Council's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and highlighted that:

- The work of the Community Response Team that had been formed in response to the Pandemic had been outstanding;
- The quality of the community leadership role undertaken by local town and parish councils having been varied;
- Great credit should be paid to the work of the Council and its officers and Members during the Pandemic. In discussion, several examples of officers and Members going the extra mile to maintain service delivery were highlighted to the meeting and particular credit was paid to those officers who had been involved in the payment of Discretionary Grants to local businesses

The meeting recognised the unprecedented challenges that had been faced by the Council and its residents and businesses and recommended to the Hub Committee to 'note and endorse the Council's response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic to date and thank and congratulate the Parish and Town Councils and other Community Groups for their response and actions to the COVID-19 Pandemic.'

This recommendation was subsequently approved by the Hub Committee.

## The Draft Recovery and Renewal Plan:

At both its June 2020 and September 2020 meetings, the Committee paid detailed consideration to the Council's draft Recovery and Renewal Plan which it was accepted would form the basis of a new Council Corporate Strategy. Particular issues that were raised included:

- The important role that is played by local Members within their local communities. The importance of the Plan utilising the local knowledge and expertise of all Members was emphasised;
- The need for a key objective to be included in the Plan in relation to Rural Broadband Provision;
- The importance of supporting communities to lead on initiatives to increase local resilience;
- The importance of both Health and Wellbeing and the Climate Change and Biodiversity agenda underpinning every aspect of the draft Plan; and
- The need for improved information sharing between partner organisations was recognised.

At the end of its deliberations, the Committee proceeded to RECOMMEND to the Hub Committee to:

1. note the Council's continuing response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic;
2. note the outputs of the Member Workshops;
3. note progress on the development of the Recovery and Renewal Action Plan ('the Plan');
4. delegate authority to the Group Leaders, in consultation with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to nominate Members to serve on the Task and Finish Groups;
5. take into account the conclusions of the Committee on the Plan; and
6. request that a further update on progress against the development and delivery of the Plan be presented back to a future meeting of the Committee.

## Amended 2020/21 Draft Budget Proposals

Such had been the impact of the Pandemic that the Committee considered a report that sought to recommend a series of options in order to produce an amended Revenue Budget for 2020/21.

The Committee had debated the proposals and concluded by recommending that the Hub Committee RECOMMEND to Council that:

1. five options totalling £501,000 (as summarised below) be approved in order to produce an Amended Revenue Budget for 2020/21:
  - use the third tranche of COVID-19 funding received from Central Government (£89,000);
  - use the New Burdens Government Grant funding received for the administration of the Business Rates Grants (£130,000);
  - utilise the 2019-20 Statement of Accounts underspend (£133,000);
  - allocate the uncommitted New Homes Bonus from 2020/21 to further fund the Revenue Base Budget (£69,000); and
  - reduce the Capital Budget for the Remedial Works to the Tavistock Viaduct from £100,000 to £20,000 (£80,000).
2. it be noted that the future capacity of Reserves may have to be called upon to meet any future financial challenges and/or additional requirements; and
3. £75,000 be used from the Business Rates Retention Earmarked Reserve to fund the Town Centre Support Initiative that is set out in Section 6 of the published agenda report

These recommendations were ultimately approved by Full Council at its meeting held on 22 September 2020.

# The 2021-22 Work Programme

**The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the ability to set its own annual work programme and it is acknowledged that sufficient flexibility is built in to enable for items to be included at short notice.**

However, at the time of preparing this Annual Report, the following substantive agenda items have already been included as part of the 2021/22 Work Programme:

- Climate Change and Biodiversity Action Plan: Six-Monthly Review;
- Planning and Planning Enforcement Improvement Plan;
- Devon Homes Choice;
- Lamerton Community Housing Programme;
- Review of Localities: Annual Report;
- Community Safety Partnership;
- 'A Plan for West Devon' – reviews of the Thematic Delivery Plans;
- Draft Budget Setting Proposals 2022/23;
- Fusion Leisure Annual Report;
- Livewest Presentation, and
- Rural Broadband Provision.