

WEST DEVON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



West Devon
Borough
Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **West Devon Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday, 17th January, 2023** at **2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Ewings
Vice Chairman Cllr Kimber

Cllr Daniel	Cllr Heyworth
Cllr Kemp	Cllr Moody
Cllr Moyse	Cllr Pearce
Cllr Renders	Cllr Sellis
Cllr Southcott	Cllr Turnbull

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Crozier	Cllr Edmonds
Cllr Jory	Cllr Mott (via Teams)
Cllr Wood (via Teams)	Cllr Yelland (via Teams)

Officers:

Director – Customer Service Delivery
Director – Strategy & Governance
Director – Strategic Finance
Assistant Director – Strategy & Organisational Development (via Teams)
Climate Change Specialist (via Teams)
Customer Service Improvement Manager
Senior Case Manager – Democratic Services

43. **Apologies for Absence**

*O&S 43/22

Apologies for absence for this meeting were received from Cllr Blackman, Cllr Spettigue and Cllr Coulson.

44. **Confirmation of Minutes**

*O&S 44/22

The minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 November 2022 were confirmed as a true and correct record.

45. **Declarations of Interest**

*O&S 45/22

Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of this meeting but there were none made.

46. **Public Forum**

*O&S 46/22

The Chairman confirmed that no formal requests had been received in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

47. **North Devon Biospheres to include water shortages, water pollution prevention and climate change**

*O&S 47/22

Andrew Bell gave an overview of the work undertaken by the North Devon Biosphere, which included:

- 2 UNESCO delegations for world heritage and mining;
- Creating a more sustainable future;
- Working with 34 organisations and working groups covering nature, nature recovery, research, community engagement, catchment management, woodland and forestry, marine and climate change;
- Working with farms to reduce water pollution;
- Turning land back into woodlands to improve carbon neutralisation;
- Solar, wind and energy efficiency.

In response to questions raised, it was reported that:

- They had worked with North Devon and Torridge on their JLP;
- Through a programme of capital investment with DEFRA helping farmers with land not of great agricultural quality to be turned into rough grass and rewilding schemes;
- They were working with farmers to improve soil management;
- DEFRA has a 25 year plan which includes 4 pioneer projects and they worked on 2 of the projects. Changes to be made as a nation, investing in land and sea, such as using seaweed for animal feed, pharmaceuticals, food and plastics and these approaches to becoming a greener economy.

The Chair and Members thanked Andrew for the informative update and welcomed the opportunity to visit the North Devon Biosphere. Members also welcomed the opportunity for the planning team to have discussions with Andrew on the JLP. Further information on North Devon Biospheres: www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the update on the North Devon Biospheres.

48. **Council Delivery against Corporate Theme: Environment**

*O&S 48/22

The Lead Member for Growing our Natural Environment reported that they were pleased with progress made, however some areas slower due to partnership working. EV Charging in West Devon not progressed but have a draft Strategy agreed at working group and then going to Hub and Council.

- Action NE1.1 – Amber – while some of the project is on track to deliver, such as the fleet plan, the grid upgrades, associated charging infrastructure and full fleet to EV is currently at risk of not occurring in full by 2024.
- Action NE1.2 – Amber - slightly off track.
- Action NE1.3 – On track.
- Action NE1.4 – On track.
- Action NE1.5 – Amber - slightly off track.
- Action NE1.6 – On track.
- Action NE1.7 – On track.
- Action NE1.9 – On track.
- Action NE1.10 – On track.

In response to questions raised, it was reported that:

- They were making slow progress on EV points with National Grid not strong enough in parts of West Devon. Also this is a DCC project and they are the providers. An update to all Members to be provided in the Member's bulletin;
- It was not currently practical to have electric refuse lorries in West Devon. This was due the rural locality, higher costs and shorter lifespan of vehicles;
- A 3 weekly collection was trialled pre-Covid and we're waiting for Government to produce their strategy on recycling. We will then look at how we achieve the aims of recycling and residual waste collection at that time;
- They would look at the grass cutting cycle following the hay fever complaint;
- Closed churchyards under the council's responsibility and frequency of grass cutting, there was a need to have a balance on biodiversity and places of grief for people to visit;
- the mapping of eco systems was in collaboration with the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the progress in delivering against the Plan for West Devon 'Environment' Thematic Delivery Plan.

49. **Draft Budget 2023/24**

*O&S 49/22

The Leader of the Council introduced the Draft Budget Proposals.

In so doing, particular reference was made to:

1. The changes as a result of the Local Government Finance Settlement announcement by the Government is as described in section 1.9 of the report;
2. The report set out the proposals for the council to set a balanced budget in 2023/24;
3. The forecast budget deficit in the MTFS of £234k in 2024/25 and £480K in 2025/26.

In response to Member questions, it was reported that:

- It was felt that a target for the council tax collection rate of 98.25% was achievable and comparable with other Devon authorities;
- The garden waste collection subscription charge has not been increased for some time. Residents have a choice – only those that want the service pay for it, meaning reduced cross subsidisation by council tax payers. The increase was comparable with similar services across the region;
- It was debated whether the garden waste collection should be increased to £49 or £52 per annum, to cover the costs of people dropping out and to cover revenue costs;
- The issues of paying for the garden waste collection on-line had now been resolved;
- The advertising of the garden waste collection would be included on the council tax envelope. Other forms of advertising such as on the refuse lorries could be explored;
- The proposals to include a 100% premium on the council tax of second homes/holiday homes is included with the report at section 3.36. The Council will lobby Government to ensure there is no delay with the Bill passing through the legislative timetable and to implement from 1 April 2024 if there are no delays to the Bill receiving Royal Assent in Spring 2023; This is the earliest that this part of the Bill can come into force.
- The use of £150,000 of New Homes Bonus funding in 2023/24 to fund the Revenue Base Budget.

It was then **RESOLVED**:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended a change to:

- v) Increasing the garden waste subscription charge from £49 to £52 per year from April 2023, and to increase the uptake of this service.

The Committee then **NOTED** the content of the Revenue Budget Proposals report for 2023/24:

- i) An increase in Council Tax for 2023/24 of £7.37 (a 2.99% increase) (This would equate to a Band D council tax of £254.00 for 2023/24, which is an increase of 14 pence per week or £7.37 per year);

- ii) The financial pressures shown in Appendix A of £1,928,800;
- iii) The net contributions to/(from) Earmarked Reserves of £(45,567) as shown in Appendix A, including the proposed use of £150,000 from the Business Rates Retention Earmarked Reserve as set out in 3.17 of the report;
- iv) The use of £150,000 of New Homes Bonus funding in 2023/24 to fund the Revenue Base Budget as set out in 3.23 of the report, v) The savings of £1,110,500 as shown in Appendix A;
- v) *Increasing the garden waste subscription charge to £49 per year from April 2023, as set out in Appendix F (see above).*
- vi) 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 (being £700,000 from the Better Care Fund funding from Devon County Council, £160,000 from NHB funding and £50,000 revenue funding from the Vehicles and Plant Earmarked Reserve).
- vii) 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.

50. **Performance Management Report**

*O&S 50/22

The Lead Member for Resources and Performance reported that the Council reports on performance in a number of ways as set out in the performance management framework. This report updates members on performance at the second tier – Service Level Performance.

In response to questions raised, it was reported that:

- They were working through enforcement cases with a new enforcement team. Historic enforcement cases however take up time and resources and were ascertaining whether it was cost effective to pursue;
- They were now accurately reporting missed bins;
- Changes had been to the way calls are dealt with in revs and bens;
- They deal with complaints on a weekly basis and moving forward look at how internal complaints are dealt with;
- It was envisaged that the Committee would receive the Performance Report twice a year.

It was then **RESOLVED**, that the Committee noted:

1. the new suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), present performance and proposals for improvement where detailed, and
2. that further KPIs, presently under development, will be provided at the next six-monthly update.

51. **Task and Finish Group Updates**

*O&S 51/22

An update on the Member Induction was provided and it was reported that:

Pre-Election:

- An all Member Briefing has been arranged on the new Voter ID requirements on 21 February 2023;
- A Prospective Candidates Evening arranged for the evening of Monday 6 March 2023;
- In discussions with Communications regarding the launch of a campaign to promote the candidates evening and standing to be a Borough Cllr.

Post-Election:

- Feedback has been received from all appointed T+F Group Members and incorporated into the latest draft Member Induction Programme for post 4 May;
- The Kings Coronation on 6 May (the day after the Count on 5 May) has led to an additional Bank Holiday Monday on 8 May. It is proposed that the first Induction Day will be on 9 May. The T+F Group has asked that all potential candidates to avoid booking holidays between the formal sign in day on 9 May and the Annual Council meeting on 30 May;
- The Programme will be run alongside the equivalent Programme at South Hams DC and will include provision for certain 'generic' matters (e.g. Health and Safety and Safeguarding) to be carried out jointly. The T+F Group recognises that the Programme should be a blend between face-to-face and remote sessions;
- In developing the Programme want to enabling Members to 'hit the ground running' without providing them with too much information that they simply cannot absorb.'

It was then **RESOLVED** that the Committee note the Member Induction Programme Review update.

52. **Draft O&S Annual Work Programme 2022/23, inc. prep for next meeting**

*O&S 52/22

The draft proposal for the work programme was reviewed. The following amendments to the work programme were agreed as follows:

- The Draft EV Strategy Plan to be scheduled for February;
- To ascertain if a police officer is available to attend the CSP item in February.

53. **Member Learning and Development Opportunities Arising from the Meeting**

*O&S 53/22

There were no learning and development opportunities identified from this meeting.

The Meeting concluded at 4.22 pm

Signed by:

Chairman
