

Report to: **Executive**

Date: **21 September 2023**

Title: **Delivering Strategic Priorities through
Community Services and Operations**

Portfolio Area: **Community Services – Cllr Abbott**

Wards Affected: **All**

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

Date next steps can be taken: Upon the expiry of the call-in period: 5.00pm on Monday, 2 October

Author: **Steve Mullineaux** Role: **Director, Customer Service Delivery**

Marie Quinn **Head of Community Services and Operations**

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Executive:

- 1. Endorses the overall approach to improving Community Services and Operations set out in section 3 of the report.**
- 2. Requests a progress update from the Lead Member in 6 months' time.**
- 3. Notes the opportunity to provide greater support to community groups and volunteers working across the district to deliver better outcomes for their local environment.**
- 4. Requests that the Lead Member for Community Services works with the Lead Member for Community Development to align resources to provide a defined Community Development team and bring a report setting out the Community Development plans to the next Executive meeting.**

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Council has a clear ambition to improve the services delivered to residents and communities.**

- 1.2 Aligning the roles and responsibilities of the team to the emerging corporate priorities is key to delivering this ambition.
- 1.3 Following the transfer of the Waste and Street Cleansing service to the Council in October 2022, there is now an opportunity to align the Street Cleansing service with the Community Services and Operations team to deliver services more effectively.
- 1.4 The service has a key role in supporting the Council's strategic ambitions around climate change and biodiversity.
- 1.5 Aligning Community Services and Operations with emerging corporate priorities will deliver the following outcomes:
 - effective and efficient services for residents and communities.
 - a renewed focus on littering, dog fouling and fly tip enforcement.
 - The potential for closer working with our Parish and Town Councils, community and volunteer groups to further enhance the work they do to improve their local environment.
 - a clear focus on Community Development through a dedicated team.
 - The opportunity to develop a comprehensive apprenticeship programme to provide young people and care leavers with the skills that will address the skills shortages within the service.

2. Background

- 2.1. Following the successful transfer of the waste and street cleansing service back to the Council in September 2022 there was a vacancy in the leadership of the frontline services team.
- 2.2. The frontline services team is made up of 4 distinct areas:
 - Localities Service
 - Grounds Maintenance
 - Property Maintenance
 - Car Parking Enforcement
- 2.3. The team was renamed to reflect the importance of delivering these community-based services and to fill the vacancy in the leadership, a new Head of Community Services and Operations was appointed in April 2023.
- 2.4. **Localities**

2.4.1. The localities team patrol the South Hams carrying out a wide range of operational activity within the community. The service was expanded in 2021 to provide 7 days a week cover between the hours of 07:00 and 20:00.

2.4.2. Key tasks include the following:

- Play Park inspections
- Litter picking
- Dog patrols
- Fly tip investigations and removal
- Management of markets
- Attend environmental nuisance / planning enforcement complaints to gather evidence for the professional officers to assess
- Customer visits to help vulnerable residents complete financial assistance claim forms
- Private water supply quality testing
- Planning notices
- Shellfish testing

2.4.3. In addition to this, the team support Members with advice and carry out the administration of the Members' sustainable locality fund.

2.4.4. It was originally intended the service would provide a community engagement function, however due to the increase in demand for operational services during and immediately following the Covid pandemic, the delivery of this element of the service has been constrained.

2.5. **Grounds maintenance**

2.5.1. The Council operates its own grounds maintenance service, which ensures that parks, closed cemeteries, and amenity areas are kept safe and to a high standard for the benefit of the residents and visitors of the South Hams. The service is key to the Council to delivering its existing target to increase biodiversity, on its own land, by 10% by 2025.

2.5.2. The service is responsible for managing trees on Council land and carries out essential tree maintenance and management.

2.5.3. Following a review in 2020 the service has been successful in securing some external contracts with local Town and Parish Councils.

2.6. **Property maintenance**

- 2.6.1. The Property Maintenance service is responsible for carrying out proactive and reactive maintenance for the Council's property and facilities, this includes:
- Buildings e.g., Follaton House, Public Conveniences
 - Facilities e.g., play parks and their equipment
 - Street furniture e.g., benches
- 2.6.2. The team is made up of skilled and semi-skilled staff carrying out a range of duties including electrical, plumbing, carpentry, building and decorating.
- 2.6.3. Over the course of time, it has become increasingly difficult to retain and attract staff to the team, primarily due to the abundance of building and contractor work in the South Hams.
- 2.6.4. The most recent internal audit report of the Council's Building Maintenance strategy and service reported limited assurance.

2.7. Car parking enforcement

- 2.7.1. The Parking service team, manage the Council car parks, including carrying out enforcement activity.
- 2.7.2. Officers have previously held discussions with Devon County Council to discuss the possibility of aligning on-street and off-street parking enforcement. To date, there is no appetite for DCC to prioritise this.

3. Improving services

- 3.1. The Council is currently developing its new corporate strategy, aligned to the aims and ambitions of the new political administration. The emerging strategy clearly highlights the desire to ensure that the Council's community services are regarded as valuable to the overall 'look and feel' of the South Hams.
- 3.2. Equally, the Council has set out its desire to improve community engagement. A future report to the Executive will set out how the Council will achieve this.
- 3.3. Street cleansing services (which covers toilet cleaning, road sweeping, litter picking and litter/ dog bin emptying) are integral to the 'look and feel' of our communities and as a result of the service being directly under the Council's control there is an opportunity to link this much more closely to the other community services.
- 3.4. The new Head of Community Services and Operations will take a strategic lead for the street cleansing services, (within waste services) ensuring that the delivery of the day-to-day service aligns with the wider community services operational delivery. In the longer-term (9-12 months) we will look to create a single integrated team, which will strengthen delivery even further and potentially

create opportunities for service efficiencies and service enhancements.

- 3.5. Each of the functional service areas currently operate as discreet teams which in the worst case could see numerous staff and vehicles going backwards and forwards to the same location. An example being a car park with public conveniences, which could be visited by a toilet cleaner, a street cleansing operative emptying litter bins, a car park enforcement officer, and a localities officer. Should any scheduled general maintenance be required – either or both of the grounds and property maintenance teams could be in attendance at the same time. There is a clear opportunity to improve service outcomes and operational efficiency.
- 3.6. This joined up approach will demonstrate to residents and communities the positive impact the Council is having through its delivery of services, whilst supporting delivery of the outcomes set out in 1.5-1.9 and offering demonstrable value for money.
- 3.7. Management arrangements will be aligned to deliver against the corporate ambitions.
- 3.8. The team has a substantial number of skilled roles (as outlined in section 2 of the report). In order to build capacity and resilience into the service we will develop a wider apprenticeship scheme that would provide a development pathway for young people to gain skills that would also be transferrable to the private sector and therefore contribute to the wider South Hams economy.

i) Localities

- 3.9. There is no doubt that the localities team is an established and valued service, patrolling and providing an out-of-hours response during the peak summer season. There is a clear need to focus on delivery of the key tasks highlighted in paragraph 2.4.2 and strengthening our enforcement stance in relation to littering and dog fouling.
- 3.10. Enforcement of individual environmental offences is notoriously difficult due to the evidence required and has been a source of frustration for members and the wider community. The wider use of Community Protection Notices for persistent offences, which can be issued on 'the balance of probabilities', will add to the organisation's 'toolkit' of enforcement options.
- 3.11. This approach should also assess the overall capacity of the service to directly support community engagement as per paragraph 3.2.
- 3.12. Officers intend to complete work within this area over the next 3 months and implement changes before the start of the 2024 summer.

ii) Grounds Maintenance

- 3.13. The Council has emerging ambition with regard to increasing biodiversity across the district including a tree planting programme. As well as managing the existing parks, open spaces and trees on Council land, the grounds maintenance team has a key role to play in achieving these goals.
- 3.14. The team will focus on this area to ensure that there is the capacity and tools to carry out the activities that enhance the South Hams and meet future ambitions for tree planting and biodiversity. In view of this, additional resource has been brought into the Council.
- 3.15. To support the wider ambition with regard to trees, a South Hams and West Devon Tree and Woodland Plan is presently under development. The plan will set out our approach, supported by key partners, for managing trees on our land, on private land and on development sites.
- 3.16. The Council offers a commercial service to towns and parishes. As well as generating a small income it enables the Council to work together with local communities and volunteers to ensure that there is a consistent and joined up approach to managing open spaces. The team already has a successful partnership with Kingsbridge Town Council and Kingsbridge in Bloom which has resulted in several national awards. We will look to build on this success in other parts of the district.
- 3.17. There are also commercial opportunities that could be explored such as providing ground maintenance services for new developments as an alternative to private management companies. These companies often contract out such services to national rather than local businesses and concerns have been expressed about the value for money residents receive as a result of these arrangements.
- 3.18. To realise these opportunities, the Council may need to set up a trading company or similar 'delivery vehicle'. This will be assessed in the next 9-12 months.
- 3.19. Members will be aware that community groups and volunteers already contribute hugely to keeping their local communities clean and tidy through litter pick and similar events. In a recent pilot in Dartmouth, officers from the council worked with voluntary groups to clear litter and improve the streets. It is proposed that officers continue to develop this enabling work with communities to improve their local areas.
- 3.20. Over the course of the next 3-6 months officers will create a service development plan which will set out how the service will achieve the ambitions set out above.

iii) Property Maintenance

- 3.21. The latest internal audit report is critical of the management of property services and raises important questions about the interface between the council's Assets team, responsible for asset management planning, and the Property team, responsible for day-to-day repairs and maintenance. To address these and other issues, officers intend to undertake a comprehensive service review.
- 3.22. The review will consider workload, the type of work needed - based on an asset management plan currently being developed - and wider opportunities including supporting communities and commercial initiatives.
- 3.23. The outcome will then be mapped against existing skills, resources, and vacancies to identify the skills, roles and structure to deliver an improved service.
- 3.24. The review will be completed within the next 6 months, although the delivery of the actions from the review will undoubtedly take longer to complete.

iv) Car Parking Enforcement

- 3.25. Currently the car parking function is split across 2 directorates with the Council's Assets team holding responsibility for car parking strategy such as pricing and service development. It is proposed to combine this within the Community Services and Operations team which is where the day-to-day management of the car parks takes place in order to create a single integrated team.
- 3.26. A recent review of working hours of the car parking enforcement team has taken place to provide a service between 07:00 and 20:00. This is currently being assessed to identify whether the anticipated benefits are being realised.
- 3.27. Officers will revisit the business case for combining on-street and off-street parking and will be engaging with Devon County Council Directors to establish a trial area within the South Hams.

4. Financial Summary

- 4.1. It is planned to complete the above improvements within the existing budgets. Should there be any additional financial implications then a further report will be presented by the lead member to the Executive.

5. Risks

- 5.1. Failure to carry out the proposed improvements outlined in section 3 will result in the Council failing to deliver its corporate strategy

and therefore fail to meet residents' and the community's expectations.

- 5.2. Residents' expectations are continuing to increase and should the services not improve it will lead to resident and community dissatisfaction.
- 5.3. Implementing change carries risk and to mitigate this it's proposed that a monthly project board with the Director of Customer Service Delivery, Lead Member and relevant officers will review progress against planned actions.

6. Recommendations

Executive:

- 6.1. Endorses the overall approach to improving Community Services set out in section 3 of the report.
- 6.2. Requests a progress update from the Lead Member in 6 months' time.
- 6.3. Notes the opportunity to provide greater support to community groups and volunteers working across the district to deliver better outcomes for their local environment.
- 6.4. Asks the Lead Member for Community Services to work with the Lead Member for Community Development to align resources to provide a defined Community Development team. A report setting out the Community Development plans will be brought to the next Executive meeting.

7. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	N	None at this time.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	N	The financial implications of the report are set out in section 4 (Financial Summary) of the report.
Risk	Y	See Section 5 (Risks) for a summary of the key risks.
Supporting	Y	Community Services

Corporate Strategy		Community Development
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	Y	Fundamental in achieving the Council's Biodiversity target of a 10% net gain by 2025
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

Background Papers:

None