

**REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL**

A meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel was held on Wednesday 21 February 2024.

**PRESENT:** Councillors I Blades (Chair), D Coupe (substitute for L Hurst), J Ewan, B Hubbard (substitute for I Morrish), J Kabuye, L Lewis (as substitute for N Hussain)

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** A Wagstaff, Assistant Director Planning, South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council (virtual attendance)

**OFFICERS:** S Lightwing and P Clarke

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** were submitted on behalf of Councillors N Hussain, S Hill, L Hurst, D Jackson, I Morrish and J Ryles

23/46 **WELCOME AND EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and read out the Building Evacuation Procedure.

23/47 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

23/48 **MINUTES - REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL - 17 JANUARY 2024**

The minutes of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 17 January 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

Page 3, paragraph 6, last sentence to be deleted.

23/49 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

The Chair provided a verbal update on items considered at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 7 February 2024.

23/50 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 20 March 2024 at 10.00 am.

23/51 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

None.

23/52 **PLANNING CAPACITY REVIEW**

The Assistant Director Planning at South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council was in virtual attendance at the meeting to provide information in relation to shared services.

The two Councils had worked together since 2006 and delivered a wide range of services, including planning, for residents and businesses across south west Devon in a shared service partnership.

South Hams and West Devon were separate Local Authorities with their own budgets but with a joint pool of staff and a single Chief Executive. West Devon was a relatively small authority with South Hams being much larger and therefore there were some recharge rates between the two to ensure service provision was fair and equitable.

Across the shared service approximately 75 members of staff were employed which included officers for conservation, planning policy, business and enforcement. Outside of the Assistant

Director's remit, but also shared across the three authorities, the Urban Fringe Delivery Team worked with the planning services to support the delivery of large and complex sites within the Plymouth Urban Fringe and employed 7 members of staff.

With the initial delivery of the shared service, planning services were hit hard in terms of the numbers of staff employed. However, over the past three years there had been more investment into planning services – including the Assistant Director appointment. Some new posts had been brought in, with extra investment to bring planning back up to speed. Careful consideration had to be given regarding cutting jobs versus operational needs when moving to a shared service. Whilst it was important to deliver savings, it was also vital to meet operational requirements.

Following a review by the Planning and Advisory Service (PAS), the Assistant Director Planning had taken up post fourteen months ago and capacity within the service had been increased with council specific posts for Head of Development and Head of Enforcement for each authority.

South Hams had a Development Management Committee for determining planning applications and West Devon had a Development Management and Licensing Committee.

Whilst each Council had its own Planning Policy Officers, there was a joint team for the Joint Local Plan. The Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan covered the administrative areas of Plymouth City, South Hams District and West Devon Borough and formed part of the Development Plan for these areas. It was created by all three Councils and adopted by each one in 2019. The Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which provided guidance on the implementation of the Local Plan was also adopted and shared by the three authorities as well as other documents such as the Climate Emergency Planning Statement.

With regard to cohesion across the three areas there was an inter-relationship and cross boundaries. There was a demand for housing generated by Plymouth and new urban extensions were needed. This meant that South Hams was able to focus less on housing areas. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty were also included, so fringe areas could be used for development as they were less sensitive. A policy decision on the Joint Local Plan was that development would be focused in market towns and sustainable villages in the first instance. However, there was knock-on impact as development happened. People had become more reliant on home working and some of the smaller places had suffered by the lack of development in them. It was therefore a challenge as to whether there should be more growth towards the smaller towns to increase sustainability.

South Hams and West Devon each had their own Constitutions with Schemes of Delegation that mirrored each other. Both Councils had different enforcement strategies but endeavoured to take the same approach.

Serving the requirements of both planning committees, which generally met around a week apart, was one of the notable difficulties of the shared planning service. The operational requirement of meeting deadlines for publication of agendas and co-ordinating reports was a difficult job. There were also different dynamics and inter relationships with Members at both authorities to manage.

In terms of finance, moving to a shared service with only one Chief Executive had produced a huge amount of cost savings. Being able to move officers around and share the burden of the resources was very useful. In terms of providing development management it was highlighted that the shared service did not make any income from planning fees once all the costs of providing the service were factored in.

A Member asked whether working as a shared service led to more successful bids for government funding for example for road network schemes. The Assistant Director confirmed that the shared service had been very successful in securing project funding and had received £185,000 from the Planning Skills Delivery Fund, which was the second highest amount in the country. The funding was linked into the shared service provision. The Urban Fringe Team was partially funded by Devon County Council. Devon County Council were also the Highway Authority and joint working had also helped target transport funding.

With regard to planning appeals, the shared service tended to do fairly well, with 70%

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dismissed and not a huge amount of costs awards.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director for his attendance at the meeting.

**AGREED** that the information provided was received and noted.