

John Birch

SHDC Member for Totnes

Report to the Totnes Town Council meeting to be held on

Monday 10 June 2024

I report on the following

Peer Review

All councils are expected to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge every 5 years. The Local Government Association undertook the Peer Challenge of South Hams District Council and its shared services partner, West Devon Borough Council in March 2024.

A team of sector specialists spent 4 days on site during which time they spoke to more than 100 people including councillors, external partners, managers and staff. The week concluded with the peer team presenting their initial findings, which have now been developed further in their final report for South Hams. The report in its executive summary stated the following.

"South Hams is a high performing council, which is well led and managed and is delivering consistently well on behalf of its residents and communities.

Following the district elections in May 2023, the political leadership of the council changed; resulting in a Liberal Democrat administration, with a new council leader.

The new administration had a well socialised manifesto ahead of the elections and the officer team supporting the council very wisely used this by quickly and effectively producing a 'risk / RAG rated potential action plan arising from the manifesto, in order to help the new administration to hit the ground running.

The above proactivity has been combined with a clear determination to be as inclusive as possible by drawing on the talent of elected members across all political groups. As one stakeholder told us, which was reflective of other views the peer team heard, 'the new arrangements feel like a breath of fresh air'. This is very much to the credit of the leader, his deputy and indeed the leaders of the other main parties and evidenced by the make-up of the council's Executive"

The report contains several recommendations and the next step is for the council to consider the recommendations and feedback provided and to develop an action plan in response. It is proposed, where appropriate, to

develop the action plan with partners to ensure it reflects the council's shared ambitions and then to incorporate it into the wider Council Plan.

The council intends to publish the report on its website by 22 June 2024 but in any event a copy is available by a link at item 7 of the Executive meeting agenda for the meeting to be held on 6 June 2024 and which is published on the council's website.

Parish Profiles

SHDC recognises that traditional housing needs surveys are only a snapshot of the situation, based on various opinions at a point in time. Furthermore, they can be divisive, and the methodology relied upon does not always reflect the need or the content of other nationally recognised data sources.

SHDC officers have created the Parish Profile – a broader basket of data and information. This easily digestible, short document provides information from secondary data for use by developers, Registered Providers (RP's) and Members on a defined parish. It presents the facts in relation to house sale prices, tenures, availability on Devon Home Choice and numbers of people waiting for housing. It will also have further information on school availability and children on roll in receipt of free school meals.

The data will provide greater understanding of each demographic within a community and where those areas of need are.

Following the Executive meeting to be held on 6 June it is anticipated that the information will be publicly available on the Council website and updated annually.

There is Parish Profile for Totnes and I will arrange for a copy to be sent to the Clerk with a request that it be circulated to all Members of the Council.

Second Homes Council Tax Premium

The second homes council tax premium was discussed with the Mayors and Clerks at a recent meeting between SHDC and town and parish councils.

It was explained that the 100% council tax premium charged from 1 April 2025 will have the effect of increasing the taxbase for Town and Parish Councils.

An approximate figure for Totnes will equate to an extra 70 Band D equivalent properties within the taxbase that will potentially raise an extra £15,000 (70 Band D equivalent properties multiplied by £218.65 Band D council tax)

SHDC will wish to discuss with the Towns and Parishes the principle of ringfencing this extra funding for housing. Below is the bullet point from the report that went to SHDC Council in February 2024:

- *Principle of the additional money raised by second homes premium being invested back into housing to address housing challenges, including to acquire existing properties to provide temporary accommodation, to support people with complex needs and the provision of specialist accommodation with supported facilities for care leavers*

The Towns and Parishes will have a choice. Their taxbase will be increased by the second homes premium and therefore they could ringfence the extra money for a specific purpose (e.g. housing) or to lower their Band D council tax for the years 2025/26.

It is the aspiration of SHDC that all those authorities being in receipt of the additional funding, including Devon County Council work together so as to ensure the additional money raised by the second homes premium be invested back into housing to address our housing challenges being one of SHDC's priorities.

Cllr John Birch
SHDC Member for Totnes
4 June 2024.

