

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 15 October 2015**

#### **Attendance list at end of document**

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 7.33pm.

#### **\*25 Public speaking**

There were no public speakers at this point of the meeting.

#### **\*26 Minute confirmation**

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on the 17 September 2015 were confirmed as a true record.

#### **\*27 Apologies**

In receiving the apologies for the meeting, the Chairman, on behalf of the committee, conveyed his condolences to Councillor Brenda Taylor for the recent sad loss of her husband.

#### **\*28 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were made.

#### **29 Crime and Disorder Update**

The Chairman welcomed Gerry Moore, Anti Social Behaviour and Community Safety Co-ordinator to the meeting. The Committee had received the latest newsletter from the East and Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership, which highlighted:

- The successful Annual Conference
- Stop Abuse for Everyone (SAFE) initiative needing volunteers to complement their existing services for victims of domestic abuse
- Tackling anti-social behaviour across both East and Mid Devon
- Avoiding scams, raising awareness by working with local police neighbourhood teams through delivery of advice packs;
- Protecting property at home with alarmed padlocks and engraving;
- Work with young people on online safety.

Local Action Groups (LAGs) continued to meet regularly and tackle issues at a local level.

Domestic Violence Awareness Week takes place in November, and leaflets were heading out to various outlets covering where anyone can get help. White ribbons were also being worn to signify Males against Domestic Violence. In response to a question about domestic violence against men, the committee were informed that whilst the majority of domestic violence was against women, men are not ignored and there are help sources for all individuals, with resources available both at a national and local level for both sexes.

Partnership working would continue to be impacted as cuts to budgets continued. There had already been significant changes for a number of agencies because of staff resourcing, and the planned cuts for the police service would only add to that problem.

Councillor Tom Wright, as the Council representative on the Police and Crime Panel, outlined the issues currently facing the Police Commissioner. These included continued efforts to improve the 101 telephone service for reporting low level crime, and the Fair Funding campaign looking to retain a fair level of funding to the police force for Devon and

Cornwall. The force was planning on having to find 25% reduction in budget, but could be facing a 40% reduction.

Recent announcements on cuts were discussed in terms of impact on delivery of the police service, including closure of police stations and the impact a dramatic budget subsidy would have on the deployment of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). A 25% budget reduction may lead to a 60% reduction in the number of PCSOs; 40% budget reduction may lead to a complete cut of PCSOs.

The Chairman echoed the sentiments of the committee in his praise of the work both of Gerry Moore and the PCSOs in the District. The loss of PCSOs would have a dramatic impact on the District, with a local example given of the quality of the PCSO at Ottery St Mary.

### **RECOMMENDED**

That Cabinet recommends to Council that it conveys to the Home Secretary that the proposed cuts for the police service would severely impact on Police Community Support Officers and other front line staff must be resisted; and raise the issue with the local Members of Parliament

### **30 Asset Management Forum**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Geoff Pook, Chairman of the Asset Management Forum (AMF), for discussion on this item.

Council had agreed for this committee to consider a motion put by Councillor Ben Ingham to look at a more transparent form of operation of the AMF.

Councillor Ingham spoke about his original motion to Council and the public's perception of the Forum. He felt that the objectivity of the Forum must be clear and he felt that a move to a public Forum would be a positive step.

Councillor Pook told the committee that he had no issue with the Forum being held in public. He accepted that the administration changes to hold the meetings in public would involve some cost but he felt that the budget should not be a barrier to transparency. He reminded the committee that confidential matters, such as tender and contract details, would have to be held in private and therefore under "part B" whereby the public and press are excluded from that part of the meeting. Ward Members would be invited as appropriate if assets in their ward were being discussed.

The committee were asked to consider if the AMF should become a meeting held in public, with any reports containing commercially sensitive or confidential information considered under "Part B" when the public and press are excluded from the meeting. Past agendas and minutes had now been published online in response to a Freedom of Information request, with some confidential information redacted.

### **RECOMMENDED**

1. Allow the Asset Management Forum, a forum appointed by Council to advise the Cabinet, to meet in public, with reports meeting exemptions being heard when public and press are excluded under "Part B";
2. Permit questions and statements from the public on agenda items of Asset Management Forum that are not considered in "Part B" as per the practice adopted by Cabinet, and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees;

3. Publish agendas and minutes of the Asset Management Forum as per the access to information procedure rules.

### **31 Changes to Scrutiny practices based on best practice**

The Chairman informed the committee of excellent training recently undertaken by him alongside the Vice Chairman and the Democratic Services Officer. Following attendance of the event organised by Westminster City Council, changes to Scrutiny practice had been drafted in a report for the Committee's consideration.

The changes included:

- Written updates from Portfolio Holders with the option for the committee to select specific elements for further discussion at a future meeting;
- Sharing of forward plans of the Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee and Overview Committee to raise awareness of issues coming up;
- Encouraging Single Member Studies for an elected member to research a specific topic to feed back to the committee;
- Regular updates from Task and Finish Forums rather than only receiving a final report;
- Seeking reasons from cabinet why a recommendation is not agreed or endorsed;
- Written submission from external bodies or witnesses if they are not able to attend a meeting in person.

### **RESOLVED**

To adopt the practices recommended as follows:

- Sharing of forward plans of the Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee and Overview Committee to raise awareness of issues for each;
- Encourage Single Member Studies for an elected member to research a specific topic to feed back to the committee that include scope and regular update;
- Receive regular updates from Task and Finish Forums prior to the final report;
- Request written submission from external bodies or witnesses if they are not able to attend a meeting of the committee in person.

### **RECOMMENDED**

That Cabinet recommend to Council that

- a) Portfolio Holder update reports are provided to the Scrutiny Committee in writing at least once each civic year, thereby giving the committee opportunity to invite the Portfolio Holder back to respond on specific issues of interest to the Scrutiny Committee;
- b) That Cabinet provide a reason to the Scrutiny Committee for not agreeing or endorsing a Scrutiny recommendation, in order for the Scrutiny Committee to re-examine and submit revised recommendation as appropriate.
- c) That the Council's constitution be amended to reflect these changes.

### **32 Matter for information – Dunkeswell and Chardstock**

Mary de Souza, as Chairman of Chardstock Parish Council, reminded the committee of the contradiction of officer recommendation in the decision to include Chardstock in the list of settlements with a Built Up Area Boundary (BUAB). She asked the committee to undertake

its role of scrutiny and fully investigate the matter, as this delay only served to undermine the confidence the Parish Council had in the District Council.

David Everett, speaking as a resident of Chardstock, reminded the committee of their purpose as set out in the constitution. He felt that the issue was being “kicked into the long grass” rather than positive steps being taken to investigate how the decision came about.

Paul Spearing from Chardstock Parish Council had nothing further to add which had not already been covered by the previous two speakers.

The inclusion on the list of settlements to receive a build-up area boundary of Dunkeswell and Chardstock would be discussed at a future meeting of the committee, once the review of the process of the production of the Local Plan got underway.

Concern was voiced by Councillor Gardner in the delay in this work although she welcomed the clear intent of the committee to review the process of the production of the Local Plan.

The Chairman shared the concern of both the members of the public and the committee in how the decision had been made, but made clear that there was no intention to ignore the issue. He assured the committee that it was only due to an issue of timing that the investigation into how the decision to include Chardstock and Dunkeswell could not be undertaken at this point.

### **33 Scrutiny forward plan**

Representatives from Connecting Devon and Somerset, and British Telecom, had been secured for attendance at the next meeting of the committee for the topic of Broadband.

Councillor Gardner raised an issue relating to Mill Street Car Park, where comment was sought on a press release from Ward Members too close to the newspaper deadline. She also asked why the matter had been handled as an urgent item at Cabinet. The Chairman reminded the Committee of their recent work reviewing the Media Strategy and agreed that a report be provided on the issues outlined by Councillor Gardner at a future meeting.

The Chairman again stressed that the Committee would be reviewing the process of production of the Local Plan, of which the decision involving Chardstock and Dunkeswell's inclusion in the BUAB list would be the first priority for the committee.

#### **Attendance list**

##### **Committee Members present:**

Roger Giles (Chairman)

Alan Dent (Vice Chairman)

Dean Barrow

David Chapman

Cathy Gardner

Bill Nash

Cherry Nicholas

Val Ranger

Marianne Rixson

**Other Members present:**

Pauline Stott  
Geoff Pook  
Graham Godbeer  
Tom Wright  
Peter Faithfull  
Dawn Manley  
Ian Hall  
Ben Ingham  
Susie Bond  
Andrew Moulding  
Peter Bowden  
Ian Thomas  
Geoff Jung  
Rob Longhurst  
David Barratt  
Megan Armstrong  
Iain Chubb

**Officers present:**

Gerry Moore, Anti Social Behaviour and Community Safety Co-ordinator  
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer  
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

**Committee Members apologies:**

Maddy Chapman  
Alison Greenhalgh  
Simon Grundy  
Marcus Hartnell  
Brenda Taylor

**Other Members apologies:**

Jill Elson  
John Dyson  
Steve Hall  
Peter Burrows

Chairman .....

Date.....