

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 14 April 2016

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.02pm and ended at 7.31pm.

***60 Public speaking**

There was no public speaking at this part of the meeting.

***61 Minutes**

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on the 17 March 2016 were confirmed as a true record, subject to an insertion to minute 58 as agreed by the committee:

Councillor David Everett from Chardstock Parish Council addressed the committee about the way a member of the public had addressed the full Council asking that Chardstock be added to the list of villages considered sustainable. Councillor David Everett said that this had been supported by Councillor Moulding, speaking on behalf of the Ward Member for Chardstock, Councillor Diviani. He said Councillor Moulding's presentation consisted of opinion, was not evidenced based, and contained inaccuracies regarding the bus service through Tytherleigh and the walking distance between Chardstock village and Tytherleigh.

The Chairman also voiced his disappointment that the recommendations made at the meeting of 17 March 2016 were not agreed by Cabinet.

***63 Broadband update**

Mr Graham Long spoke in regard to Broadband provision for the district. He outlined some of the background to the project and the current stage of the project where separate invitations to tender were being issued for the second phase. He commented that if the Council and other authorities continued to refuse to match fund towards the project it would bring further delays, resulting in suffering for local communities and businesses operating from rural areas.

The Portfolio Holder – Central Services presented his update report. It outlined the bid submitted by the Council for funding to the Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) South West Ultrafast Broadband fund. The bid was to support a technical solution to provide a wider provision of broadband in the districts not covered by other providers. The bid had been unsuccessful.

This was appealed by the Chief Executive and the responses from BDUK were set out to the committee.

Discussion took place surrounding:

- BDUK suggestion to enter into a non-disclosure agreement with Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) to avoid double funding was felt to be inappropriate, as it was not transparent. Neil Parish MP had been approached on this issue. CDS had recently informed the council that, if a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) was signed and the council paid their share, they would be informed where the money was being spent – but the NDA would prevent the council from sharing this information more widely, and therefore would still not be transparent.

- Differing options of the CDS/BT model offering Fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) whereas the bid partnership proposed (that was subsequently unsuccessful) offered Fibre to the premises (FTTP)
- What promotion should be made of the £500 subsidy offer for rural users to help towards their costs for broadband that was available from central government. The specific providers listed for this promotion were offering a solution through satellite technology which was not the best solution for broadband; although other providers were now being added to the scheme who utilised other technologies for receiving broadband.
- CDS Media release considered at the meeting of the committee on 12 November 2015 set out a timeframe for delivery that had clearly not been achieved. Whilst Mr Long offered a reason why CDS had not kept to the timescale, the committee agreed that an official response from CDS, who were unable to attend the meeting, should be sought;
- The Portfolio Holder Central Services and the Portfolio Holder Finance continued to work with a number of providers to encourage as many as possible to come forward in filling the gap of service that phase 2 of the CDS project would leave, even though this authority does not control the budget for broadband delivery;
- In response to a question about the use of mobile technology, the delivery of broadband through mobile devices was possible, but had a bandwidth constraint, and therefore was unlikely to be suitable for some users and businesses.
- Should the committee continue debate on the issue when further progress had been completed by CDS on Phase 2 of the project

RECOMMENDED:

The committee regrets the move by CDS, and subsequent advice by BDUK, to ask the council to enter into a non-disclosure agreement which would prevent the council publishing where, when or how funding is spent on this project. The committee requests that Cabinet write to the three MPs covering the District to ask that they lobby on this issue as an issue of transparency.

RESOLVED:

1. That the committee supports the Portfolio Holder Central Services in his endeavours for alternative solutions to meet the needs of the areas not covered by the CDS project;
2. That a progress report and revised timetable is requested from CDS;
3. That the committee receives a further update from the Portfolio Holder Central Services in approximately six months time or as soon as there are further significant developments.

***64 Scoping for engagement and consultation**

The committee received a report outlining the consultation guide adopted and past examples of consultation exercises undertaken by the council.

As the committee had already expressed the view that the adopted guide was sound, the recommendation made by the Democratic Services Officer was for the committee to narrow focus down to specific consultation exercises, where Members felt lessons could be learned, in order for a more specific scope to be drawn up for the committee to work within. Examples of consultation exercises raised by the committee included:

- Exmouth seafront
- Exmouth masterplan consultation undertaken in 2011

RESOLVED:

That further scoping work be undertaken on the following consultation exercises:

- a) Exmouth masterplan consultation of 2011;
- b) "Splash" and associated area excluding current pre-planning application work
- c) Beach hut consultation prior to hire charge changes, particularly on the timing of public meetings in relation to wider consultation;
- d) Inclusion of land at Sidford in the production process of the local plan;

***65 Scope for website**

The report presented to the committee outlined the work undertaken in evolving the website, and the evidence of public confidence in the services provided online and ease of use. Members had identified that some information was difficult or impossible for them to find. With this in mind, the officer recommendation was to direct specific examples where information could not be found to a dual member group, who would then work with web editors to help better signpost information or make such improvements that produced better search results. Discussion took place over the merits of a single member TaFF with assistance from other Councillors as required.

The Vice Chairman informed the committee that a familiarisation tour for members on the website was being planned for a date in June. He offered to receive directly from members specific examples of information that found difficult to find, and would work with any other members and the web editing team to find solutions.

RESOLVED

That the Vice Chairman undertakes research on the website issues raised by Members, working closely with web editors to resolve issues where necessary and report back to a future meeting of the committee.

***66 Draft Annual Report**

Members of the committee received the draft report.

RESOLVED: that the final version of the Scrutiny Committee Annual Report be agreed by the Chairman and Vice Chairman before submission to Annual Council in May 2016.

Attendance list (present for all or part of the meeting):

Scrutiny Members present:

Roger Giles
Alan Dent
Marcus Hartnell
Simon Grundy
Val Ranger
Marianne Rixson

Other Members

Phil Twiss
Tom Wright
Rob Longhurst
Dawn Manley
Pauline Stott

John Dyson
David Barratt
Geoff Jung
Megan Armstrong

Officers present:

Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

Scrutiny Member apologies:

Cathy Gardner
Alison Greenhalgh
Brenda Taylor
David Chapman
Maddy Chapman
Dean Barrow

Other Member apologies:

Ian Hall
Jill Elson

Chairman

Date.....