

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 9 June 2016

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 7.15pm.

Prior to the business of the meeting, the Chairman spoke about the sad loss of Alison Greenhalgh. She had been a very valued member of the committee and her loss was keenly felt. The Chairman's thoughts were with her family and friends at this difficult time. In response, Cllr Bill Nash spoke about her commitment to public service not only at a District level but also to Exmouth Town Council and in her working life in teaching.

As a mark of respect, the committee observed a period of silence to reflect and remember her.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Colin Brown as a new member of the committee.

***1 Public speaking**

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

***2 Minutes**

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on the 14 April 2016 were confirmed as a true record.

***3 Going paper light – planning online service**

The committee received a report from the Economy Practice Manager on his continued work with town and parish councils in relation to the receipt and comment on planning applications.

Ed Freeman, Service lead – Planning Strategy and Development Management, outlined the benefits many of the towns and parishes had in operating this process; as well as the cost benefit with the reduction in paper copies.

The committee raised some issues based on their experience of planning meetings at town or parish councils, including:

- Staff time in going through plans online with public, rather than being able to hand them a paper copy to read. Not all public can either access, or have ability, to use online facility to view applications and plans;
- Uploading plan images directly from website can be very slow and therefore slows down the overall meeting while members wait for images to appear;
- Quality of plans varies, with some plans being difficult to read or too much information on one page there the quality reduces if the image is scaled up to view online;
- Combe Raleigh and Sheldon needed to be added to the areas not able to access online planning facilities because of the broadband coverage.

In responding, the Service Lead - Planning Strategy and Development Management reminded the committee that comment from towns and parishes was key, and that the team were happy to work out what best delivered the applications to each individual council. Some councils downloaded the information onto a memory stick or other device prior to holding a planning meeting, so that the images could load for viewing at a quicker speed than over the internet.

The team also helped point councils towards the Parishes Together funding stream, which has been successfully used in the past, often with parishes submitting a joint bid for both equipment and training. Individual issues raised by the committee relating to specific councils had been noted and would be followed up by the Economy Practice Manager.

RECOMMENDED to endorse the continued work in consultation with our town and parish councils to reduce the Planning Services reliance on paper and improve their access to our online services, subject to resolving the issues raised relating to speed of access to information online, quality of images of plans, and further incorporation of rural parishes as broadband delivery permits.

***4 Beach hut 2016/17 season update**

The report provided a position statement on the letting of huts and sites, following the decision to increase hire charges.

The number of vacant huts and sites, set out in the position statement, was updated verbally at the meeting as at 9 June 2016: Beer (West beach) 2 site vacancies; Exmouth 3 brick hut vacancies; Seaton (West Walk) 3 vacancies and Seaton (East Walk) 5 site vacancies; all under offer.

The decision to increase the hire charges had already been extensively discussed at previous meetings of the committee. The position statement demonstrated that there had been a reduction in the waiting lists. Some members voiced concern that some tenants that had renewed for 2016/17 may not do so for 2017/18 because of the second increase in hire for that year. The position was agreed to be reviewed in 2017/18 to see if the impact was any greater on vacancies than for the current year.

Some detail was requested on the position statement, which could not be provided at the meeting, but would be sought and fed back to the committee.

***5 Performance monitoring for the fourth quarter 2015/16**

The committee considered the service objectives and performance indicators showing concern or variation, including:

- Priority 1b: Resolve penetrating dampness issues and ensure wind and weather tight properties – various issues still to be resolved are the subject of a report to the next Housing Review Board on 16 June 2016, the remit of which covers this service objective;
- Priority 4a: Implementation of E-billing, Self Service & Risk Based Verification – resource allocation was discussed at the Strata Joint Scrutiny meeting on 7 June 2016. The Vice Chairman informed the committee that Strata were under some pressure with staff shortages due to sickness; however recruitment was underway to ensure that projects were not adversely affected;
- Priority 4b: Complete the roll out of smartphones and mobile working technology as part of the Councils Mobile Working Project and design/implement new systems and technologies to make the way we work more efficient; allowing more time to be spent 'on site'. - MX Apps - EDDC phone App - Sita in cab solution- Training for all staff. The Vice Chairman reported that a software bug, relating to smartphones going into "sleep" mode, was the main issue and should be shortly resolved.
- Priority 4b: deliver service efficiencies within Legal. Licensing and Democratic Services and improvements through the application of Systems Thinking techniques

and ensure that we do “what matters” for customers – Will now be delivered in 2016/17, due to changes in personnel and ensuring appropriate training to properly undertake the systems thinking review;

- Council promise – Outstanding council: Number of random vehicle license checks. Recruitment of the licensing team was now complete so the checks should soon be able to be completed;
- Council promise – Outstanding council: Percentage of Minor planning applications determined within 8 weeks and Percentage of other planning applications determined within 8 weeks. A clear explanation on workload and the improvements thanks to the employment of agency staff was provided in the report.

The Vice Chairman also highlighted some indicators from the main report for the committee to be aware of, including relating to the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), a positive collection rate of Council Tax, and securing affordable homes.

***6 Scrutiny forward plan**

Suggestions for topics to be scoped and considered for the forward plan were requested.

A suggestion put forward by the Chairman, relating to the NHS property services policy of commercial rent and the subsequent impact on community hospitals was agreed by the Committee for scoping.

The committee were reminded of the date of the next website tour for Members – 13 July 2016 at 3pm in the Council Chamber.

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

Scrutiny Members present:

Roger Giles
Alan Dent
Marcus Hartnell
Cathy Gardner
Dean Barrow
Colin Brown
Bill Nash
Cherry Nicholas

Other Members

Jill Elson
Tom Wright
John Dyson
David Barratt
Megan Armstrong

Officers present:

Ed Freeman, Service lead – Planning Strategy and Development Management
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

Scrutiny Member apologies:

Simon Grundy

Val Ranger
Marianne Rixson
David Chapman
Maddy Chapman

Other Member apologies:

Andrew Moulding
Geoff Jung
Susie Bond

Chairman

Date.....