

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 20 July 2017**

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

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 7.27pm.

#### **\*8 Public speaking**

There were no questions from the public.

#### **\*9 Minutes**

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on the 22 June 2017 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

#### **\*10 Declarations of interest**

Cllr Bruce De Saram; minute 11; personal interest as member of the Exeter Citizens Advice.

#### **11 Citizens Advice East Devon**

The Chairman welcomed Hilary Nelson, Chief Executive Officer for Strategy and Development of Citizens Advice East Devon (CAED); alongside Edwina Bradshaw, Chairman of the CAED; and Nevil Sailsburyrood, CEO handling operations of the CAED. The committee had been provided with the report that set out the context of the working of the CAED.

The CAED receives no central government funding, operating as a local charity that is funded by the Council, as well as Devon County Council, an element from Town and Parish Councils, and received funding through fundraising and project specific grants. The Council provided just over 35% of the income the CAED receive. This figure had remained relatively constant over the past five years with an inflation increase of 1% for the coming year.

The CAED aims to provide free, confidential and impartial help to anyone who needs it. The report touched on the range of issues raised and the number of client contacts over the past year, which has seen a significant increase in complex cases. CAED is currently undertaking a review of its services, to produce a new service development plan.

Questions and discussion from the committee covered:

- Clarification of numbers of salaried staff, and work already carried out to cut back overheads to try to retain a balanced budget;
- Good value for money in terms of the cost of dealing with an issue averaging out at £13.32, discounting income for specific projects; this has reduced from previous years where that figure was approximately £18;
- Positive view of the work undertaken by the CAED and the difference it made both for those individuals helped and the wider community;
- Expanding the excellent service could be considered if additional funding was available, but the CAED were not prepared to undertake any funding risk presently;
- Concern of the impact of Universal Credit, including the impact on a number of individuals who current receive credits automatically but under the new system would need to undertake an application. The DWP had not given any predicted figures to the CAED and there was concern about how the requirement for their service would

increase dramatically, once the system had been introduced in Exmouth from November, and in Honiton from April 2018;

- CAED are looking to explore how they can use the extensive expertise of the volunteers and staff for training others as an income opportunity; however their primary concern was the core work and dedicating time to undertaking that;
- CAED had a different client base to Age Concern; they also had the national principal of not charging and could only accept donations that are given freely;
- Exmouth Town Council operated a three year service level agreement; it was not clear that the Council operated any commitment to the grant given over one year. The committee felt that it might give more stability to the CAED if a three year commitment of grant was in place with the inclusion of the standard 1% increase, as had been applied in previous years;
- Comparisons with other branches of Citizens Advice had been made – grant levels varied, with Exeter granting more than double the grant of East Devon; the cost per issue was the cheapest in comparison with comparable rural district authorities;
- Success rates for appeals under the new personal independence payment system were between 90% and 95% which highlighted the problem with this new process that replaced the disability allowance.

The Committee were in agreement that the service provided by the CAED was invaluable, and all Ward Members could have a part to play in encouraging as much contribution from town and parish councils as possible for the charity. Raising awareness of the work of the CAED could also be included in the regular newsletter produced by the Council.

**RESOLVED** that a press release be issued, covering the incredible work undertaken by the CAED with EDDC as its largest contributor and to encourage more funding to the CAED

**RECOMMENDED**

1. That Cabinet request an investigation into a longer term arrangement for grant funding, in order to give more security to the CAED, such as a three year agreement with the inflation increase as per previous grant awards;
2. that the Council is kept informed of the progress of review of the CAED, and actively involved as a stakeholder.

The Chairman thanked the CAED representatives for attending and affirmed that as a committee, they would do what they could to assist the service.

**\*12 Modern Day Slavery awareness update**

The committee received an update report on how Council employees were made aware of modern day slavery. This formed part of the work across the council in safeguarding vulnerable adults and children, where clear procedures are in place for reporting any concerns, as set out in the adopted safeguarding policy. A further training session for staff is in place for September as part of the continued development of staff.

**RESOLVED** To investigate if the recording of any cases logged could be included in the performance monitoring reporting.

**\*13 Scrutiny Forward Plan**

Two topics previously put forward for scoping were set out with a preliminary view in the report to the committee:

- The review of the procurement approach agreed by the Housing Review Board will fall under the remit of the Board as an overview and scrutiny committee in its own right, and therefore does not fall under the remit of this committee;
- Building regulations relating to internal room sizes only relate to buildings of student accommodation, hotels and schools. The only option identified at that time was the option for the committee to lobby government about their concerns.

Other topics listed were still due to be scoped. The Chief Executive would be reporting to the Cabinet in September with an election update and the committee had an opportunity to attend that meeting, as well as receive a report back at a future meeting. Cllr Gardner suggested linking that with the report from the Electoral Commission that was due out in the autumn.

**RESOLVED**

1. To include an election update at the 16 November 2017 meeting of the committee;
2. To scope the topic of health and safety in the workplace
3. To add to the scheduled report of the Service lead Planning Strategy and Development Management for 19 October for comment on the issue of room sizes under building regulations.

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

**Scrutiny Members present:**

Roger Giles  
Bruce de Saram  
Simon Grundy  
Cathy Gardner  
Bill Nash  
Cherry Nicholas  
Val Ranger  
Marianne Rixson  
Eleanor Rylance

**Other Members**

David Barratt  
John Dyson  
Steve Gazzard

**Officers present:**

Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor  
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

**Apologies:**

Alan Dent  
Dean Barrow  
Tom Wright  
Andrew Moulding  
John O'Leary  
Jill Elson  
Maddy Chapman  
Darryl Nicholas

Chairman ..... Date.....