

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of a joint meeting of the Overview Committee and Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 17 January 2018**

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

The meeting started at 9.00am and ended at 12.12pm.

#### **\*1 Election of Chairman**

Councillor Graham Godbeer was elected Chairman of the joint meeting, and appointed Councillor Roger Giles as Vice Chairman.

#### **\*2 Public speaking**

There were no questions from the public.

#### **\*3 Declarations of interest**

Minute 4: Councillor Jill Elson; personal interest: Community Transport

Minute 4: Councillor Ian Hall; personal interest: Cloakham Lawn Association

Minute 4: Councillor Graham Godbeer; personal interest: Chair of AONB Group

Minute 4: Councillor Alan Dent; personal interest: member of Asset Management Forum

Minute 4: Chief Executive; personal interest: Spouse has run courses at THG

#### **4 Draft service plans, Revenue budget and Capital Budget for 2018/19**

##### **Service plans**

The committees considered the service plans for 2018/19 and discussion arose as follows:

##### **Countryside and Arts**

- The team had developed a management proposal for the newly created Minerva Country Park on behalf of the developers but that would provide an income to the service;
- Consider review of the funding of the arts and culture service in light of the scale of budget set for the THG.

##### **Environmental Health and Car Parks**

- Streetscene operatives were now providing intelligence back to the Environmental Health team in respect of issues with dogs and dog mess;
- No specific budget is set aside for prosecutions for fly tipping but covered as and when such prosecutions come forward;
- There had been progress in the delivery of mobile software support for undertaking food hygiene inspections;
- Fixed penalty notices had increased. Figures would be provided to the committee. These were not considered as an income stream, because they were to act as a deterrent;
- Welcomed the continued review of pay and display signs in light of feedback received;
- Discussion over the merits of “greening” car parks and balancing with possible future need for green energy harvesting from the same sites for electric cars. Members were assured that the work was to optimise the use of the site, giving a balance of enhancing the environment with the practical use of the car park;
- Chip and pin car park machines had been introduced in six locations and further toll out would be considered depending on their success. Contactless technology for car park machines had just been approved nationally;

- Congratulations were passed onto the team with their parking offers, particularly welcomed by local business.

### **Streetscene**

- Some concerns over using public parks for events and the impact that had on both local people and visitors. This area of work had already been agreed the previous year as part of the Transformation Strategy, with preparation of a detailed business case underway. Extensive research had been undertaken with other authorities using their assets in the same way, with a mix of both open and ticketed events in public parks and spaces. Some events had already taken place, with an example in Manor Gardens for a wedding event. Any damage to the open space would be recovered in costs;
- Work was underway in streamlining the process for permissions for events, covering street trading and clean up by Streetscene;
- Public toilet review was emotive and needed to be handled with care. Some councillors felt the wording in the service plan suggested, although was not explicit, that toilets could be closed. This was clarified as a review that examined all relevant issues, including upgrading and vandalism prevention;
- Charging developers for waste receptacles was in place in other authorities, including replacements. Some councillors felt that charging for replacements was a step too far;
- An update was given on asset mapping.

### **Housing**

- There were successful examples in the district of community land trusts, aided both by the Housing Enabling Officer and the Wessex Trust. This work would continue to help communities that came forward to assistance in setting up their own trusts;
- Work was carried out with private landlords to point them to grants available for improving efficiency in housing, with the intent of helping tenants reduce their heating costs.

### **Finance**

- There had been a significant shift in the use of online services, particularly in the Revenues and Benefits service that meant that staff budgets could be reduced because of more customers undertaking transactions and changes online.

### **Governance and Licensing**

- No specific comments.

### **Organisational Development and Transformation**

- Lack of detail in how the service plan elements would be financed.

### **Economy and Regeneration**

- What evidence was there that spend in the budget for this service delivered significant benefit to local businesses, as opposed to national chain business.

### **Growth Point**

- No specific comments.

### **Planning Services**

- Why no reference to the relocation in the service plan? In response, the relocation was a cross cutting element for all services to cover.

## **Revenue and Capital Estimates report**

The Strategic Lead for Finance highlighted from his Cabinet report of 3 January 2018:

- Medium term financial plan pressures
- Negative impacts on the budget included the expected reduction of income from recycled materials, the higher than expected pay award, and the benefit subsidy had reduced;
- Positive impacts were that the council tax base was higher than predicted and change in budgeting for vacancies;
- In order to balance the budget, a call had to be made on the General Fund, but this would still be within the accepted limit;
- Additional items were presented to the Committees – those officers felt had to be included due to priority, and those that were not deemed as a priority or affordable in the current budget. Two requests had been made from two external bodies – Clyst Honiton Parish Council and Action East Devon, which were not included in the budget but highlighted for debate.

Rural service delivery grant has increased by £42k, reducing the call on the General Fund to £140K. An assumption had been made that the £5 per year in Council Tax would be agreed in preparing the budget. Bid for 100% business rates pilot had been successful; initial modelling showed that this could yield an additional £1m for the Council, but further work had to be undertaken in assessing the government pilot publications with a report to the Budget Working party in March of this year to provide more detail. This additional money had to be allocated to the promotion of financial stability across the district, and investing and encouraging further growth. This was excellent news for the district.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance commended the work of the Strategic Lead Finance, Financial Services Manager and the finance team in preparing the budget before the Committees for consideration.

Discussion on the Revenue budget covered:

- Additional items listed under Appendix 2 that were not included in the current budget could come forward during the year for inclusion if circumstances dictated that the priority had increased. These would come before Cabinet for decision;
- The income predicted for Streetscene had been calculated prior to the news that China was no longer accepting some recycled plastics from other countries. It was explained this would not have a material effect on the draft 2018/19 budget as the income assumed from plastics was only £7k. The market for recycled material was already known to be volatile and best estimates had been made;
- Income from business rates that had a significant effect on the Council's finances came from commercial premises, such as supermarkets, hotels or the Growth Point area;
- The Chairman of the Council made a plea for assistance with the cost of development of a skatepark in Axminster, advising that a number of bodies had been involved in raising the finance to pay for the work but there may be a shortfall. Members were reminded that the Council welcomed partnership funding examples and could always consider proposals made to the Cabinet;
- Funding for the footbridge at Ottery St Mary was not seen as a priority and had not been included in the draft budget, but again partnership funding and alternative funding was encouraged to try to deliver the footbridge;

- Some additional items listed in Appendix 2 had not been prioritised because there were a special case for debate, such as those from outside bodies; or because further assessment needed to be done, with a referral to the Budget Working Party;
- Feasibility of referral of all additional items not currently included to the Budget Working Party; including a suggestion for all items rated as priority 3 to be referred, and priority 4 and 5 to be excluded;
- As local Ward Member, Councillor Eleanor Rylance informed the Committees of the increase in workload for Clyst Honiton Parish Council due to the extensive new commercial development in that parish. She asked for support for inclusion in the budget for an extension of the support to provide a Parish Clerk, supported by a number of Councillors at the meeting;
- The second external request, by Action East Devon, was outlined by Councillor Tom Wright, who informed the Committees about the work they undertake and the impact of reduced funding on the work they could deliver;
- Replacing beach signs had been discussed at the Exe Estuary Management Group;
- Suggestion to revisit budget allocation for the THG, with a view that many of the outreach services provided by the Gallery could be delivered at other venues throughout the District. Councillors were advised that it would be far better to consider the overall budget for Arts, Culture and Leisure in terms of prioritisation, for an overall perspective on the budget than single out one element. The Committees were reminded of the work of the Arts and Culture Forum, who monitored the budget extensively. Some Councillors spoke about the improved performance of the THG, including the Chairman, who expected their outreach work to continue to grow;
- Consider using the balance of the General Fund in order to pay for the additional items that had not been included in the draft budget. The Committees were reminded that the balance of the General Fund had to operate in the tolerances of £2.8m and £3.6m in order to have sufficient funds available for emergency costs;

**RECOMMENDED by the Overview Committee:**

1. that the Council increases the Council Tax for 2018/19 by £5 per year;
2. that the draft Revenue Budget be recommended to Council, subject to the inclusion of:
  - a. Car Parks apprentice at ongoing cost, £20, 480 in 2018/19 for reason of succession planning;
  - b. New trailer for countryside service at one-off cost of £7000;
  - c. Grant to Action East Devon at £20,000 each year for 2018/19 and 2019/2020;
3. that the bid for grant for Clyst Honiton Parish Council extending the current funding to support the employment of a Parish Clerk be referred to the Budget Working Party for consideration, in that the Overview Committee is in support of the proposal but needs further work to establish realistic costs;
4. that the remaining additional bids as set out in Appendix 2 of the report not listed above be afforded effort to seek out and obtain other funding, recognising that these items could come forward for inclusion during the year if circumstances dictated that the priority had increased to an urgent need;
5. that the draft Capital Budget be recommended to Council;
6. that the Service Plans be recommended to Council, with the Overview Committee noting the recommendation made by the Scrutiny Committee in respect of the public toilet review.

**RECOMMENDED by the Scrutiny Committee:**

1. that the Council increases the Council Tax for 2018/19 by £5 per year;

2. that the draft Revenue Budget be recommended to Council, subject to the inclusion of:
  - a. New trailer for countryside service at one-off cost of £7000;
  - b. Grant to Action East Devon at £20,000 each year for 2018/19 and 2019/2020
3. that the bid for grant for Clyst Honiton Parish Council extending the current funding to support the employment of a Parish Clerk be referred to the Budget Working Party for consideration, in that the Overview Committee is in support of the proposal but needs further work to establish realistic costs;
4. that the remaining additional bids as set out in Appendix 2 of the report not listed above be afforded effort to seek out and obtain other funding, recognising that these items could come forward for inclusion during the year if circumstances dictated that the priority had increased to an urgent need;
5. that the draft Capital Budget be recommended to Council;
6. that the Service Plans be recommended to Council, with the Scrutiny Committee specifically noting the review of public toilet provision in the service plan for Streetscene. The committee wish to ensure that the importance of public toilet provision is recognised and secured.

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

**Overview Members present:**

Graham Godbeer  
Ian Hall  
Rob Longhurst  
Peter Faithfull  
John Humphreys

**Scrutiny Members present:**

Bruce de Saram  
Cathy Gardner  
Dean Barrow  
Cherry Nicholas  
Maddy Chapman  
Roger Giles  
Alan Dent  
Eleanor Rylance

**Other Members**

Brian Bailey  
Pauline Stott  
David Barratt  
Jill Elson  
Phil Skinner  
Mike Howe  
Iain Chubb  
Marcus Hartnell  
Ian Thomas  
Tom Wright  
Geoff Jung  
John Dyson

**Officers present:**

Mark Williams, Chief Executive  
Richard Cohen, Deputy Chief Executive

Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance  
Henry Gordon Lennox, Strategic Lead Governance and Licensing  
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing and Environment  
Ed Freeman, Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development Management  
Andrew Ennis, Service Lead for Environmental Health and Car Parks  
Andrew Hancock, Service Lead for Streetscene  
Charlie Plowden, Service Lead Countryside and Leisure  
Libby Jarrett  
Laurelie Gifford, Financial Services Manager  
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer  
Tabitha Whitcombe, Democratic Services Officer

**Apologies from Overview and Scrutiny Members:**

Mike Allen  
Marianne Rixson  
Simon Grundy  
Darryl Nicholas  
Val Ranger  
Mark Evans-Martin  
Jim Knight

**Apologies**

Paul Diviani

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