

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held at Knowle, Sidmouth, on Wednesday, 29 July 2015

Attendance list at the end of document.

The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 7.13 pm

***25 Public Speaking**

The Chairman welcomed those present and invited members of the public to speak to the Council.

Michael Clarke, Vice Chairman to East Budleigh Parish Council spoke on the East Devon Villages Plan and the proposed criteria for reviewing Built-Up Area Boundaries (BUAB) which was recommended for use by Cabinet and Development Management Committee. He advised that up until the previous day, East Budleigh's BUAB was proposed to be amended to include a site which was not recommended for inclusion by the Parish Council (this site had since been withdrawn and BUAB was now recommended to remain unchanged). Concern was raised about the lack of communication and consultation with the Parish Council, which was in the process of preparing its own Neighbourhood Plan, over the proposed amendments to the BUAB.

In response the Chief Executive advised that the concerns of East Budleigh Parish Council were noted and that any proposed changes to BUABs would be consulted on before adoption. With regard to the inclusion, and subsequent removal, of the specific site referred to by the Vice Chairman of the Parish Council, this would be looked into further and a response would be given to the Vice Chairman of the Parish Council.

***26 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Annual Council held on 27 May 2015 and minutes of the Extraordinary meeting of the Council held on 3 June (Office Relocation) were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***27 Declarations**

There were none.

***28 Chairman/Leader notices/announcements**

- a) The Chairman invited Councillor Jill Elson, Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities to address the Council on the Government Summer Budget Statement presented to the House of Commons which contained rent reduction proposals that would affect the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 30 year Business Plan.

She outlined the background to the HRA and advised how the system was based upon assumptions Government had made about rental income and expenditure required to maintain the stock over 30 years; any changes in those assumptions would impact on the Council's ability to maintain its housing stock.

Last year, the Government had announced a ten year rent setting policy which adjusted the rental formula damaging the Business Plan. The

proposals in the Summer budget altered the formula introduced, just last year, and indicated that it would be compulsory to implement a Government Rent policy of 1% rent reduction each year for 4 years - the intention being to reduce the housing benefit bill.

The impact of this proposal of 1% reduction in rents for 4 years on the Council's Business Plan were highlighted as:

- Housing Revenue Account Business Plan allowed for 2.5% increase so this effectively means a 3.5% reduction each year;
- The cumulative effect by end of year 4 (2019/20) is a reduction in rent income of £7 million. (66 new affordable homes at £120,000 per home);
- The estimated rent loss over the full 30 year Business Plan period was £77.2 million (equivalent to 643 New Homes at £120,000 per unit);
- In 2025/26 our HRA balance would drop below the agreed minimum of £2 million;
- The balance would not reach an acceptable level until 2037/38 (when the Council's debt was repaid) when it is projected to reach £5 million;
- New build/acquisition would be curtailed – it was anticipated that Right to Buy receipts would have to all returned to the Government;
- Reductions might be required in maintenance programmes;
- The Council's average rent was currently £81.97 per week which was well below equivalent affordable rents charged by some Housing Associations.

Councillor Elson had requested an urgent meeting with MPs Hugo Swire and Neil Parish and advised that MP Hugo Swire has asked for an urgent meeting with the Minister for Housing to discuss the matter.

RESOLVED: that a copy of the Portfolio Holder – Sustainable Homes and Communities address to Council on the impact of the Government's Summer budget statement on the Council's Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Business Plan be circulated to all Members for information.

- b) The Leader was pleased to announce that the Council had been awarded 'highly commended' for infrastructure-led planning in Cranbrook at the recent annual RTPI awards for Planning Excellence. These awards were held to highlight exceptional examples of planning and celebrate the contribution that planners and planning make to society.

*29 **Questions (Procedure Rules 9.2 and 9.5)**

Five questions had been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 9.2 - the printed [questions and answers](#) were circulated at the meeting. Councillors submitting questions are entitled to put a related supplementary question (Procedure Rule 9.5). The responses to the supplementary questions are set out below.

- a) Question 1 – In response to a supplementary question about the surplus election budget and why more staff had not been employed to reduce the risk of errors and to reduce the stress levels of staff involved in the counts, the Chief Executive advised that a report on the issues relating to the recent

local elections would be considered at Scrutiny Committee the following day. The reference to stress in his report was in relation to the lead up to the elections. There were no issues, as far as he had been made aware, in relation to the number of staff available during the count.

Councillor Cathy Gardner asked that it be noted that EDA was not running a FOI campaign.

- b) Question 2 – In response to a supplementary question about whether it was considered that the inclusion of a member of the Independent Group on the Office Accommodation Executive Group would lead to delays to the Council's relocation rather than improving public confidence and transparency, the Leader referred the Councillor to the answer given in the original question and advised that the Executive Group in its current form worked well and was efficient. He therefore saw no reason to amend the membership.
- c) Question 3 – In response to a supplementary question about how requests for information by Members were dealt with and steps to ensure acceptable responses in future, the Leader referred the Councillor to answer given in the original question.
- d) Question 4 – In response to a supplementary question about the early termination of the Chief Executive arrangement with South Somerset District Council and whether this would be considered good value for money by the residents of East Devon, the Leader gave absolute reassurance; the CEO had always had a full time employment contract with EDDC.
- e) Question 5 - In response to a supplementary question asking for reassurance that all Councillors would be kept fully briefed on the progress in respect of the Local Plan, the Leader confirmed that this would happen.

***30 Minutes of Cabinet and Committees**

RESOLVED

1. that the under-mentioned minutes be received and the recommendations approved

Cabinet

Minutes 1-27, 28-57

Development Management Committee

Minutes 72-79, 1-3, 4-14, 15-17, 18-22

Planning Inspections Committee

Minutes 25-27, 28-30

Audit and Governance Committee

Minutes 1-14

Licensing and Enforcement Committee

Minutes 1-5

Licensing and Enforcement Sub Committee

Minutes 37-38

2. that the under-mentioned minutes be received.

Cabinet (minutes 37, 38 39) had noted or accepted the following Overview/Scrutiny Committees' recommendations with or without amendment.

Overview Committee

Minutes 1-5

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes 1-7

Housing Review Board

Minutes 1-16

Arising from consideration of the above minutes:-

a) Environmental Protect Team Reorganisation (Minute 49 Cabinet)

Councillor Peter Burrows spoke about the loss of the dog warden post following reorganisation of the Environmental Protection Team. He advised of ongoing issues of people walking their dogs on banned areas within Seaton and the need for better signage as the current signs were inadequate.

The Leader suggested that Councillor Burrows speak direct to the Street Scene Manager regarding the need for better signage.

b) Review of FOI decisions (Minute 55 Cabinet)

Councillor Matthew Booth referred to the outcomes of the recent Tribunal and his concerns that the Council had not fully demonstrated that it had learnt lessons from the findings. He raised concern that the Officer who had undertaken the review of FOI decisions (the Monitoring Officer) was also the Strategic Lead – Legal, Licensing and Democratic Services and therefore was in effect examining activity that he had been involved with. Councillor Booth spoke about the primary role of the leadership of the Council being to uphold transparency and accountability. He advised that the issue was not whether the Council should relocate but the processes behind facilitating the relocation. Clarification was sought as to who the officer peer would be and suggested that the choice should be an independent person. He highlighted the need for clear requirements for any FOI, including reasons why the Council might withhold information and a review of the Council's publication scheme.

The Chief Executive advised that he had full confidence in the Monitoring Officer's ability to remain impartial and referred Councillors to the Monitoring Officer's comprehensive report into the matters relating to the Tribunal findings, which set out lessons to be learnt and changes required to procedures.

***31 Housing Review Board - appointments**

RESOLVED

1. that the appointment of Angela Bea as a tenant and/or leaseholder representative on the Housing Review Board be confirmed.
2. that the appointments of Christine Drew and Julie Bingham as independent community representatives on the Housing Review Board be confirmed.

Attendance list

Councillors present:

Brian Bailey
David Barratt
Dean Barrow
Susie Bond
Matthew Booth
Peter Bowden
Colin Brown
Peter Burrows
Paul Carter
Maddy Chapman
Iain Chubb
Matt Coppel
Alan Dent
Paul Diviani
Jill Elson
Peter Faithfull
David Foster
Cathy Gardner
Roger Giles
Graham Godbeer
Pat Graham
Simon Grundy
Maria Hale
Ian Hall
Steve Hall
Stuart Hughes
Douglas Hull
John Humphreys
Ben Ingham
David Key
Jim Knight
Rob Longhurst
Dawn Manley
Andrew Moulding
Bill Nash
Cherry Nicholas
John O'Leary
Helen Parr
Christopher Pepper
Geoff Pook
Marianne Rixson
Philip Skinner
Pauline Stott
Brenda Taylor
Ian Thomas
Phil Twiss
Mark Williamson
Eileen Wragg
Tom Wright

Honorary Aldermen:

Christine Drew
Stephanie Jones
Ann Liverton
Ken Potter
David Scott
Tim Wood

Officers:

Mark Williams, Chief Executive
Richard Cohen, Deputy Chief Executive
John Golding, Strategic Lead - Housing
Henry Gordon Lennox, Strategic Lead – Legal and Democratic Services
Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer
Diana Vernon, Democratic Services Manager
Hannah Whitfield, Democratic Services Officer

Councillor apologies:

Mike Allen
David Chapman
Steve Gazzard
Alison Greenhalgh
Marcus Hartnell
Mike Howe
Geoff Jung
Val Ranger
Marianne Rixson

Honorary Aldermen apologies:

Bob Peachey
Margaret Rogers

Chairman Date