

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 13 March 2018**

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

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 8.20pm.

#### **\*27 Public speaking**

There were no public speakers at the meeting.

#### **\*28 Minute confirmation**

The minutes of the Overview Committee held on the 30 January 2018, were confirmed as a true record.

#### **\*29 JLL Presentation**

The Chairman welcomed John Kinsey, Simon Bennett, David Roberts and Alexandra Deare from JLL to the meeting. Their presentation covered a number of cases studies on other local authorities moving into the commercial property market, facilitated by their firm.

The [presentation](#) covered:

- The general market in the sector currently, the headlines being a lack of available land, increase in hotel development (attracting a higher weekend rate for the leisure demand), shortage of skilled labour and increasing construction costs as a result, challenges to retail and mid-range restaurant chains;
- Property market is showing increasing good return on investment with rental growth and property market value. With the shift in online retail there was an increase in demand in warehouse space;
- Alternatives to traditional investment that were showing growth included:
  - Self-storage units
  - Private rented housing
  - Student accommodation
  - Car parks
  - Healthcare
  - Retirement living
  - Data centres
- Examples were shared with the Committee covering:
  - Plymouth City Council purchase of industrial space, including the Royal Mail centre;
  - Torbay Council, with the EDF energy building in Exeter, and a retail park in Torquay;
  - Bath & North East Somerset Council with a unit at Aztec West for use of highways officers, plus the purchase of their main HQ offices;
  - Teignbridge District Council, with a shopping centre and associated land for further development of it in Newton Abbott
  - Swindon Council with office place in Bristol
  - South Somerset District Council owning retail space in Yeovil High Street.

Different funding mechanisms were available to local Councils, including access to a better rate of borrowing than the commercial sector. There was also strength in unlocking borrowing against a Council covenant, which would be stronger than that of a commercial covenant. Again, examples of local authorities using different funding mechanisms were given, including Gloucester Council's Kings Walk Shopping Centre where the strength in

the council covenant created both rental profit and additional value in the capital of the site. Many local authorities had also worked with commercial partners for funding and delivery.

JLL had also seen an increase in local authorities developing their own business units rather than wait for the private sector to deliver them. There was clearly a demand for small business units, many of which were being offered on a freehold basis.

At present, there was no restriction on undertaking commercial property outside of the District boundary, but some authorities were exercising caution in developing long-term projects in case there was a change by Government to impose a restriction. In response to a question, JLL held the view that there would be more commercial investment choices and availability to consider if the Council looked at an area wider than its boundaries.

In discussion, the Committee were of the view that taking an approach to investing in commercial property was the right step for the Council to take, and specific opportunities to do so should be explored. Having the necessary skills set, in-house or contracted in was also key to ensure delivery.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from JLL for their informative presentation and the discussion that it had provoked.

**RESOLVED** that the presentation from JLL be noted.

### **\*30 Naturally Healthy Devon Schools project**

The Chairman welcomed Tim Dafforn, Countryside Team Leader, and Meg Knowles, Education Ranger to talk to the committee about the project. He reminded the committee of the golden thread of health and wellbeing through the Council and service plans, and the importance of this type of work in contributing to that.

The project was to stimulate the demand for schools for outdoor learning, supporting teachers to build learning outdoors into everyday practice by providing training and networking opportunities. The project also looked to increase the understanding of the learning and health benefits that outdoor learning could provide.

Through the [presentation](#), the committee learnt of the scale of work already undertaken by the Education Rangers in working with schools, including some outside of the District. The service does attract an income through fess, with an expected increase in income due to a charging restructure for the coming financial year. The service is well regarded, with an excellent reputation and good approval ratings. The service also has extensive experience in bidding for funding, and continues to do so.

The concept of outdoor learning was explained to Members. The specific project for Devon had covered 20 primary schools in the county that had higher than average obesity levels. The [outcome of the project](#) had shown that there were benefits to both pupils in terms of learning and wellbeing, but also to teachers in terms of job satisfaction and wellbeing. A number of case examples were shown to the committee of how individual children had benefitted during the project.

Going forward, the service hoped to continue through engaging with teachers and train them by means of delivering professional days. Members were welcomed to contact the service to observe outdoor learning, and asked to act as advocates to the concept and spread the word to their local schools and groups about the service.

In response to questions, Members were advised that all uniformed groups in the area already had links to the service. Some suggestions came forward and Members were asked to make direct contact with the service to pursue those.

In terms of existing resources, the area had no field studies centre that could accommodate residential style courses, as fondly remembered by the Vice Chairman. It was agreed that having such a facility would also provide an income for the Council. This option was currently being explored by the service and would come forward to Cabinet if viable.

The Chairman thanked Meg Knowles and Tim Dafforn for their informative and inspiring presentation.

**RESOLVED** that presentation be noted.

### **\*31 Overview forward plan**

An additional meeting was planned, subject to further work on income generation being prepared, for late April or early May. The frequency of meetings of the committee would also be increased for the coming civic term.

There was an appetite from the Committee membership to progress onto discussion on more specific concepts for increasing income generation, now that the committee had received a degree of background information to help them form what approach the Council should take to provide such income.

#### **Attendance list**

##### **Councillors Present:**

Graham Godbeer (Chairman)  
Peter Faithfull  
Mike Allen  
Matt Booth  
Chris Pepper

##### **Councillors Also Present:**

Ian Thomas  
Brian Bailey  
David Barratt  
John Dyson  
Geoff Jung  
Tim Dumper

##### **Officers**

Richard Cohen, Deputy Chief Executive  
Tim Child, Property Services Manager  
Alison Hayward, Senior Manager Regeneration & Economic Development  
Charlie Plowden, Service Lead Countryside and Leisure  
Tim Dafforn, Countryside Team leader  
Meg Knowles, Education Ranger  
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

**Councillor Apologies:**

John Humphreys  
Mark Evans-Martin  
Pauline Stott

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