

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Council held Online via the Zoom App. on 21 October 2020

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.45 pm

93 Public speaking

The Chair welcomed members of the public and Councillors to the meeting and explained that all participants were taking part remotely and the meeting was also being viewed online and recorded.

The Chair then started the meeting by doing a roll call of those present, and confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

During the meeting the public would be able to participate if they had pre-registered to speak. Three members of the public had pre-registered.

Anne Bentham spoke about Exeter Airport and the proposed package of support to be offered to offset the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on its operation. She expressed her view that the future plans were not at all clear and left many questions to be answered.

Mary Culhane had requested that a statement be read out on her behalf as she would be unable to attend the meeting. She also referred to Exeter Airport. She understood that EDDC had pledged to put the climate at the heart of any decisions it made but with the proposed subsidy of the airport and Long Lane project this did not seem to be the case, when money would be put towards a fossil-fuel polluting industry which would go against the pledge. She asked for support to sustainable industries and re-training rather than propping up an industry in decline. She expressed her view that it would need brave decisions to be made to follow through on EDDC's pledge, putting the climate first and thinking of the future for today's children.

Peter Scott also spoke on issues relating to the Airport. He expressed concern and a lack of confidence in the Council's proposed actions. He stated that referring to sustainable aviation was an attempt to make a difficult situation acceptable and urged that the measures proposed were rejected.

94 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Council held on 20 August 2020 were confirmed and agreed as a true record.

95 Declarations of interest

99. To answer questions asked by Members of the Council pursuant to Procedure Rules No. 9.2 and 9.5.

Councillor Mike Allen, Personal, Supports a Food Bank at the church in Honiton..

99. To answer questions asked by Members of the Council pursuant to Procedure Rules No. 9.2 and 9.5.

Councillor Olly Davey, Personal, Exmouth Town Councillor.

99. To answer questions asked by Members of the Council pursuant to Procedure Rules No. 9.2 and 9.5.

Councillor Paul Hayward, Personal, Involved in a Community Group in Axminster.

96 **Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency.

97 **Announcements from the Chairman and Leader**

There were no announcements from the Chair or Leader.

98 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were no confidential/exempt items.

99 **To answer questions asked by Members of the Council pursuant to Procedure Rules No. 9.2 and 9.5**

Twenty questions had been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 9.2. The questions and answers had been circulated with the agenda and published on the website. Councillors submitting questions are entitled to put a related supplementary question (Procedure Rule 9.5). A summary of the supplementary question asked and the response is set out below.

Q 2: Cllr Ingham asked a supplementary question regarding the support being made available for the over 50's.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets advised that the written response was very clear and the Council was taking action to help all age groups.

Q 3: Cllr De Saram asked a supplementary question in relation to whether the Council would consider a roll out of the 'Eat out to help out' initiative along the lines of the Gate to Plate event in Honiton, across the district.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets advised that the Council would consider what it could do in the light of the evolving COVID situation before committing itself to local events.

Q 4: Cllr Moulding asked a supplementary question in relation to the most vulnerable communities in East Devon, specifically Exmouth and Axminster, and how the Council was intending to improve the outcomes in those towns.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets stated that the Council worked with all towns across the district but that Axminster had had a Regeneration Board for several years which had never met, so he suggested that Axminster ward councillors work with other EDDC councillors and local agencies to achieve the outcomes needed in the town.

Q 5: Cllr Moulding asked a supplementary question in relation to the construction sector, and how the Council would work with local builders and developers to assist their post COVID recovery.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets stated that clarity was required from national government about how to plan for the future rather than the District Council trying to take local action on its own.

Q 6: Cllr Moulding asked a supplementary question in relation to fraud checks and whether the Portfolio Holder agreed that fraud was a blight on society, and an issue which councillors should receive training on.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets said that he would look into this further and provide a written response after the meeting since he was on leave and could not provide detail for the meeting.

Q 8: Cllr Ingham asked a supplementary question in relation to how EDDC could take the lead and provide support to businesses operating within the green growth agenda.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Finance stated that the Council was engaged in a number of initiatives as outlined in the written response provided. It had also committed to putting considerable funds into the whole climate change agenda, which would see benefits for businesses.

Q 10: Cllr Skinner about the personal approach taken by the Portfolio Holder in getting out to meet people and engage with businesses, and how many he had contacted to establish the current situation.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets stated that he was in full time employment as well as being a councillor, and considered that he engaged with businesses on a daily basis. He did not however, consider himself to be in a competition between politicians or keep a daily tally of his contacts, nor did he intend to impose himself on businesses for political purposes while they were working to maintain their business.

Q 11: Cllr Skinner asked a supplementary question in relation to a possible re-structure of the Council and a move to a committee structure and whether this would be re-visited in future.

The Leader gave a lengthy reply indicating that the written response to the original question had been clear, and that whilst the current situation with the COVID pandemic had delayed aspects of work to be conducted by the Governance Working Group, such as visits to other Councils, this would be picked up again as soon as it was feasible to do so.

Q 12: Cllr Skinner asked a supplementary question in relation to how the Portfolio Holder was supporting infrastructure initiatives such as Connecting Devon and Somerset, to assist local employment.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets requested clarification on the question and would provide a further written response after the meeting once he had received it.

Q 13: Cllr Allen asked a supplementary question about whether COVID had had a disproportionate impact on East Devon.

In response, the Leader stated that the Council could not wait for government to take action in support of East Devon and the lack of clarity to date had created confusion. However, there was a huge amount of activity going on in the west end of the district and the Council would be working with the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) and national government to do what it could to support economic recovery. He referred to examples, such as the work being undertaken in Cranbrook and discussed at the Strategic Planning Committee on 21st October. The Council would be kick starting the work needed in Axminster and good progress was being made in Exmouth. In terms of Organisational Development, Cllr Jess Bailey, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and COVID-19 Response & Recovery, would be introducing a refreshed Council Plan over the next few weeks.

Q 14: Cllr Allen asked a supplementary question in relation to the steps being taken to help young people develop new careers and people over 50 to review their careers, given that there was a difference between the needs of younger and older people.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Assets reiterated that the Council is doing the best it can but the Chancellor and central government is not helping as much as it could. Businesses are trying against overwhelming odds to keep going and EDDC is doing its best to support all residents.

Q 15: Cllr Allen asked a supplementary question regarding the dedicated resource referred to which will provide financial counselling and how they would be trained.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Finance outlined that the Council would be keeping back £2m from business rates by way of reserving money in anticipation of the growing future deficit. Training would be considered following liaison with the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to identify what skills are required.

Q 17: Cllr Allen asked a supplementary question regarding what actions the Council would be taking to equip its employees working from home to develop resilience and deal with mental health problems over the winter.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and COVID-19 Response & Recovery, stated that over recent years there had been a more flexible approach to work, which had resulted in the Working from Home and Happy, Healthy Here policies, which had developed further as a result of the COVID pandemic. There were also trained mental health first aiders across the council to assist workers at home and a 24/7 self-referral Counselling Helpline available for all staff. In terms of equipment or support, staff could undertake an assessment and talk to their managers if they needed anything.

Q 18: Cllr Allen asked a supplementary question regarding the fact that disability data was not captured within the current statistics relating to employment status.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Finance agreed that this was a good point which he would take up with officers after the meeting.

Q 19: Cllr Allen asked a supplementary question relating to how EDDC could justify spending significant sums on decarbonising its own housing stock in the face of other priorities.

The Portfolio Holder for Coast Country and Environment pointed out that the question should have been directed to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, but responded by advising that there would be a massive problem in future in terms of affording the costs related to making changes to its housing stock in order to bring into line with climate change requirements. It was a good time to bid for funding via government programmes available.

Q 20: Cllr Allen asked a supplementary question in relation to the Standards Hearing Sub-Committee.

In response, the Vice Chair, Cllr Ranger, asked Cllr Allen to put his question in writing to the Chair, Cllr Gardner so that she could provide an answer after the meeting.

100 **Reports from the Cabinet and the Council's Committees and questions on those reports**

The Chair requested that the minutes of the following committees be received and any recommendations to Council be approved.

(a) Minutes of Cabinet held on 30 September 2020. Minute numbers 196 - 212

Cllr Arnott presented the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 30 September 2020.

Arising from consideration of the minutes:-

➤ **Cabinet of 30 September, minute number 211 – Exeter Airport**

Cllr Helen Parr wanted to reflect levels of concern held by members of the public in relation to the sustainability of the Airport and the proposed package of support to it to help counteract the impact of the lockdown and pandemic generally. She also expressed concern about why the Cabinet agreed to a loan in the form of a Parent Company Guarantee rather than a charge on the land.

The Leader responded at length, to address comments from the public speakers, to refer to the Long Lane project, and also the deferral of Business Rates. He stated that apart from the circumstance of it being located adjacent to the airport, the Long Lane project was a standalone project in its own right which was not widely understood. In terms of borrowing against future business rates, the loan of £3.7m is money which will come back to the Council in time and is, therefore, not a risk to the Council.

Following a vote by those present in favour of the recommendations contained therein, the minutes were agreed.

(b) Minutes of Cabinet held on 8 October 2020. Minute numbers 213 - 226

Cllr Arnott presented the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 8 October 2020. Following a vote by those present in favour of the recommendation contained therein these were agreed.

- (c) **Minutes of Scrutiny Committee held on 10 September 2020. Minute numbers 78 - 86**
Cllr Brown presented the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 September 2020. These were agreed.
- (d) **Minutes of Overview Committee held on 24 September 2020. Minute numbers 59 - 65**
Cllr Hookway presented the minutes of the Overview Committee held on 24 September 2020. These were agreed.
- (e) **Minutes of Housing Review Board held on 17 September 2020. Minute numbers 63 - 84**
Cllr McCollum presented the minutes of the Housing Review Board held on 17 September 2020. These were agreed.
- (f) **Minutes of Strategic Planning Committee held on 16 September 2020. Minute numbers 54 - 61**
Cllr Ledger presented the minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee held on 16 September.
Following a vote by those present in favour of the recommendation contained therein, these were agreed.
- (g) **Minutes of Planning Committee held on 9 September 2020. Minute numbers 145 - 152**
Cllr Wragg presented the minutes of the Planning Committee held virtually on 9 September 2020. These were agreed.
- (h) **Minutes of Audit & Governance Committee held on 24 September 2020. Minute numbers 33 - 50**
Cllr Hawkins presented the minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 24 September 2020. These were agreed.
- (i) **Minutes of Licensing & Enforcement Committee held on 3 September 2020. Minute numbers 41 - 50**
Cllr Whibley presented the minutes of the Licensing & Enforcement Committee meeting held on 3 September 2020. These were agreed.

101 **Motion: Towards Gender Equality at East Devon District Council**

The following motion was,

Proposed by: Councillor Kathy McLauchlan

Seconded by: Councillor Paul Millar

Supported by Councillors: Sarah Jackson, John Loudoun, Eleanor Rylance, Sam Hawkins, Olly Davey Paul Arnott and Joe Whibley.

That Council;

- 1) Notes the gendered language within the 1972 Local Government Act and that the Council's Constitution follows the language of this legislation.
- 2) Further notes with concern new data from the Fawcett Society following the 2019 local government elections that found that women made up just 35% of councillors in England.
- 3) Acknowledges with disappointment that women make up just 30% of councillors on East Devon District Council which is below the national average.

- 4) Believes that the membership should address the Chairs of any committees, panels, forums or groups as the 'Chair' rather than Chairman
- 5) Resolves that the Constitution be appropriately revised to accommodate the title of 'Chair' rather than 'Chairman' with delegated authority given to the Monitoring Officer to make the necessary amendments.
- 6) Commits to ensuring gender neutral language is used across the Council in our internal and external communications considering it a small but necessary step to encourage more women to stand to represent East Devon.
- 7) Agrees with the Fawcett Society's call for Councils to change their maternity policies for Councillors on Special Responsibility Allowances and notes with concern that only 8% of Councils have maternity policies for senior Cabinet-level councillors and 7% for councillors who receive only the Basic Allowance.
- 8) Acknowledges that, although we have a policy for maternity pay for councillors without extended roles, our current Allowances Scheme does not extend maternity pay for councillors on a Special Responsibility Allowance with current East Devon District Council policy stating that such allowances 'cease to be paid if a councillor is unable to continue with those duties'.
- 9) Asks the Monitoring Officer / Strategic Lead for HR to write a report to the Cabinet on how we may seek to adopt the Fawcett Society's recommendation of having maternity pay for Councillors with extended roles.
- 10) Notes that Fawcett Society research has found that a third of female councillors have experienced sexist comments from their colleagues.
- 11) Refer to the Standards Committee the Fawcett Society's recommendation that new clauses in the Code of Conduct against sexism be introduced.

The proposer of the motion, Cllr McLauchlan, highlighted the situation in the 1970's when there was no requirement for gender neutral language which had resulted in a male dominated bias in many areas. Fifty years on there were still many Local Authorities which were still falling behind the general effort to change this bias. EDDC had been successful in attracting a greater percentage of female councillors to its ranks at the last elections in May 2019. She referred to the Local Government Association (LGA) toolkit which highlighted that having more women councillors resulted in more equitable policies, but sexism was still rife in local government. On International Women's Day 2019, a toolkit had been prepared for local authorities to encourage women to become councillors and engage in major policy making.

The seconder of the motion, Cllr Millar, said that he was disappointed to see that many councillors had left the meeting before this motion had been debated. He went on to list the women councillors at EDDC who had started to make it more progressive. He stated that EDDC could be one of the first twenty councils in the country to adopt a positive stance on issues such as maternity policies for women councillors and using gender neutral language. The motion seeks to empower women, particularly young women and encourage them to become involved in democracy.

During a debate on the motion, comments included the following;

- That there is equality through the use of language, and that if people were to look at a Council and never see or hear anyone like them, they would be put off applying to become involved or elected
- A Council needs to reflect and represent people locally
- Why refer to a Chairman when a woman occupies this role
- The 2019 elections brought in a new, young, diverse set of councillors who want to introduce change

- Adopting the motion demonstrates a forward thinking Council in action. The details are not insignificant or small to many people
- Councillors were reminded of another recent motion about the WASPI issue when local MPs were written to request they lobby government to support women over 50 who affected by pension changes. The MPs had subsequently indicated that there was nothing they could do
- Councillors confirmed that they were proud to be part of the new administration with such a motion being put forward, and others were shocked that the issue had to be brought to Council as a motion at all.
- Some councillors confirmed that it would be difficult to change the habits long established, such as referring to the role of chairman on the basis that it referred to a role where the chair of a meeting 'manned' the chair, and where the male bias in titles took precedence e.g Ombudsman, craftsman and similar.
- Other councillors recalled hearing such gender biased comment forty years ago and it was time to move away from such patronisation with all of its social implications.
- Councillors commented that they were pleased with the nature of motions presented to Council recently and that if it agreed the motion it would be starting to turn the tide of change towards recognising the position of many diverse sections of the community.
- It was important to strive for equality for women, to recognise the barriers standing in the way and deal with them before the next elections.
- If it was the experience of many women councillors that they had encountered sexist comments it would be helpful to know what actions had been put in place to deal with the issues.
- It was intimidating to join the Council as a young woman, and important to make it a positive environment for anyone who wants to become a councillor.

Cllr Arnott requested a recorded vote take place on the motion, which was seconded by Cllr Rowland.

A vote on whether to hold a recorded vote on the motion was supported by a majority of those present so the Chair invited councillors to vote in favour of the motion, against or abstain.

Recorded vote:

Councillors Megan Armstrong, Paul Arnott, Jess Bailey, Denise Bickley, Kevin Blakey, Colin Brown, Sarah Chamberlain, Maddy Chapman, Andrew Colman, Olly Davey, Bruce De Saram, Steve Gazzard, Ian Hall, Marcus Hartnell, Sam Hawkins, Paul Hayward, Nick Hookway, Stuart Hughes, Sarah Jackson, Luke Jeffery, Vicky Johns, Geoff Jung, Fabian King, John Loudoun, Dawn Manley, Tony McCollum, Kathy McLauchlan, Paul Millar, Andrew Moulding, Helen Parr, Geoff Pook, Geoff Pratt, Val Ranger, Marianne Rixson, Jack Rowland, Eleanor Rylance, Philip Skinner, Brenda Taylor, Ian Thomas, Joe Whibley, Tony Woodward, Eileen Wragg, Tom Wright - voted in favour – 43.

Councillors Fred Caygill and Peter Faithfull voted to abstain – 2.

RESOLVED that:

This Council;

- 1) Notes the gendered language within the 1972 Local Government Act and that the Council's Constitution follows the language of this legislation.

- 2) Further notes with concern new data from the Fawcett Society following the 2019 local government elections that found that women made up just 35% of councillors in England.
- 3) Acknowledges with disappointment that women make up just 30% of councillors on East Devon District Council which is below the national average.
- 4) Believes that the membership should address the Chairs of any committees, panels, forums or groups as the 'Chair' rather than Chairman
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- 10) Notes that Fawcett Society research has found that a third of female councillors have experienced sexist comments from their colleagues.
- 11) Refer to the Standards Committee the Fawcett Society's recommendation that new clauses in the Code of Conduct against sexism be introduced.

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.45pm.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

V Ranger (Vice-Chairman)	V Johns	I Hall
M Armstrong	D Ledger	M Hartnell
P Jarvis	J Rowland	B Ingham
S Jackson	J Loudoun	G Jung
S Chamberlain	D Bickley	H Parr
P Arnott	J Bailey	G Pook
K Blakey	K McLauchlan	G Pratt
F King	P Hayward	M Rixson
F Caygill	S Hawkins	E Rylance
A Colman	A Moulding	B De Saram
P Millar	M Allen	P Skinner
T Woodward	D Manley	B Taylor

N Hookway
O Davey
J Whibley
L Jeffery
T McCollum

C Brown
M Chapman
I Chubb
P Faithfull
S Gazzard

I Thomas
P Twiss
E Wragg
T Wright
S Hughes

Officers in attendance:

Mark Williams, Chief Executive
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance
Henry Gordon Lennox, Strategic Lead Governance and Licensing
Susan Howl, Democratic Services Manager
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Councillor apologies:

K Bloxham
C Wright
D Key
C Gardner
S Bond
A Dent
D Barrow
M Howe

Chairman

Date: