

**EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the meeting of Overview Committee held at Council Chamber,  
Blackdown House, Honiton on 28 March 2019**

**Attendance list at end of document**

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.11 pm

**24 Public Speaking**

There were no questions from the public on items on the agenda.

**25 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the Overview Committee held on the 15 November 2018 were confirmed as a true record. The minutes of the joint meeting held with the Scrutiny Committee on the 16 January 2019 were also confirmed as a correct record.

A query was raised on the issue of SMART objectives and if that discussion, as set out in the minutes of 16 January, had taken place.

In response, the committee were informed that the process of reviewing the service plan objectives would have involvement of the Scrutiny and Overview committees in the next civic term earlier in the process, with joint meetings in the autumn to debate the service objectives coming forward from the new Council Plan.

Councillor Allen challenged that the objectives put forward on 16 January had not been amended at their request, specifically in regard to those relating to Economy and Regeneration.

The Chairman advised that the new Overview Chairman in the new civic term would have to closely monitor any developing plans accordingly.

**26 Declarations of interest**

Minute 28 Poverty, homelessness, human rights and health and wellbeing in East Devon - scoping report.

Councillor Mike Allen, Personal, Works in food bank run by Honiton Community Church.

Minute 30 Overview Draft Annual Report.

Councillor Ian Hall, Personal, Chairman of Cloakham Lawns Sports Centre.

**27 Digital East Devon - Firmstep presentation**

The Chairman welcomed the Service Lead for Organisational Development and Transformation, Karen Jenkins.

She outlined steps the Council will be implementing as part of the Digital Strategy. This included a step change in the delivery of digital services, by introducing new software – Firmstep. The outcome would be to meet the growing customer demand for the choice to transact online, with better customer journeys – both in completing the transaction, but also kept informed of progress in getting to completion.

The committee received a presentation from Firmstep Customer Ambassador, Hilary Jones and colleague Tamsin Cooper. Hilary explained her own experience of implementation at Scarborough Borough Council, and gave practical examples of what customers can expect from the changes.

Tamsin Cooper took the committee through some specific examples of transactions that a customer could complete in one place, through their own customer account. This meant that a customer didn't need to search for each individual service they required, or had to complete information for each of those services required. Logging into their customer account provided access to all the relevant information to that customer.

Other benefits of the new software included:

- Tailoring ability to provide the right questions and validate the responses, streamlining the process to what the customer needs;
- Ability to transact on behalf of others, such adult with mature parent who is not confident in transacting online;
- Transactions working across smartphones, tablets and other devices;
- Feedback built in to keep customer updated on progress and provide reminders;
- Frees up frontline staff to help with customers who do need personal interaction in order to transact, because much of the administration will have been dealt with by the software.

Developers from Strata – John Williams and Roy Podbery – were also present. They would be working on moving the existing online transactions to the new software, and creating new ones, working closely with officers delivering the service.

Councillors raised several questions on service delivery to understand how the changes would benefit residents of East Devon.

Debate on the issue covered:

- Helping digital inclusion for all sectors of the community, through front line staff helping people to become more confident in transacting online, and Councillors championing that support;
- Recognition that not all transactions can be offered online, because of their complexity;
- Frontline staff helping customers complete information online was already happening, and this would extend that further, to other transactions;
- Using a wide range of means to help people, including community groups and family members, as well as frontline staff;
- Expected take-up was high, based on experience both with existing LAGAN (current software) transactions at the Council, and with authorities across the country using Firmstep;
- Firmstep was compliant with data protection regulation, working with a secure workflow and on a permissions basis;
- The Digital Strategy was clear that this was not a channel shift to all transactions being online – but to offer the choice, accepting that some services, such as homelessness triage cases, needed personal interaction;
- Positive approach to providing a solution to customers that can signpost to what they need, regardless of who is providing it - such as other authorities or voluntary bodies that can provide help and advice.

The committee were advised to look specifically at Scarborough Borough Council's website, as a working example of the range of services available to residents to transact with online. A customer network also existed to provide lots of case examples and shared good practice.

In response to a question about timeframe for implantation, the committee were informed that Phase 1, covering existing transactions that the Council offers online, would take between 12 and 18 months, before moving onto Phase 2 for new transactions. There would be continual improvement to keep developing what was available, to meet demand. Development for the Cloud 9 based East Devon App was also planned, to include voice recognition.

The Chairman welcomed the development in online services and agreed that it was an exciting time for improving service delivery further. He thanked the representatives for their extensive presentation and helpful examples.

## 28 **Poverty, homelessness, human rights and health and wellbeing in East Devon - scoping report**

Cabinet received the report at their meeting of the 6 March 2019, in response to a Council motion in December 2018.

The motion put was "Following the findings of both the UK Equalities and Human Rights Commission and the UN Special Rapporteur on the impact of benefits changes and other spending cuts on people living in the UK, this Council will receive a report on the potential impacts on residents in East Devon and the need for further support from this Council, for example in supporting the roll-out of Universal Credit, homelessness prevention or for local food banks".

The report tried to scope the subject, and suggested themes for further investigation to provide a locally meaningful analysis of poverty and interventions that could influence, and perhaps provide action, to alleviate the impact of poverty on individuals and communities. It was recognised that the implications highlighted were as a result of national social welfare policy decisions, where the Council had limited influence. The report also proposed that the council work alongside Devon County Council, who were also investigating the issues and share the same concerns.

Cabinet resolved to agree the scope with the themes set out in the report, namely:

- Welfare benefits
- Homelessness
- Food banks
- Local economy
- Health and wellbeing of individuals and communities

Draft terms of reference have been made for this work, falling to the formed Devon Strategic Partnership Welfare Task Group. This group includes representation from East Devon District Council.

The committee discussed:

- Including in the review what local services can provide;
- Defining affordable homes and pushing back against developer arguments for not fulfilling the target percentage of affordable homes being built;

- Impact on affordable housing, recognising housing crisis, and reduction or withdrawal of grants to build homes;
- Profit had increased for house builders.

Cllr Allen tabled a paper setting out his suggestions for key areas of focus for the Council's approach that should be included, which is appended to these minutes. The suggestions would go forward with the minutes of the meeting to the Task Group.

**RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet

that the additional suggestions for key areas of focus go forward to the Devon Strategic Partnership Welfare Task Group for consideration alongside Cabinet's agreed themes of the scope.

29 **Environmental sustainability and climate change emergency**

Devon County Council have agreed, following a proposal by their Cabinet, to declare a 'climate emergency' and start a county-wide partnership to ensure that Devon is carbon neutral by 2050. The report before the committee, due to go before Cabinet in April, requests a commitment from this authority to be part of this partnership. The County will be working with Exeter University and others who can draw in the necessary experts to ensure that any plans adopted have the impact sought.

The committee discussed:

- Delivery of charging points in car parks. Many authorities were undertaking their own installations. There was some debate that, whilst this might help in respect of emissions, the electricity still had to be produced;
- Need for government support to change housing build requirements to include better standards, such as quality insulation and PV panels, balanced with what those measures cost on the overall cost of build;
- Society demand for new products, rather than repair, reuse and recycle;
- Need to see some specific proposals, on how the District can sustain itself and how;
- Need to bring forward the proposed date for these measures – too little too late?;
- Need of a test bed – such as East Devon – to establish what would be needed to reach the target;
- Future Council Plan should reflect the need to address climate change.

**RECOMMENDED to Cabinet**

to recommend to Council that we work with Devon County Council on a shared climate change programme, and signal our commitment to tackling climate change in areas where we can affect positive and meaningful change in our activities, and those of our partners, communities and residents.

30 **Overview Draft Annual Report**

The committee considered the draft report on the work of the Committee in the current civic term.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor Ian Hall, voiced his concern that despite a successful Housing Taff undertaken by the committee during 2017/18, no real progress was evident. He wanted to see progress in providing more social housing and assisted living accommodation, giving an example of opportunity in his own Ward. He asked that this issue be pursued into the next civic term to bring about progress.

There was also a request to make clear that the committee had always strived to push forward for a more business approach to aspects such as commercial property investment.

**RESOLVED** that the final version of the Overview Annual Report be agreed by the Chairman and Vice Chairman before submission to Annual Council in May 2019.

**CLOSING WORDS OF THE CHAIRMAN**

The Chairman gave thanks to the support from officers, both in terms of reports provided, legal advice, and from the Democratic Services Officer.

He asked the committee to continue to, and to develop, strategic forward thinking in the coming civic term. He felt that the role of the committee was important to the Council and should continue to be so.

**Attendance List**

**Councillors present:**

G Godbeer (Chairman)  
I Hall (Vice-Chairman)  
M Allen  
T Dumper  
P Faithfull  
R Longhurst  
G Pratt

**Officers in attendance:**

Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)  
Karen Jenkins, Strategic Lead Organisational Development and Transformation  
Mark Williams, Chief Executive  
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

**Councillor apologies:**

M Evans-Martin  
S Hall  
D Hull  
J Humphreys  
M Williamson

Chairman .....

Date: .....

Cllr Allen tabled a paper setting out this suggestions for key areas of focus for the Council's approach that should be included:

- All relevant services to be subject to poverty proofing
- The success of the Problem Families Programme to be turned into local action
- A grant fund for revenue funding of Foodbanks for three years to be developed
- Improve skills and employment career advice to schools and through co-ordination with job centres
- Encourage the CCG and County Council to focus on poverty alleviation through co-ordination with this Council
- Community team to engage the faith and voluntary sector in an audit of what exists and how to help this sector to efficiently harmonise with statutory bodies
- Supporting residents to access benefits and responding to the impacts of welfare reform
- Working with voluntary sector partners to provide debt advice and financial advice
- Promoting and signposting residents to sources of affordable finance
- Supporting residents in fuel and water poverty to reduce their energy and water bills
- Continuing to promote the Living Wage to employers
- Working with businesses to identify ways that they might use their skills, capacity and resources to support achievement of shared objectives around poverty and disadvantage
- Working with partners to support low income residents into higher paid employment and raise skills, attainment and life chances
- Continuing to promote digital access for residents on low incomes
- Continuing to promote volunteering as a means to develop skills and employability and build communities
- Promoting community pride and cohesion through supporting a range of community events and celebrations
- Working with partners to improve health outcomes for people on low incomes, including physical and mental health
- Constructing new Council homes and working with social landlords and developers to deliver more affordable homes
- Providing housing, employment and skills support for homeless people
- Delivering a range of projects to support groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty, including women, children and substance abusers.