

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Poverty Working Panel held Online via the Zoom app on 26 April 2021

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 2.30 pm and ended at 4.45 pm

48 Public speaking

The Chair thanked all Panel members, other members and the public for their understanding during the previous two weeks following the sad passing of HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh on 9th April. The Council had been obliged to postpone the previous meeting and all other public meetings during the national mourning period, which had now officially ended.

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

49 Declarations of interest

Minute 51. Discussion paper on the Community and Voluntary Sector - Jamie Buckley - Community Engagement and Funding Officer.

Councillor Ian Hall, Personal, Member is a Devon County Councillor, Chair of a sports charity which provides services through Cloakham Lawns in Axminster and Vice-Chair of ARC.

50 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 March 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

51 Discussion paper on the Community and Voluntary Sector - Jamie Buckley - Community Engagement and Funding Officer

The Chair confirmed that Jamie Buckley had been unable to attend the meeting and John Golding would be presenting her report, on her behalf.

During the presentation, the following points were made;

- The Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) are major players in alleviating poverty and supporting households in various ways.
- The Sector is not for profit, supports the whole district and offers services in a range of services covering issues relating to jobs, education, money, health and food.
- VCSE groups are actively working in communities and partners with the Council to fulfil its ambitions on poverty. In turn, the Council can influence how they operate and offer support on issues such as recruitment, legal advice, safeguarding amongst others.
- The VCSE Sector works well but needs practical support to function at its best. COVID has shown the importance of 'community' and mutual support at local level.

- There has been no Council for Voluntary Service in East Devon for some years, which would have offered support, advice and advocacy, representation and networking opportunities across the VCSE Sector.
- The emerging Poverty Strategy Action Plan seeks to capture key issues which have been highlighted by groups in the VCSE Sector and respond with proposals to support and coordinate VCSE activity in a sensitive way to add value.

Debate following the presentation, included the following comments:

- Groups from the VCSE had engaged in discussions with the Panel.
- COVID has been shown not to be the cause of many problems, but has exacerbated them, for people relying on Universal Credit, for example. For parents with children who have had to home-school, the financial impact of no free school meals has been huge on low incomes. Also people who could not work from home or those with mental health problems were significantly affected by the pandemic.
- The Council needs to work with other organisations who are in contact with people directly, and can be agile in their responses.
- Officers are sensitive to the independence of VCSE groups, when groups are requesting specific forms of help.
- A Directory of Services could be of benefit, although it was recognised that setting up and maintaining an up to date Directory would be resource intensive.
- An umbrella organisation such as a Council for Voluntary Service could fulfil a role similar to a Directory.
- The potential for volunteer burnout was recognised and groups could be assisted with recruitment to help support volunteers.
- Concern was raised regarding local residents' access to credit unions as none were registered in East Devon. Officers had started work to research credit unions and similar schemes and a report would be brought to the next meeting.
- It was hoped that the annual *Working Together* events would recommence when possible.
- Short podcasts were suggested as a means of reaching residents with reading difficulties.
- Mental health first aider training was recommended as being beneficial for all Councillors.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the discussion and wished to record her thanks to John Golding for presenting in Jamie Buckley's absence.

52 **Draft Poverty Strategy and Updated Action Plan - John Golding - Strategic Lead - Housing, Health and Environment**

The draft Poverty Strategy and updated Action Plan had been circulated prior to the meeting. John Golding's presentation outlined the approach taken by the Panel and highlighted the following points:

- The Poverty Working Panel was set up to produce a Poverty Strategy as a key outcome and this was now well underway before finally being recommended to Cabinet and full Council.
- It was important to understand the Council's sphere of influence and where partnership working would be required to deliver the Poverty Strategy.
- Five high level themes / objectives had been identified and had been considered in detail at Panel meetings.

- Four main Council services contribute significantly to alleviating poverty and the draft Strategy seeks to build on existing work within the Council across Environmental Health & Car Parks, Housing, Finance and Growth & Prosperity.
- The Services have had direct in-put in to the emerging Poverty Strategy.
- The narrative of the Poverty Strategy set out how the themes and objectives align with the Council's Statement of Intent.
- Resourcing would not affect what is undertaken, but will inevitably impact on the speed of delivery of the Poverty Strategy and progressing projects/tasks contained in the Action Plan.

Discussion included the following points:

- The Strategy should include confirmation that help for existing deprived wards should be maintained, specifically Exmouth Littleham and Honiton St Paul's wards.
- Once the Strategy has been approved and adopted, resources may need to be re-allocated to ensure a good pace of delivery and the Strategy should be regularly monitored to review its effectiveness.
- The budget highlighted the potential need for future resources to deliver the Strategy.
- Wording regarding voluntary / involuntary poverty had originated with the full Council.
- Most of the Government funding aimed at reducing domestic violence had been paid to upper tier authorities. EDDC had received £32,000 under the scheme.
- There is an on-going commitment to maintain and develop community engagement work funded through the housing revenue account.

It was agreed that the draft Poverty Strategy and Action Plan, updated to take account of the comments made during the meeting, would be recommended to the next available meeting of Cabinet.

The Chair thanked John Golding and everyone involved for their work on the Strategy.

53

Breathing Space Regulations - Libby Jarrett - Service Lead - Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services and Corporate Fraud

Libby Jarrett gave a presentation on the Government's Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space Regulations) which come into force on 4th May 2021. The aim is to support people who have fallen into problem debt by giving them a moratorium to obtain professional debt advice. The presentation highlighted the following:

- Debt is a significant problem both nationally and locally.
- A different scheme, with a longer moratorium, managed by the Insolvency Service, would support those with mental health difficulties who are experiencing problem debt.
- Action to recover debt would be suspended during the time a person was accessing the Breathing Space Scheme.
- Eligibility extends to those resident in England and Wales with a qualifying debt including those relating to local authorities such as arrears for council tax, business rates, housing rents and car parking charges.
- EDDC will receive notification from the Insolvency Service that a resident has entered the Breathing Space Scheme and any recovery action already underway must stop.

- The proposed Statutory Debt Payment Plan was outlined. Under this Plan, EDDC would receive one payment from a debtor which could comprise several different types of debt which would need to be allocated by the Council.

Discussion included the following points:

- It was not yet known how the additional work generated by the Scheme would impact on local authority resources.
- EDDC will have to raise awareness of the Breathing Space Regulations as part of its normal support and advice for residents.

An update on the take up of the Scheme would be provided to a future meeting.

Systems are in place to identify residents who repeatedly pay late or who appear to be falling in to debt and do not ask for help and Officers work proactively to support those in this position.

The Chair thanked Libby Jarrett for her presentation.

54 **Date of the next meeting**

It was agreed that the meeting scheduled for 10th May be cancelled. The next meeting would be held on 14th June at 11am. Dates for future meetings would be 19th July, 20th September and 22nd November at 11am.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

M Armstrong (Chair)
M Chapman
B De Saram
S Hawkins
M Rixson
T Woodward

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott
S Gazzard
I Hall
D Manley
E Rylance

Officers in attendance:

John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Libby Jarrett, Service Lead Revenues and Benefits
Andrew Wood, Service Lead - Growth Development and Prosperity
Susan Howl, Democratic Services Manager
Wendy Harris, Democratic Services Officer

Councillor apologies:

M Allen
P Jarvis
F King

Chair

Date: