

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the consultative meeting of Scrutiny Committee held Online via the Zoom app on 29 July 2021

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.40 pm

1 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 April 2021 were recommended to senior officers for approval.

DECISION:

The recommendation was approved by a Senior Officer. The Senior Officer Decision Notice is listed above under Additional Documents.

3 Declarations of interest

Minute 7. Report on proposed actions to improve staff morale.

Councillor Vicky Johns, Personal, Member was of the view that all Councillors had an interest in this item.

Minute 8. Planning Enforcement Process.

Councillor Olly Davey, Personal, Member is an Exmouth Town Councillor.

4 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

5 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential / exempt items.

6 Decisions made by Cabinet called in by Members for scrutiny in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules

There were no decisions made by Cabinet called in by Members for scrutiny.

7 Report on proposed actions to improve staff morale

The Chief Executive presented his report which was a follow up to the report to the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 4 March 2021, when the findings of a Health and Safety Executive approved survey of all staff taken during February 2021 had been presented.

Since the last Scrutiny Committee meeting, Strategic and Service Leads had worked with their teams to discuss the result and develop actions plans to work on any issues raised

regarding operational matters. The action plans formed part of an ongoing work to address and where necessary revisit issues raised through the survey results. The Chief Executive's report outlined the issues raised in the action plans.

It was intended that the same Health and Safety Executive approved questionnaire would be distributed to staff during October / November 2021 and that this would allow for a comparison position to be established and an assessment of the extent to which the concerns raised have been addressed.

In response to questions, the Chief Executive advised the following:

- Regarding IT issues, further investigation would be needed as not all problems were experienced all of the time
- Recruitment of staff remained problematic for various reasons including difficulties of re-locating during the pandemic and the shortage of professional staff wanting to work in local government
- Regarding the Code of Conduct and standards procedures, Members should take responsibility for their own behaviour and measures to enforce standards should remain for exceptional circumstances only
- The new Corporate HR Manager would be in post from 2 August and work on a pay review would be undertaken to ensure that the Council remained as a median pay employer as per its policy
- Member development and training was in the Monitoring Officer's work plan
- The draft Council Plan was expected to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in September / October
- The CEO would prepare a project plan to set out the way forward with implementing the actions proposed in the report

During the debate, Members were advised of the background to the formation of the new Personnel Committee which would be chaired by the Chair of the Council. Members also discussed the role of Portfolio Holders and Member Champions and the ways in which these roles could improve the flow of information and assist with signposting.

The Chair thanked the CEO for his report.

Having received the report and noted the comments, members were accepting of endorsing the proposed actions set out in the CEO's report and that reports addressing the proposed actions will be presented to Cabinet and the Personnel Committee in due course.

Members also felt that the CEO and / or Strategic Lead Governance & Licensing should liaise with all Committee Chairs (and Vice Chairs) to encourage managing their meetings so as to allow appropriate breaks (from screens and for general comfort) for the benefit of both staff and Members.

Recommendations

That the Cabinet (through the Portfolio Holders for Democracy & Transparency and Strategic Planning) assess whether Member Champion roles should be reintroduced, particularly in respect of the Council as Local Planning Authority, and

That Cabinet considers asking the Member Development Working Group to meet as soon as possible to review and revise the member training programme with a view to providing training designed to mitigate concerns raised in the staff survey, and

That the Chief Executive brings a report back to the Scrutiny Committee meeting of 7 October 2021 to provide reassurance as to when and how the actions in the report would be addressed. The Chief Executive confirmed that the report would be provided.

8 **Planning Enforcement Process**

A report by the Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development Management had been circulated in advance. The report responded to a request from the Committee to look at the planning enforcement process and the resourcing of planning enforcement. It sought to outline the principles of enforcement, the process followed and how the work is resourced.

Responses to questions to the Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development Management and debate by Members included the following points:

- There is adequate officer capacity currently, but no slack in the system if an officer is on leave or sick
- A significant amount of officer time is spent explaining the enforcement system to members of the public and a simple guide for residents might assist with understanding the process and would free up officer time to concentrate on other planning matters such as reducing the backlog of applications
- Planning would support the introduction of fines for planning breaches and lobbying of Government needs to continue
- It is recognised that there is frustration among members regarding the limited enforcement powers available to Planning and which are unlikely to change, although there are powers which give rights of access to officers in order to carry out inspections

The Committee acknowledged the report and its contents and recognised that planning enforcement is constrained by current legislation.

9 **Quarterly Monitoring of Performance - Quarter 4 2020 - 21**

Regarding the Quarterly Monitoring of Performance, it was noted that the absence report looking at working days lost due to sickness was ready and would be brought to the next meeting.

The Committee considered and acknowledged the report on Quarterly Monitoring of Performance for the 4th quarter - January to March 2021.

10 **Forward Plan**

Members considered the proposal form on Playing Pitch Strategy submitted by Cllr Millar.

The Committee was advised that the Strategic Planning Committee had agreed at its February meeting that the Playing Pitch Strategy would be considered when officer resources allowed as the current focus was on the new Local Plan process. Members of the Scrutiny Committee were welcome to attend and contribute to the Strategic Planning Committee.

The Committee was content to leave consideration of the Playing Pitch Strategy to the Strategic Planning Committee.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

V Ranger (Vice-Chair)
M Allen
M Chapman
O Davey
V Johns
H Parr
E Rylance
A Bruce
P Millar
T Wright (Chair)

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

J Bailey
C Brown
B De Saram
B Ingham
D Ledger
J Loudoun
M Rixson
J Rowland
M Armstrong
S Chamberlain
I Thomas

Officers in attendance:

Ed Freeman, Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development Management
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Wendy Harris, Democratic Services Officer
Rebecca Heal, Solicitor
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Mark Williams, Chief Executive

Councillor apologies:

A Colman
C Gardner
S Hawkins

Chair

Date: