

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 9 March 2023

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.15 pm

110 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

111 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

112 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

113 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential / exempt items.

114 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.

115 Portfolio Holder Annual Report - Council and Corporate Co-ordination

Cllr John Loudoun, Portfolio Holder for Council and Corporate Co-ordination presented his report and thanked the Corporate HR Manager and her team for their contributions and professionalism in maintaining good employee relations. Cllr Loudoun also thanked Cllr Ian Thomas for his work as Chair of the Personnel Committee.

Questions and comments on the Portfolio Holder report included the following points:

- Members of the Personnel Committee do not necessarily need HR experience as they have the professional advice of the supporting officers.
- Future potential pay claims were flagged as an area of concern, however, it was noted that this is a national issue facing public sector employers.
- Regarding the Worksmart approach which was revised in May 2022, it was emphasised that service delivery is the first priority when staff are working flexibly.
- Good information sharing is regarded as crucial to an organisation's culture and it was considered that the culture within EDDC is good.
- Setting up the Personnel Committee was a very positive step and had taken staffing matters out of the political arena. This had been assisted by having the independent Chair of Council as Chair of the Personnel Committee.
- With regard to staff turnover, and in particular staff at a higher level, it was noted that there needs to be a balance of experience and innovation when recruiting for these posts.

- On-going difficulties with recruitment were discussed and it was acknowledged that, although the recent pay review had helped considerably, there are also national shortages in some skill sectors such as surveyors which contribute to recruitment issues.
- In order for the Council to maintain its position following the pay review, this will be considered again after 9 months to monitor its success.
- Apprenticeships are not restricted to traditional roles, but are spread across the council. The Portfolio Holder would report back to clarify the number and type of apprenticeships currently in place.
- Regarding sickness absence, it was noted that, as well as winter colds, flu and covid, staff mental health was also being negatively impacted by the current cost of living crisis.
- It was noted that a staff survey is due at some point, but that this needed to be undertaken separately from the Investors in People re-accreditation process which is currently underway.

At the conclusion of its discussion, the Committee noted that the outcome of the staff survey will be monitored closely by the Personnel Committee as a good indicator of staff well-being.

It was further noted that the Chief Executive delivers the Council Plan through the staff, while always ensuring that support for staff well-being is paramount.

The Chair thanked Cllr Loudoun for attending and for his report.

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Portfolio Holder Annual Report - Tourism, Leisure, Sport and Culture

Cllr Nick Hookway, Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Leisure, Sport and Culture presented his report. Cllr Hookway advised that this was a relatively new Portfolio and the report covered the past two years. The Portfolio, which covered several services, was an effective cross-cutting method of working and would not function without the cross-service support of officers. Cllr Hookway also thanked Cllr Hawkins for his work as Chair of the LED Monitoring Forum.

Questions and comments on the report included the following points:

- The Exmouth Pavilion is seeing audiences returning slowly following the pandemic, in line with the experiences of venues across the country.
- A key issue for the Pavilion and other similar building is the lack of investment in maintenance over previous years.
- The Exmouth placemaking consultation is currently underway, although it was noted that any investment in the Pavilion may be constrained by lack of funds.
- A report is awaited as to what urgent repairs to the Pavilion might be needed.
- The Queen's Drive fitness space was installed during the pandemic so that it could be used while social distancing was in place. It was noted that its usage has not been as hoped and the space had been adversely affected by last year's heatwave and the impact on growing conditions for the grass surface. It was planned to run fitness sessions for teenagers over the summer season.
- It was noted that the key rationale in the Portfolio is to drive the economy in tourism and culture. Working across departments was critical to providing support for businesses as they emerge from the pandemic.
- Thanks was also due to the Arts and Culture Forum chaired by Cllr Whibley and the LED Monitoring Forum for their roles in delivering the strategies within the Portfolio.
- Regarding the playing field strategy, it was noted that no further update is available currently and the Portfolio Holder is waiting for work to recommence.

- Cllr Whibley as Member Champion for Arts and Culture, highlighted the excellent work undertaken by the Assistant Director, Countryside and Leisure and the Arts Development Manager at the Thelma Hulbert Gallery in pulling the different strategies together.
- The role of consultants in developing the Culture, Leisure and Tourism Strategies was noted.
- The appointment of the EDDC Cultural Producer would assist with overcoming some of the obstacles to delivering the Culture Strategy, however, the lack of a budget remained an obstacle to delivery. The Portfolio Holder was considering future Government levelling up funding as a possible option.
- Regarding the demographic of visitors to East Devon, it was difficult to be specific as it depends on time and location. The Portfolio Holder would report back with demographic information at a future point.
- It was noted that existing dual use arrangements are to be renegotiated and that this was well received. It was further noted that this would be a slow process as all sites have to be re-negotiated and that previously unknown issues had come to light during production of the Leisure Strategy.
- With regard to holding cultural events, there needs to be a balance between the benefit and the impact on local residents.
- The impact of holding weddings and the Christmas event in Connaught Gardens in Sidmouth was discussed and concern was expressed about closing off parts of the Gardens to visitors during events. Concern was also expressed that the identity of the Gardens should not be lost due to the holding of events, and that events should at least cover their costs.
- It was further noted that events such as weddings bring considerable economic benefit to the area.
- It was noted that Cranbrook should be included in the delivery of cultural and leisure facilities and that discussions between the Portfolio Holder and the Assistant Director, Growth, Development and Prosperity are on-going with regard to delivery of the Leisure Strategy in Cranbrook.
- With regard to ensuring that there is sufficient and wide promotion of cultural events, it was noted that one of the purposes of the Arts and Culture East Devon (ACED) network is to promote awareness of events.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report with regard to the stock condition survey and agreed the following recommendations to the Overview Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

1. That the Council aims to complete the Leisure Strategy stock condition survey by the end of the next Council term to enable both the Council and the public to be aware of the condition of their local assets and so that the required maintenance can therefore be budgeted for.
2. In the event that a cultural or leisure site is to close as a result of the stock condition survey, a public consultation be held where possible.

The Portfolio Holder was thanked for his report.

With regard to the annual report from the Portfolio Holder for Democracy, Transparency and Communications, the Interim Monitoring Officer advised that it would be preferable for the report to be considered in the new Council term rather than at the meeting scheduled for 6th April 2023 as this falls within the pre-election period. It was noted that there was, therefore, no business for the meeting on 6th April 2023.

It was agreed that the Committee write to the MPs requesting a date for them to report on their actions on requiring improvements from South West Water.

The Forward Plan was agreed.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

O Davey
B De Saram (Chair)
C Gardner
S Hawkins
D Key
H Parr
E Rylance (Vice-Chair)
B Taylor
J Whibley

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott
N Hookway
J Loudoun
J Rowland
P Skinner
T Wright

Officers in attendance:

Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Anita Williams, Interim Director of Governance and Licensing and Monitoring Officer

Councillor apologies:

J Bailey
A Bruce
M Chapman
J Kemp
T Woodward

Chair

Date: