

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Extraordinary Joint Meeting of Overview Committee, Scrutiny Committee and Housing Review Board held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 15 February 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.46 pm

33 Declarations of interest

There were none.

34 Public Speaking

No members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting.

35 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

36 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential/exempt items.

37 East Devon District Council Scrutiny Improvement Review - Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

The Democratic Services Manager presented this report which set out a number of recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Improvement Review carried out during October and November 2023 by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), following a Motion at Full Council in July 2023.

The CfGS letter setting out the findings of the Review was included with the agenda papers.

Members were asked to note the report and associated CfGS letter and to request that the Democratic Services Manager prepares an Action Plan to deliver the CfGS recommendations, for consideration at a further joint meeting, by 30 April 2024.

Discussion and clarification included the following points:

- The Action Plan will include detailed proposals on how and when recommendations can be delivered, taking account of any cost implications for the Council.
- Members discussed whether it was appropriate for Cabinet members to attend meetings of the scrutiny committees outside of occasions where they are required to present their Portfolio Holder report. It was noted that since meetings of the scrutiny committees are public, nobody can be prohibited from attending. However, Local Government Association advice in recent scrutiny training was that Cabinet members should attend scrutiny meetings only when invited to do so. The issue will be picked up in the Action Plan.
- Where recommendations refer to committee Chairs, it is appropriate to interpret this to include Vice-Chairs given that they may need to deputise, on occasion. This will be made clear in the Action Plan.

- Referring to recommendation 3, a senior officer has now been assigned to each of the three scrutiny committees and these arrangements are expected to remain in place for the foreseeable future.
- Referring to recommendation 6, it is intended that cross-party pre-meetings will provide a mechanism for members to be briefed so that they have a strong understanding of the matter under discussion and are better positioned to carry out effective scrutiny by asking the right questions and making best use of the time, in public meetings.
- A lack of officer capacity has prevented the scrutiny committees from carrying out in-depth scrutiny work and Members are keen that this is addressed, so that Task and Finish Forum (TAFF) work can be conducted for issues identified as a priority. It is envisaged that this will develop, moving forward, through delivery of recommendations around resources for scrutiny, and around work programming and alignment with the Council's strategic priorities. Members suggested a budget could be set aside for consultancy support for TAFFs in the event that the necessary resource is not available in house.

RESOLVED

That the Overview Committee, Scrutiny Committee and Housing Review Board:

1. Note the letter and recommendations from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny arising from the Scrutiny Improvement Review.
2. Request that the Democratic Services Manager prepares an Action Plan identifying the resources required to deliver the eight recommendations from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and presents the Action Plan to a joint meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, Overview Committee and Housing Review Board by 30 April 2024.

The Democratic Service Manager was asked to write to the CfGS to thank them for their work.

38 Scrutiny Protocol for Scrutiny Committee, Overview Committee and Housing Review Board

The Democratic Services Manager introduced this report which set out the draft Scrutiny Protocol for Scrutiny Committee, Overview Committee and Housing Review Board.

The three committees had previously considered and commented on the draft Protocol and were now asked to recommend it to Council, for approval. It was intended that the Protocol would be included in the Constitution and reviewed annually to ensure it is operating effectively.

Discussion and clarification included the following points:

- The wording at section 11.3 of the Protocol concerning Portfolio Holder Reports should be revised to allow longer than 35 minutes for questions, at the Chair's discretion.
- Some wording will be included to the effect that reports to the scrutiny committees will be authored by Officers and not by Members.
- Some Members suggested the inclusion of wording which indicates that, in the event that a scrutiny committee resolves to set up a TAFF, resources should be made available to facilitate this. It was recognised that this must not compromise the other good work that the Council undertakes, and that resources are finite. The Democratic Services Manager was asked to consider the issue further.

RECOMMENDED to Council

1. To approve the draft Scrutiny Protocol subject to:
 - a. Revision of the wording at section 11.3 to allow longer than 35 minutes for questions, at the Chair's discretion.
 - b. The inclusion of wording setting out that reports to the scrutiny committees will be authored by Officers and not by Members.

Thanks were expressed to the Monitoring Officer for her work on the draft Protocol.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

J Brown
A Hall (Vice-Chair)
J Heath
V Johns
Y Levine
M Martin
C Nicholas
H Riddell
D Wilson
I Barlow
M Chapman
B Collins
M Goodman (Chair)
D Mackinder
S Chamberlain
P Faithfull
T McCollum
H Parr

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott
C Brown
D Ledger
M Rixson

Officers in attendance:

Tracy Hendren, Director of Housing, Health and Environment
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Hopkins, Corporate Lead - Communications, Digital Services and Engagement
Andrew Melhuish, Democratic Services Manager
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Councillor apologies:

B Bailey
T Dumper
P Fernley
T Olive
A Toye
J Whibley

Other apologies:

Sue Dawson, Tenant, Housing Review Board
Sara Clarke, Independent Community Representative, Housing Review Board
Rob Robinson, Independent Community Representative, Housing Review Board

Chair:

Date: