

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Overview Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 29 August 2019

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.30 pm

19 Public Speaking

Adam Powell, Secretary for the Tiverton and Honiton Constituency Labour Party, read out the following statement:

“On behalf of the Tiverton and Honiton Labour Party I would like to offer some comments and observations on East Devon’s recent Review of Policies on Poverty. The report is obviously a result of detailed research.

Despite East Devon being an affluent region of the U.K., poverty is a real issue, and getting worse.

To quote:

11,956 households having two or more scores for deprivation,
7 wards with more serious deprivation [scores on 3 or 4 measures] in over 100 households,
6344 children growing up in poverty in East Devon,
Half the people in poverty live with someone registered disabled.

This is clearly not a credit to our affluent East Devon, that people flock to visit.

This report is academic, how many people in this room have experienced:

Not being able to feed their children in the summer holidays,

Not being able to ever afford a family holiday,

Not being able to afford school uniforms,

Not being able to afford to the rent,

Living in damp, housing where the children have no space to do their homework,

Or a case I heard about recently ‘Only being able to afford Weetabix for Sunday lunch for a family of four’.

Firstly this review needs an action plan of how to locate these East Devon people who are clearly needing extra help. A law was passed a few weeks ago in Sweden making it illegal to beg on the streets unless you registered on line for a permit to beg. The aim was not to punish beggars, but to make contact so they can be helped. East Devon we need to identify children, families, disabled people, and even working people who are simply, for what ever reason, are not able to afford their basic needs. The data needs joining up; free schools meals registers, ESA [employment support allowance] claimants, etc.

Secondly this council has failed in its target to build more truly affordable homes, dry and warm, and spacious enough for human beings not just to survive but to thrive. When we have a secure home we can benefit from good education; from the early years to sixth form and beyond to adult education as well. This can break the cycle of poverty and make society richer.

This council has failed to build quality social housing, we have failed to invest in education, the results are a poor society that suffers from physical and mental health prematurely. This is proven, now we need to act.

Many families in poverty are working, individuals holding down two or three low paid jobs are common. These people are not only financially poor, but also short of time to spend with their families. This council needs to positively nudge employers to pay the living wage [at least £10/hour] and champion those that do. East Devon falls short of their own targets on job creation.”

20 **Minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 July 2019**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 25 July 2019 were confirmed as a true record.

21 **Declarations of interest**

Minute 25. East Devon Policies on Poverty.
Councillor Ian Hall, Personal, Devon County Councillor.

Minute 25. East Devon Policies on Poverty.
Councillor Mike Allen, Personal, Volunteers for local food bank.

22 **Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency.

23 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were no items classified in this way.

24 **Council Plan draft**

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services to the meeting, to present the emerging draft Council Plan 2020 – 2024.

The Portfolio Holder explained the purpose of the plan is to set the strategic priorities for the Council. Drawing up the plan was a collaborative process, and she welcomed any input on it from the Committee and other councillors present. The draft plan would also be considered by the Scrutiny Committee, before going to Cabinet on the 30 October, with the final revised version being presented to Council on the 11 December. She specifically thanked the Strategic Lead Organisational Development, Transformation and Equalities for all her hard work in helping prepare the plan.

Questions on the plan, and suggestions for amendments generally, included:

- Summary information in the plan was based on data held by the Council, and information provided by Exeter University specifically on CO₂;
- That the plan was not sufficiently creative or aspirational;
- That budget shortfall figures should be consistent through the document.

Specifically on priority one: outstanding place and environment:

- a. Expand on working with Natural England to include working with East Dorset on a new national park;
- b. What was the latest decision on the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan;
- c. CPRE report wants to build more homes than are needed;
- d. What was meant by promoting open spaces on a commercial basis;
- e. Accessible green space at Cranbrook should be credited to Cranbrook Town Council, not the District;
- f. There is no reference to the playing pitch strategy – suggested that there is reference both to that, and to providing opportunities for sport, culture and leisure as part of preparations for the next Local Plan and the GESP;
- g. Proposals for housing design have drifted and should be a focus for planning
- a. Make specific reference to working with health support groups (there are a number, based in each town and in other areas) across the District, as well as enable links to local community hospitals;
- b. Include cycle paths in future infrastructure, in reference to Cranbrook;

In response to the points on priority one: outstanding place and environment:

- a. Building a case for a new national park covering the AONB areas in Dorset and East Devon is expected to take ten years or more, outside the period of the draft plan, and therefore it was deemed sensible to wait for an outcome of the review, before configuring that into a council plan;
- b. No decision has been taken on the GESP; an update report on progress by the new councils on it would be provided to the Strategic Planning Committee in November;
- c. Location of new housing will take into account all evidence, including the CPRE report, as has been set out in previous reports to the Strategic Planning Committee; the GESP and Local Plan are subject to consultation processes;
- d. Events run on council land is what is meant by promoting open spaces on a commercial basis, to help generate additional income;
- i. The development plan document is currently with the Inspector – if cyclepaths are not part of the plan that the Inspector has to consider, there isn't provision to include that – if the plan is found to be sound, the suggestion could subsequently be examined;

Specifically on priority two: outstanding homes and communities:

- a. What is the level of tenancy fraud;
- b. What are current levels of deprivation, broken down by town;
- c. How devolution of assets will be delivered – will it be on a town by town basis or collectively across the District;
- d. Divert the budget for an online ticketing service from section 106 funding to delivering the Beach Management Plan (BMP) for Sidmouth;
- e. Not enough affordable homes delivered and no news from the Housing Company; diminishing housing stock issue needs to be addressed and incorporated into the plan.

In response to the points on priority two: outstanding homes and communities:

- a. Tenancy fraud level is low, confirmed by an amnesty run in 2018;
- b. Specific data would come forward in a future report to the committee following the work of the Devon Strategic Partnership Welfare Task Group;
- c. Asset Management Forum have a report on the next steps for the agreed devolution of assets, which will come back to Cabinet along with the outcome of the pilot undertaken at Beer Parish Council;

- d. Section 106 funding is limited to where it can be spent by the agreement set up – it must relate directly to tourism and therefore cannot be utilised for the BMP.

Specifically on priority three: outstanding economic growth, productivity and prosperity:

- a. Where are the high skilled and better paid job opportunities in the District;
- b. What is the innovative approach to promoting tourism and what are the footfall figures for Seaton Jurassic;
- c. No comprehensive view of the rural and coastal community, the plan could be interpreted as only having focus on higher paid jobs being provided by the science park;
- d. Weighting high skilled/paid jobs to the west of the district meant that those who reside in the east would need to travel – there needs to be an even distribution across the District to reduce travel distances;
- e. Consider expanding on supporting infrastructure providers, as there will be a shortfall in the CDS project in delivering broadband across the District; having a good broadband service in place allows rural communities to better develop local businesses that can operate remotely and therefore helps boost the local economy. There needs to be action to enable a better penetration of broadband in the District;
- f. More promotion of the services available to SMEs, and work to deliver small business units that are needed in the District

In response to the points on priority three: outstanding economic growth, productivity and prosperity:

- a. The plan sets out to try to provide different land for different jobs, to encourage higher paid jobs – examples being the airport and the science park;
- b. Number of visitors to Seaton Jurassic can be provided to the councillor; previous attempts had been made to join up the tourism offer to promote the district as a whole, but towns had been reluctant to buy into that and had preferred to promote themselves on a single destination basis, so not pursued by the previous Council. This would be reviewed under the new administration;
- d. The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services commented that the plan had the aspiration for all towns in the District to be able to offer highly skilled/paid jobs.

Specifically on priority four: outstanding council and council services:

- a. In regard to relocating to Blackdown House and Exmouth Town Hall, the savings are less than claimed; was the Project Manager still employed, what is the total consultation bill and the total refurbishment bill for Exmouth Town Hall;

In response to the points on priority four: outstanding council and council services:

- a. Cabinet will receive a report one year after the relocation that will outline the savings achieved and various elements related to the relocation;

The Leader explained to the committee his desire, and that of his Cabinet, to work towards delivering for the District's towns to enable them to become as self-sufficient as possible. He also shared his ambition for all towns to have their own business centres in the future, and the expansion of small business units to again help the degree of self-sufficiency each town could develop. Through the Heart of Devon partnership, an economic strategy was due to be presented to Government in the New Year outlining plans to expand growth in the enterprise zone areas.

He also commented that work was underway to try to change the diminishing housing stock, and that it would take time to ensure that the right policies were in place, and that

any new stock built would not be taken away by Government. He looked forward to hearing ideas from Councillors on how to address social housing, weighing up what could be delivered and within the law.

The Chairman brought the debate to a conclusion, adding that three elements would impact what the Council could deliver: Brexit; a general election; and climate change. It was likely that the plan would have to adapt over time to deal with those outcomes.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet to accept the draft Council Plan, subject to revision taking into account the comments made during the debate by the Overview Committee; specifically that that there is reference both to the playing pitch strategy, and to providing opportunities for sport, culture and leisure as part of preparations for the next Local Plan and the GESP.

25 **East Devon Policies on Poverty**

Cllr Allen presented his paper to the committee. His paper outlined how poverty is defined currently, and how a new way of measuring poverty the Department of Work and Pensions takes account of factors other than income.

His paper covered the many causes of poverty, and the practical implications for those living in poverty. The paper also covered statistics for the District.

He suggested a number of measures that the Council could use to take action on local poverty, which are detailed in the recommendation to Cabinet below.

Debate on the item included:

- Further discussion should take place on the issue when a report prepared by officers was presented to the committee in November, which included the work undertaken to date alongside the Devon Strategic Partnership Group;
- Data from intelligence already held from council tax and benefit records needed to be presented to get a clear picture of what impact there is on the District;
- Any measures for alleviating poverty must include helping people with dealing with personal debt;
- More officer resource should be considered in order to build on work already undertaken by officers in both revenues and benefits, and the housing service, to help signpost where help could be found;
- Concentrate on the root causes of poverty and look to educate where possible; including working with housing providers to help identify those who need help;
- Not enough housing stock is key issue, as is the impact of universal credit;
- Wait for report in November and consider alongside the proposals in Councillor Allen's paper.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

that in the preparation of the Council Plan, and subsequent service plans and related budgets, the following proposals on dealing with poverty are taken into account:

1. Council should have two basic aims, that:-

- 1.1. No one in East Devon is destitute without immediate help, and
- 1.2. Nobody is in poverty for more than two years duration.

2. To achieve this we should address the following key issues:

- 2.1. Boost incomes and reduce relative housing costs;
 - 2.2. Work with partners to deliver an effective benefit system;
 - 2.3. Deliver actions with Business and Public Sector to improve education standards, raise skills and improve work placements;
 - 2.4. Strengthen families and communities to help those at risk of poverty; and
 - 2.5. Promote long-term economic growth to reduce dependency on agriculture, tourism and catering industries
3. **Cabinet should organise lobbying of Government Policymakers by the Council and with Partners** Aimed to improve Welfare, Housing Policy and Employment Law using this report as a basis.
4. There is now a general power to give financial assistance for home repairs, providing the Council has a published policy for providing such assistance. Council should develop a clear Private Sector Housing strategy which plays a key part in delivering the various duties and powers the Council has regarding housing, such as:
- 4.1. assessing the quality, condition and management of the housing stock in the private sector
 - 4.2. tackling poor housing conditions and take action where the meet the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard is not met
 - 4.3. developing measures to bring empty properties back into use
 - 4.4. helping to drive up standards of property management in the private sector
 - 4.5. helping to improve homes through grant assistance in respect of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)
 - 4.6. preventing and reducing homelessness
 - 4.7. improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions from housing. From April 2018, it is unlawful for a landlord to rent out a residential property that does not reach a minimum energy efficiency standard. The intention is for the minimum standard to be set at EPC rating E.;
 - 4.8. administering and enforcing mandatory HMO (house in multiple occupation) licensing
- We cannot deliver the aims of such a strategy alone and it will only be achieved with the assistance of partners and with Devon Home Choice
5. **Devon Strategic Partnership** should report on poverty mapping and should include actions regarding:
- 5.1. Welfare Benefit Policies
 - 5.2. Homelessness
 - 5.3. Exeter and Heart of Devon local Economy actions on jobs
 - 5.4. Health and wellbeing integrated developments
 - 5.5. Broadband
 - 5.6. Food Banks
 - 5.7. Discretionary funding and match-funding with grants
 - 5.8. Review of Priorities
6. **Action with DCC and Skills Agency** Can improve skills and employment career advice to schools and links with SMEs through coordination with Jobcentres:-
7. **Work with EHOD Partners** including Skills Agency to enhance skills in Admin. Food Supply, Wholesale/Retail and Agriculture especially to counter Brexit damage
8. Work with Partners to support low-income residents into higher paid employment and raise skills, attainment and life chances.
9. **Encourage Clinical Commissioning Group** and County Council focus on poverty alleviation through coordination with the District Council
10. Work with partners to improve health outcomes for people on low incomes, including physical and mental health.
11. Apply rigour with transport licensing to improve rural and town access

Potential key areas of focus for the Council's own action going forward:

12. All relevant services and policies to be subject to “poverty proofing” by a report to Overview when each Service Plans and budget is being developed
13. Economic Development to prioritise Business support for Technology, Professional Services and Manufacturing businesses.
14. Economic Development to counter stereotypes of age in employment practises by suitable fact-based engagement with employers
15. Planning to be supportive in Planning applications for Technology, Professional Services and Manufacturing businesses.
16. Contract to AED or similar entity to crowdfund (and raise donations and legacies) and then administer an emergency help fund to help with catastrophic life events. Find grant funds for emergency bridging loans and signpost help
17. Specific EDDC local action integrated with volunteers to focus on key families based on the success of the Troubled Families Programme including creche, early years and childcare facilities; food clubs to improve nutrition; mums and dads clubs to improve parenting and homework and food facilities for children
18. A specific EDDC action research project to focus on disability and chronic ill health:
 - 18.1. Evaluation by Housing Department of disability affects in our social housing stock
 - 18.2. Research by Policy Planning Department on design standards which inform policies to address poverty amongst disabled people.
 - 18.3. Advisory help on home adaptations grants and methods for the disabled and elderly using Disabled facilities grants, Warm Home grants etc.
19. Mechanisms for mapping and enabling key volunteer agencies with committed 3-year funding support based on performance goals
20. Strengthening Community team action to build self-help among community volunteers
21. A Grant fund contributing to revenue funding of Foodbanks for the next 3 years
22. EDDC Community team to engage the Faith and Voluntary sector in an audit of what help exists in East Devon and plan how to help this sector can efficiently harmonise with statutory bodies
23. Support residents to access benefits and respond to the impacts of welfare reform and Brexit.
24. Work with voluntary sector partners to provide debt advice and financial advice - For example UC claimants are able to access the Jobcentre Plus Flexible Support Fund (FSF)—a discretionary fund, controlled by Work Coaches—to cover the up-front costs of childcare, if these would otherwise present a barrier to work. Universal Credit claimants are required to pay for childcare upfront, and claim the money back from DWP. Initial costs, including deposits, can run to hundreds of pounds: costs that may be prohibitive for people with no savings or immediate income. The Flexible Support Fund can be used to meet these costs.
25. Promote and signpost residents to sources of affordable finance.
26. Support residents in fuel and water poverty to reduce their energy and water bills.
27. Continue to promote the Living Wage to employers through Economic Development.
28. Work with local businesses to identify ways that they might use their skills, capacity and resources to support the achievement of shared objectives around poverty and disadvantage.
29. Continue to promote digital access for residents on low incomes with a PC loan fund.
30. Continue to promote volunteering as a means to develop skills and employability and build communities.
31. Promote community pride and cohesion through supporting a range of community events and celebrations to raise funds to alleviate immediate poverty.
32. Construct new Council homes, working with social landlords and developers to deliver more affordable homes.
33. Provide housing, employment and skills support for homeless people.

34. Deliver a range of projects to support groups of people that are more likely to experience poverty, including women, children and substance abuser.

RESOLVED that the proposals be considered alongside a report on Poverty at the November meeting of the committee, with a view to making further recommendations to Cabinet.

26 **Review of the Council's Governance Arrangements - update**

The Chairman advised the committee that circumstances had prevented a meeting between him and the Portfolio Holder for Transformation, but that work would continue on this issue.

An additional meeting for the committee was set for the 17 October 2019 to debate this issue only. Further discussion had also been timetabled in for the scheduled meeting in February 2020.

27 **Overview Forward Plan including update on active scopes**

The Chairman updated the committee on two issues:

- High Streets Task and Finish Forum would get underway later in the year, following discussion with the Portfolio Holder Economy in relation to his plans for a wider economic review of key towns of the District. A [recently published report by Manchester Metropolitan University](#) on the subject would be circulated to councillors;
- Broadband work continued, being actioned by Councillor King. A recent announcement had been made by Government of a [Rural Connected Communities competition](#).

The forward plan for the committee was noted.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

N Hookway (Chairman)
V Johns (Vice-Chairman)
M Allen
S Chamberlain
I Hall
M Hartnell
S Hawkins
F King
M Rixson
T Woodward

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

M Armstrong
P Arnott
J Bailey
K Blakey

K Bloxham
S Bond
P Faithfull
B Ingham
S Jackson
A Moulding
G Pook
J Rowland

Officers in attendance:

Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Service Lead Housing
Libby Jarrett, Service Lead Revenues and Benefits
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer
Karen Simpkin, Strategic Lead Organisational Development, Transformation and Equalities
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Mark Williams, Chief Executive

Councillor apologies:

B De Saram
J Loudoun
C Wright

Chairman

Date: