

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 15 January 2020

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 6.00 pm

1 Public speaking

There were no public speakers at the meeting.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 September 2019 were agreed and signed as a true record.

3 Declarations of interest

Cllr Kim Bloxham Minute 6, Personal Interest, Member of Cranbrook Town Council

Cllr Sam Hawkins Minute 6, Personal Interest, Member of Cranbrook Town Council

Cllr John Loudon, Minute 6, Personal Interest, Member of Sidmouth Town Council

4 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

5 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential items.

6 Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets 2020/21 and Key Service Objectives

The Chairman welcomed the Strategic Lead Finance to open the meeting with an overview of the budget position in the context of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the main factors influencing this and future budgets.

The report presented the draft revenue and capital budgets for 2020/21 for consideration by this joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Recommendations from this meeting would be presented to the Cabinet on 5th February 2020 when members would finalise budget proposals to be recommended to Council.

Members noted that the projected deficit was £0.7M in 2020/21 rising to £1.6M in 2021/22, giving a total deficit in the next two years of £2.3M.

At the beginning of the meeting Cllr Fabian King expressed a concern over whether Commercialisation Strategy as presented was fit for purpose. He was concerned that there did not seem to be a viable plan and that the senior management of the Council

needed to acknowledge the need to change. He considered that managing change had not been handled well or planned. He was concerned that the Council would not be able to generate sufficient income through its Commercialisation Strategy.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- There had been no significant generation of additional income by the Council.
- There was an issue of management of change by the Council.
- Need to progress the process of change.
- A Transformation Strategy had been in place for a number of years.
- Significant budget savings had been achieved over recent years in response to the reduction and removal of Government grants.
- There had been considerable thought given to the posts that were being made redundant under 'Fit for Purpose'. Systems thinking had made the way the Council worked more efficient and Development Management had seen a recent reduction in workload.
- It was acknowledged that there had been a number of proposed income generating areas that had slipped in the budget.
- The Commercialisation post was to assist Service Leads on preparing business plans but the Senior Management Team (SMT) were responsible for delivery of commercialisation initiatives.
- Why have we not invested in commercial initiatives or housing? The Council were limited by that lack of suitable property available in the district.
- If there was no money we would have no choices to take.
- Concern expressed that Council Tax had not been increased for many years previously.
- The Action Plan was weak as there was a lack of commercial income.
- Concerns about how much car park initiatives would achieve in 2021. Would like reassurances about the future.
- Would have to look at other initiatives if current ones did not bring in income.
- What would happen with Cranbrook in future years?
- The need to produce a balanced budget by being more commercially driven.
- Concern about proposals to create an alternative shopping centre to Cranbrook town centre on the outskirts of Exeter.
- There was there need for someone to drive forward a cultural change at EDDC. Concern that the £60K for commercialisation would not be spent effectively.

Discussion of Key Service Objectives

Countryside and Leisure service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- The £60K in the budget for Butts Lane play equipment was not required and should be spent elsewhere.
- Support expressed for HRA outreach programmes.
- The purchase of land at Seaton Wetlands Link project needed to be reviewed by the Overview Committee.
- Balance needed between staffing levels in the Countryside Team and the Economic Development Team.

- Wildlife Exmouth – a presentation would be prepared for Exmouth Town Council.
- What proportion of the services work was funded by EDDC and what was funded by grants? This could be sent out to members.
- The service had adopted a commercial approach and was very good at achieving grant aid funding for its work.
- Invasive foreign species in waterways was a problem and would take time to overcome.
- Praise to the service for the initiatives they were taking regarding health benefits and tourism.
- What could be done to demonstrate the benefits of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery? It was acknowledged that the Gallery Manager was very proactive.
- Sidmouth Manor Pavilion was highly valued in the community.

Environmental Health and Car Parks service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- Recruitment was underway for a Climate Change Emergency Officer.
- Work was progressing on a pilot refill drinking water scheme.
- Possibility of pursuing a money back scheme for plastic bottles.
- Need to introduce a realistic charging scheme for parking of motorhomes, particularly in Exmouth.
- Concerns over the public health aspect of water fountains, particularly possible infection by drug users. The Service Lead confirmed that anything done in this regard would be risk assessed.

Finance service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- Develop and articulate the Commercialisation Strategy.
- Support for the banded discount scheme.
- Concern that 10% of the district still could not receive adequate broadband coverage. This was a key strategy of the Council.
- Support for enabling officers to prepare plans to execute commercialisation in priority areas to deliver the Commercialisation Strategy. There was also the need to include a communication plan in this, highlighting successes, such as the levels of recycling within the district.
- There would be additional staff appointed to allow better out of hours access and security to Blackdown House.
- Include within the finance Key Service Objectives that it should 'carry out an urgent review of the Capital Strategy and Allocations Group, specifically the fitness for purpose of the climate change matrix which is used to determine the fate of applications' in light of the CSAG decision over providing open space at Brixington.
- Include within the finance Key Service Objectives wording on the commercialisation Strategy to say 'Enable officer to prepare plans to execute commercialisation in priority areas to deliver the Commercialisation Strategy'.

Growth, Development and Prosperity service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- This was a new service created from the Growth Point and Economic Development teams and the strength of the team lay in the officer team and their relationships with outside agencies.

- Two thirds of businesses in East Devon were rural and it could be considered that there was no clear rural development strategy.
- Officers should be enabled to prepare plans to deliver the commercialisation strategy.
- Concern that the SMT were unclear regarding the Commercialisation Strategy and that this needed further clarification.
- Possibility of adding an additional member of staff to look at ways to promote the development of commercial premises. There was also a need for a good quality member of staff to undertake research and grant bidding work. The budget for the service should be increased to include these two members of staff.
- There was the need to allow time for the new team to 'bed in'.
- Skypark had not so far developed as was hoped and this was due to a number of reasons.
- Lack of private development coming forward for business units and the need for the district council to deliver small business units, such as those proposed in Seaton
- 90% of businesses were smaller businesses with less than 6 employees, but not all wanted to grow bigger.
- Should look at reassessing the Local Plan and the level of housing need.

Governance and Licensing service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- Noted the two additional objectives namely - *Enable enhanced meeting management through fully utilising the Bosch equipment in the Chamber by implementing electronic voting and speaker queuing* and *'Assess options for live-streaming and / or webcasting of meetings and virtual member attendance at meetings'*.
- Possibility of commercialisation of legal services and sharing with other Council's.
- Need to look at possibility of reducing the number of Licensing pages on the website.
- Should the Monitoring Officer be a standalone role. This had been considered previously when one of the Deputy Chief Executives was also the Monitoring Officer and it was determined that there was not enough work to justify this.

Housing service plan

The Chairman reminded the committees that the Housing Review Board would be examining this service plan, but welcomed any comments from Members on the general fund aspects of the plan.

Clarification and debate covered:

- Council housing was a big area to address for the Climate Change agenda.
- The stock condition survey had indicated that the cost of making the 4,200 council properties carbon neutral would be in the region of £44M, at £25K per property.
- There was a report going to Housing Review Board on proposals to fund this work.
- Where was the housing portfolio in terms of its long term plan?
- Was the HomeSafeguard service fit for purpose in terms of having up to date technology? It was acknowledged that it had been a challenge to keep

up with technology on this area, but there was an equipment upgrade in progress.

- Need to help tenants understand their conditions of tenancy better.
- In view of the effect of the Homelessness Reduction Act, would building our own accommodation be more effective. This was being explored and a HIMO in Exmouth with 8 letting rooms was being purchased.
- Would the Axminster Fairshare scheme be rolled out across the rest of the district? This scheme had worked well and the service were looking at rolling it out throughout the rest of the district.
- Possibility of looking at larger property division where possible.
- Need to look at development opportunities to enable more council housing to be built.
- Possibility of purchasing houses direct from developers should be investigated.

Organisational Development and Transformation service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- Included the aim of achieving 'platinum' standard for Investors in People, which would mean the Council being in the top 1% of Councils.
- Concern about the lack of involvement of councillors in some commercial decisions.
- Need to investigate the process through which we go through before the Council should look to buy a property as a commercial investment. The Overview Committee should be asked to investigate the way things were being done.
- Could ward members be informed before acquisitions were made?
- Possibility of reviewing the delegated powers process? A list of delegated powers would be circulated to members.

Place, Assets and Commercialisation service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- This was a new service recently established.
- Concern that the Asset Transfer policy says to 'target' parish/town councils, which could give a negative impression, and far better to refer to approach. It was noted that this policy was subject to public consultation under Careful Choices. It was acknowledged that asset devolution was important in terms of commercialisation and engagement.
- Any potential asset transfer would be considered by the Asset Management Forum.
- Is there a list of potential assets that could be sold?
- No mention of the Poverty agenda in the plan.
- The Council acquisition policy has been limited by lack of opportunity and restrictions on the council's investments.
- It was planned to start work improvements to the Honiton Swimming Pool changing rooms shortly.
- Work had started on an expansion plan for East Devon Business Centre.
- Need to establish what assets EDDC could transfer to town/parish councils.
- Town/parish councils should not be expected to take on loss making assets from EDDC
- How much had been spent on Queens Drive Phase 3, how much more needed to be spent and what would be the eventual debt?

- It was recommended that the process for assessing Commercial Investment opportunities was deferred to Scrutiny

Planning service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- Importance of encouraging small and medium size house builders. Need to reduce house buildings carbon footprint and improve room sizes and design.
- Encourage sites with planning permission to be developed.
- Importance of environmental protection and mitigation.
- Planning fees were set nationally and it was difficult to increase income. Building Control fees had recently been increased.
- Delivery of regeneration of market towns had been delayed.
- The level of the River Clyst had been rising faster than it had been in recent memory .Need to emphasis flood prevention works in any new development.
- Encourage communities to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan.
- In the Planning Service include a Key Service Objective in relation to ensuring proper Construction Environment Management Plans (CEMP) are put in place for development and then enforced robustly where necessary
- Quality of documents on the planning app needed improving. There was also the issue of the poor usability of the system. The Service Lead indicated that he was aware of these problems.
- Playing Field strategy agree to the Key Service Objective on the carrying out of a review of the Playing Pitch Strategy, but ensure that the spirit of the Strategy, once adopted, is followed at all levels within the Council.
- The council cannot insist that house builders must use its building control service to check on quality.
- Target dates in the plan needed to be updated.
- Concern about progress with GESP and whether this had been properly considered by Councillors.
- Agree to the Key Service Objective on the carrying out of a review of the Playing Pitch Strategy, but ensure that the spirit of the Strategy, once adopted, is followed at all levels within the Council.

Street Scene service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- The Blue Flag target for Seaton beach could be aligned with the town councils ambitions for seafront enhancement.
- Discretionary spend of £2M could be reduced by 10% and put into the budget headroom?
- The 70,000 property tipping point in the district had been reached and this shad resulted in a considerable increase in the waste and recycling contract cost.
- Issue of whether on street recycling needed improving upon.
- Significant cost of beach management schemes.
- Thanks to officers for moving forward the Sidmouth Beach Management Scheme.
- Need to provide Exmouth Town Council with itemised lit of work service undertakes for Exmouth Town Council.
- Possibility of providing shared community allotments in any areas of spare land.

- Honiton Butts Lane play area was underused.
- It was anticipated that the self-funded participation officer would help increase recycling rates further and increase income from recycling.

The Chairman thanked the officers involved in preparing the service plans presented to the Committees.

RECOMMENDED by both Overview and Scrutiny Committee,
that Cabinet;

1. Receive greater clarification on what the Commercialisation fixed term position for 2 years (£60k pa) will actually be spent on.
2. Include within the Finance Key Service Objectives that it should '*carry out an urgent review of the Capital Strategy and Allocations Group, specifically the fitness for purpose of the climate change matrix which is used to determine the fate of applications*' in light of the CSAG decision over providing open space at Brixington.
3. Include within the Finance Key Service Objectives wording on the Commercialisation Strategy to say '*Enable officer to prepare plans to execute commercialisation in priority areas to deliver the Commercialisation Strategy.*'
4. Include two additional Key Service Objectives for Governance & Licensing namely, '*Enable enhanced meeting management through fully utilising the Bosch equipment in the Chamber by implementing electronic voting and speaker queuing*' and '*Assess options for live-streaming and / or webcasting of meetings and virtual member attendance at meetings*'.
5. In the Place, Assets and Commercialisation Service to replace the word '*target*' with '*approach*' in relation to Asset Transfer to Towns and Parishes.
6. In the Planning Service include a Key Service Objective in relation to ensuring proper Construction Environment Management Plans are put in place for development and then enforced robustly where necessary.
7. In the Planning Service, agree to the Key Service Objective on the carrying out of a review of the Playing Pitch Strategy, but ensure that the spirit of the Strategy, once adopted, is followed at all levels within the Council.
8. In the Growth, Development and Prosperity Service, include two additional posts for roles to (i) investigate ways in which the Council can promote development of commercial premises, and (ii) research and bid for grants and

RECOMMENDED by both Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet

9. That the draft Budget proposed on the agenda including the schemes and funding tabled in paragraph 2.13 of the report, subject to;
 - a. It being made clear that for the additional request for £323k towards the Climate Change Action Plan, this is up to £323k,
 - b. Consideration of the suitability of having a £323k fund towards the Climate Change Action Plan in light of the requests for the two additional posts in Growth, Development and Prosperity Service.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

A Dent (Vice-Chairman)
K Bloxham
T McCollum
K McLauchlan

J Rowland
E Rylance
M Chapman
B De Saram
C Gardner
P Jarvis
F King
M Allen
S Hawkins
N Hookway (Chairman)
J Loudoun
P Millar
M Rixson
T Woodward

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

J Bailey
K Blakey
S Bond
B Ingham
G Jung
A Moulding
P Arnott
D Barrow
D Bickley
F Caygill
P Faithfull
P Skinner
I Thomas
E Wragg
T Wright
H Parr

Officers in attendance:

Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance
Andrew Ennis, Service Lead Environmental Health and Car Parks
Ed Freeman, Service Lead Strategic Planning and Development Management
Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Service Lead Housing
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Henry Gordon Lennox, Strategic Lead Governance and Licensing
Susan Howl, Democratic Services Manager
Christopher Lane, Democratic Services Officer
Charles Plowden, Service Lead Countryside and Leisure
Karen Simpkin, Strategic Lead Organisational Development and Transformation
John Symes, Finance Manager
Mark Williams, Chief Executive
Tim Child, Service Lead - Place, Assets & Commercialisation
Andrew Hancock, Service Lead StreetScene
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Wood, Service Lead - Growth Development and Prosperity

Councillor apologies:

V Ranger
J Whibley

I Chubb
S Chamberlain
I Hall
M Hartnell
V Johns
A Colman

Chairman

Date: