

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Committee held on 10 December 2020

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 9.15 pm

95 Public speaking

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

96 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2020 were agreed as a true record.

97 Apologies

98 Declarations of interest

Minute 106. Car parking tariff review.

Councillor Andrew Colman, Personal, Exmouth Town Councillor.

Minute 106. Car parking tariff review.

Councillor Eleanor Rylance, Personal, Broadclyst Parish Councillor and a resident of Broadclyst which has a car park and a member of the Car Park Task and Finish Forum.

Minute 106. Car parking tariff review.

Councillor Iain Chubb, Personal, Devon County Councillor.

Minute 106. Car parking tariff review.

Councillor Maddy Chapman, Personal, Exmouth Town Councillor and a resident of Exmouth.

Minute 106. Car parking tariff review.

Councillor Olly Davey, Personal, Exmouth Town Councillor.

Minute 106. Car parking tariff review.

Councillor Tony McCollum, Personal, Employed by Honiton Town Council which has car parks managed by EDDC and President of Honiton Chamber of Commerce.

Minute 106. Car parking tariff review.

Councillor Vicky Johns, Personal, Ottery St Mary Town Councillor and Ottery St Mary has two EDDC car parks.

99 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

100 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential/exempt items.

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

There were no items called-in.

102 **Draft Financial Strategy 2021-2031**

Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance, presented the draft Financial Strategy 2021 – 2031. The purpose was to provide background information and set the scene in advance of the Overview Committee considering the more detailed budget for the next financial year at its meeting in January.

The Draft Strategy outlined how the Council would structure and manage its finances over the next ten years to deliver services in accordance with the objectives set out in the Council Plan. The Strategy, which was updated annually, covered the general fund (all services except housing which had its own financial plan) and capital.

The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) was explained, and the following points were highlighted:

- Reduction in funding from central Government had severely impacted on all local authorities
- Renegotiation of the refuse and recycling contract for 2022/23 would require significant capital investment
- The ongoing commitment of £323k per annum for the carbon reduction programme would need external funding if the Council was to meet its objectives in full
- The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on income generation in the current financial year. Despite Government funding to reimburse the loss of various income streams, the Council would need to find £1.2 - £1.3million of its own funds to make up the deficit
- Timing of the Government's proposed re-basing of business rates was uncertain which made financial planning difficult. The likely loss of business rate income as a result of re-basing had been taken into account in future years
- Income from the New Homes Bonus scheme had been reducing year on year and would disappear completely from 2023/24. As yet there were no details from Government as to a replacement for the New Homes Bonus

The MTFP showed a projected deficit for 2021/22 of £0.694m, which increased annually, reaching £5.653m in 2030/31 as a cumulative deficit. In order to mitigate the uncertainty surrounding the timing of the loss of the New Homes Bonus and the reduction in business rates income, the Council had set aside £2 million into a MTFP risk reserve which would enable the Council to support service delivery and then react when there was greater clarity and certainty.

The MTFP also showed the projected capital expenditure and funding position. Capital expenditure was considered on a scheme by scheme basis and, through a rigorous assessment process, was balanced against the funding available.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- Concern that the increase in car park charges would take away money for the community.

- Clarification sought about whether an analysis had been done on the savings. In response Simon Davey confirmed that an analysis had been done on Homesafeguard which showed there was a demand for additional services that people want and are prepared to pay for. He also referred to item 12. He felt confident, subject to Members approval, that the savings that could be made and were achievable and that the demand was there to generate the level of income.
- It was noted the positive lift in Business Rates was as a result in the efforts of Libby Jarrett and her team.
- Concern raised about the loss of business rates in towns with shops closing down. In response Simon Davey confirmed the loss had been taken into account and although still important it was not significant as there had been high rateable value increases with the likes of the Enterprise Zone and large supermarkets.
- Concern raised about the rise in car park charges if businesses were struggling and a suggestion was made to defer the increase for a year. In response to the suggestion to defer the increase in car park charges for a year he urged Members to consider the loss of £300,000 which would need replacing.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

103 **Sustainable Homes and Communities Portfolio Holder report**

Before starting her report Councillor Megan Armstrong, the Homes and Communities Portfolio Holder provided a response to a question raised by Councillor Twiss at the Poverty Working Panel meeting. In response to his question about whether the council had applied for government funding towards homeless projects she advised the council did have several capital projects and had purchased the Sailors Rest and a HMO in Exmouth and had ongoing plans for further purchases using our own funds. The Council has received government funding for revenue support as previously reported.

The Portfolio Holder outlined her responsibilities and Members acknowledged the role of the Homes and Communities Portfolio Holder was a strategic role to look at shaping policies and strategies. Members were reassured that the stock condition survey which was overdue would start in the New Year to look at and assess all the councils housing stock to find out what needs to be done to maintain fit for purpose homes for tenants which would also include a climate change action plan.

A lengthy questions and answers session followed which was first opened to non-committee members and included:

- Councillor Millar sought clarification on the meaning of systems thinking and an explanation about what had changed from the former portfolio holder. In response it was advised systems thinking meant an effective and efficient way of working. In terms of her role as portfolio holder was looking at all the different departments and getting to know the staff and said she did not want to compare herself to the previous portfolio holder.
- In response to a question about the portfolio holder's involvement with the review of the Housing Company she advised she sat on the TaFF and was working through what direction the Housing Company should take and how the council would best deliver on its affordable housing ambitions.

- Councillor Skinner understood how hard the portfolio holder role was and emphasised the importance to understand that different people need different housing. He emphasised the need to develop schemes for the right people to live in and how communities and families need to stay together to look after each other and suggested that she worked with the Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee to understand what each community needs.

Questions from Councillors de Saram, Moulding, Allen and Key could not be answered at the meeting and would be provided at a later date.

The Leader of the Council applauded Councillor Armstrong for enduring the questions and addressed the issue of the endless supplementary questions that demanded factual information that Members could have asked Officer in advance of the meeting. He advised that Scrutiny was not meant to trip up portfolio holders and ask members to show more respect.

The following questions and comments were raised by committee members:

- The portfolio holders report was welcomed and was excellent.
- The welcome reference to solar panels and a £450,000 secured grant. Would like to see more grants like this.
- Clarification sought on what she thought were the main issues and challenges with the housing in East Devon. It was advised the lack of social housing was a concern and that she did not agree with the right to buy scheme which takes away social housing from people who cannot afford to live anywhere else.
- Concerns raised about the lack of accommodation available for victims of domestic abuse which had seen an increase this year. In response John Golding, the Strategic Lead for Housing, Health and Environment advised the council had arrangements with other authorities to get victims of domestic abuse to a place of safety and if required out the area. There was also a sanctuary scheme that provided additional security to tenants' homes where domestic violence had occurred or feared.
- Clarification sought on what was being done to help vulnerable tenants who struggled with technology and how were they being reached. In response John Golding, the Strategic Lead for Housing, Health and Environment advised the council had provided digital awareness classes for sheltered housing tenants and Mobile Support Officers with the help of Home Safeguard and other teams had contacted every tenant in East Devon and offered support and signposted to community and voluntary groups if assistance was required.
- Disappointed that councillors from the previous administration did not know why they had set up the Housing Company.
- In terms of domestic abuse a suggestion was made to explore empty homes or second homes.
- The need to scrutinise councillors in meetings to gain a positive outcome.
- There are no council houses in Cranbrook. In response Cllr Armstrong agreed there was a clear need for social housing in Cranbrook and whilst housing associations had significant stock in Cranbrook she would look into this in the New Year with Councillor Ledger, Chair of Strategic Planning Committee.

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Ranger and seconded by Cllr Johns.

All councillor should receive training on how to ask constructive questions to address the matter in hand so the meeting can move on at a constructive and timely manner.

The Chairman requested that a vote take place on the motion. The motion was put to committee and with 11 votes in favour and no abstentions. The motion was carried.

RECOMMENDATION to Cabinet:

That all councillors should receive training on how to ask constructive questions to address the matter in hand so the meeting can move on at a constructive and timely manner.

104 **Quarterly performance report**

Members received the report of Joanne Avery, Management Information Officer which provided performance information and progress against our performance indicators from across the council services

This information would provide a clear view of progress against what we said we would deliver in our Council Plan and Service Plans and deal with performance issues arising.

RESOLVED:

That the performance against delivery of our key performance indicators for the 2nd quarter of 2020/22 so that issues can be addressed in a timely way be accepted.

105 **Expenditure on consultants and agency staff 2019/20**

Members considered the report of Melissa Muir, Assistant Accountant which provided details of capital and revenue spend on consultants and specialist advice and agency staff for 2019/20. It was noted Audit and Governance Committee had received previous reports.

This information would provide the expenditure on consultants and agency staff in the delivery of council services.

The following points were discussed:

- Clarification sought on potential savings for the council by not employing outside agency staff but by bringing functions in-house. It was advised agency staff were used in Streetscene during peak times for grounds maintenance and cleansing which was more efficient.

RESOLVED:

The details of expenditure on consultants and agency staff in 2019/20 be noted.

106 **Car parking tariff review**

Members received a report from Andrew Ennis, the Service Lead Environmental Health and Car Parks which set out proposals to engage with the public on proposals to introduce changes to car parking tariffs in some of our car parks. Members noted the report followed consideration of some of the issues raised by Members of the Car Parks Task and Finish Forum.

Members were asked to consider recommendations for the better management of some of our car parking assets and in turn to recommend that the Council should now authorise Officers to carry out the required statutory advertisements and consultation of these proposals.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- Concern about raising car parking charges just after Covid-19. In some areas driving is the only option. It is a bad idea to put charges up in April.
- Prefer to look at category 2 car parks rather than increase costs.
- Need to consider inappropriate parking in towns.
- Need to encourage local shopping.
- If car parking charges increase this will encourage vehicles parking in side roads.
- Suggest to postpone for a year.
- Town centres are struggling.
- Campervan charges in other areas are higher than East Devon.
- Need a shoppers' car park without residents parking.
- Bad timing – need to put off until next year.

RESOLVED:

1. To request Officers to prepare a revised policy for campervans and motorhomes for further consideration by the TAFF.
2. To repurpose the Car Parks' Task and Finish Forum to report back to Scrutiny Committee in the Spring of 2021:
 - a) To consider in more detail the options for supporting the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan,
 - b) To develop a range of options for the future management of the Council's category 2 car parks,
 - c) To consider any other measures including the possibility of introducing evening charges in certain car parks.

RECOMMENDATION to Council

1. That TAFF Members propose the introduction of a new tariff of £1.20 per hour in East Devon District Council's category 1 (prime location) car parks effective from 1 April 2021
2. That TAFF Members also propose the introduction of a revised pricing structure for car parking permits with a £120 per annum for a single town (and an additional £24 per each town added) up to a maximum annual permit charge of £240 to cover all towns. To provide a 'pay monthly' scheme for all regular customers starting with a single town permit for just £10 per month.

107 **Forward plan**

3 Scrutiny Forward Plan proposals forms were received.

Members considered a proposal form received from Councillor David Key on the ban on Chinese lanterns and loud fireworks.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- Officer comments advised this matter was passed to the Overview Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the proposal on the ban on Chinese lanterns and loud fireworks should not be scoped.

Members considered a proposal form received from Councillor Bruce de Saram on ensuring that our green spaces were safe, welcoming and well managed and to protect our biodiversity

During discussions the following points were noted:

- Should we wait to see what Streetscene have to say as clearly it is an error. It is clearly a mistake at operational level. It is not a pattern of mistakes.
- Comes down to selection of staff and staff training.

RESOLVED:

That the proposal to ensure that our green spaces were safe and welcoming and well managed and to protect our biodiversity should not be scoped.

Members considered a proposal form received from Councillor Vicky Johns to consider S106s due to the lengthy time it takes to get these done. Councillor Johns praised the S106 Officers for doing a fantastic job but said East Devon was a large area with only two S106 Officers.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- Officer comments noted there was a SWAP audit in progress to review S106/CIL and suggested the Committee await the outcome of the SWAP audit before progressing this matter.

RESOLVED:

That the proposal be put on the forward plan and scoped in February 2021.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

C Brown (Chair)

V Ranger (Vice-Chairman)

E Rylance

M Chapman

I Chubb

A Colman

V Johns

O Davey

S Hawkins

F King

T McCollum

H Parr

B Taylor

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

M Allen

M Armstrong
P Arnott
J Bailey
S Chamberlain
B De Saram
P Faithfull
M Howe
D Key
D Ledger
K McLauchlan
P Millar
A Moulding
M Rixson
P Skinner
J Whibley
E Wragg

Officers in attendance:

Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Wendy Harris, Democratic Services Officer
Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Ennis, Service Lead Environmental Health and Car Parks
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Councillor apologies:

C Wright

Chairman

Date: