

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of Poverty Working Panel held Online via the Zoom app. on 15 February 2021**

#### **Attendance list at end of document**

The meeting started at 11.00 am and ended at 1.26 pm

#### **33 Public speaking**

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

#### **34 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **35 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 January 2021**

The Chair advised that apologies for the previous meeting had been received from Cllr Ian Hall but were not recorded in the minutes. With this amendment noted, the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

#### **36 Presentation by Tim Bridger - CEO Citizens Advice East Devon**

The Chair welcomed Tim Bridger, CEO Citizens Advice East Devon (CAED), to the meeting. Mr Bridger's presentation on the work of CAED included the following points:

- An introduction to the CAED service and how it had identified the issues faced and had already been planning for change prior to the Covid-19 pandemic
- How the service then responded at short notice to the first Coronavirus lockdown in March 2020 and addressed the challenges of remote working in the short, medium and longer term
- The CAED service would not now return to previous ways of working prior to the pandemic as remote / digital working had addressed the issues which had been identified previously
- The service, with its strong historic message of being free, confidential and impartial, had identified the priorities of support, innovation and community which were underpinned by its core values
- CAED had introduced three directorates; community resilience, innovation and communication and quality and learning
- The use of video booths in partner locations was highlighted and CAED was keen to work with other stakeholders including foodbanks and town halls to provide an integrated digital service on a sector wide basis
- Projects for 2021 were outlined, including money management, cookery, mental health and wellbeing, improving the aftercare of clients and early warning systems to help clients to proactively avoid falling into crisis
- The key drivers of success were highlighted as partnership working, effective use of data and openness and transparency

Discussion and responses to questions included the following points:

- The age range of CAED clients has changed significantly, with 40% of clients now under the age of 40 and an increase in the 16-20 age group. Resources are in place to support the younger age groups

- CAED volunteers are equipped to work from any location, including home working via Teams software
- Former clients of CAED sometimes return as volunteers and CAED was looking at offering this as a way of assisting volunteers to get back into employment where appropriate
- CAED has identified the increased need for redundancy support as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic
- Money management advice would include helping clients to identify triggers so that behaviour patterns could be changed to avert a future crisis
- CAED had identified that one of the major causes of poverty was a change in circumstance such as relationship breakdown. Work was on-going to develop support in the form of questions for clients to provide an early warning that circumstances may be changing for the worse
- CAED is funded through Devon County Council, EDDC, town and parish councils and Lottery funding for specific projects
- Approximately half of CAED clients are in poverty according to the definition of poverty used by EDDC
- Digital services would remain in place and continue after the end of the Covid-19 lockdown and it was anticipated that services would be delivered through partnership working in community hubs
- Lockdown had contributed to an increase in relationship breakdown and domestic violence. CAED had trained advisers and a confidential process in place to support those leaving unsafe situations
- CAED was talking to service providers regarding mobile wifi units to assist clients to access broadband

The Chair thanked Tim Bridger for attending the meeting and for his presentation which would be circulated after the meeting.

37 **Libby Jarrett - Service Lead - Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services & Corporate Fraud**

Libby Jarrett outlined ways in which the positive working relationship with CAED had benefited EDDC's service delivery. Examples included putting out information on social media platforms to assist clients who may not be receiving their full benefit entitlement, shaping a job description for an EDDC financial resilience officer and setting up a direct referral process to CAED.

Joint work also included data analysis and sharing in order to identify themes and trends in clients' behaviour. Other synergies such as one time data capture and sharing were also being introduced as partnership working continued.

The Chair thanked Libby for her contribution to the discussion and her team's ongoing work with CAED.

38 **'Environmental Health and Car Parks Making a Difference'**

**Andrew Ennis – Service Lead for Environmental Health and Car Parks**

Andrew Ennis introduced his presentation from the Environmental Health team and made the following points:

- Environmental Health works within a historic and statutory framework to support vulnerable groups. The factors which determine ill-health have a disproportionate impact on those in the community who are less well off, and there is a direct link between environmental health and poverty
- The EDDC Environmental Health work includes, for example, advice and support for those setting up new food businesses, dealing with the deceased where there is no other support, poor housing, deprivation, nuisances, noise and other social issues such as anti-social behaviour and pest control
- EDDC Environment Health also works with the East and Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership which collaborates with other agencies such as the Police and town and parish councils

### **Jody Harding – Principal Environmental Health Officer for Private Sector Housing**

Jody Harding outlined his team's work to improve housing conditions in the private sector in East Devon as follows:

- Environmental Health also deals with climate change and fuel poverty in relation to housing and has obligations under the Homes Energy Conservation Act 1995 across all tenures of housing stock, including social rented housing
- The service is provided across four key areas; advice, education, enforcement and provision of adaptations and there are a range of legislative actions available, including undertaking inspections
- Three key activities to address fuel poverty have been identified; reduce energy bills, improve energy efficiency and maximise household income
- Environmental Health's work also supported local communities to break down barriers to improving energy efficiency and enabled residents to engage with the Council and its partners
- The presentation outlined the various interventions available to households to improve home energy efficiency and the various partners and methods of delivery, including loan providers for home improvements
- Current actions with regard to private sector housing were highlighted and proposed strategy and actions included to enhance and improve understanding of fuel poverty in East Devon, to influence and change behaviour, to signpost and educate residents and to make direct referrals to energy partner companies

### **Helen Wharam – Public Health Project Officer**

Helen Wharam introduced her work which included writing the Public Health Strategic Plan and evidence-based projects aimed at tackling health inequalities and health deprivation. Helen's presentation highlighted the following:

- Deprivation covers a wide range of issues including employment and education as well as financial poverty, so that there is a strong overlap with public health
- The Public Health Project Officer works with services across the District Council, at County Council level and with colleagues in the NHS
- Projects included working with other agencies to support community activities, for example, encouraging public libraries to host hygiene banks and setting up of flu vaccine drive through clinics
- Work in the past year has focussed on Covid-19 support work, but would normally focus on providing information for residents to help with making good decisions which impact on their health

Discussion included the following points:

- The need for support for disabled residents to access digital and online services

- Regarding problems with housing, referrals may come from tenants and are then triaged
- Enforcement is undertaken through Environmental Health and Trading Standards legislation
- In past years, the single greatest reason for homelessness has been the loss of private rented accommodation
- Part of the Environmental Health remit is joint working with the Planning team on health aspects of development
- Concern was raised about the number of food businesses starting up from individuals' homes, partly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and whether the right support was in place to ensure public safety
- It is a legal requirement to register a new food business with the local authority prior to commencement and registration is free

The Chair thanked Andrew Ennis, Jody Harding and Helen Wharam for their very informative presentations.

39 **Updated draft Poverty Strategy Action Plan - John Golding - Strategic Lead - Housing Health & Environment**

John Golding presented the latest draft of the Poverty Strategy Action Plan which had already been circulated. The Plan was being updated after each of the meetings to reflect the different themes covered.

Future iterations of the Plan would include housing and working with community and voluntary groups.

The Chair thanked John for this latest draft of the Action Plan.

40 **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March at 11am, with a presentation from Jo Garfoot, Acting Housing Service Lead.

The following meeting will be held on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> April, with input from Community Development workers and a proposed final draft of the Poverty Strategy.

Future meetings will be held on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 14<sup>th</sup> June, 19<sup>th</sup> July, 20<sup>th</sup> September and 22<sup>nd</sup> November to monitor progress in part due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Attendance List**

**Councillors present:**

M Allen

M Armstrong (Chair)

M Chapman

S Hawkins

P Jarvis

F King

M Rixson

T Woodward

**Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)**

P Arnott  
P Faithfull  
I Hall  
D Ledger  
A Moulding  
E Rylance  
B Taylor

**Officers in attendance:**

Sharon Church, Benefits Manager  
Andrew Ennis, Service Lead Environmental Health and Car Parks  
Jo Garfoot, Acting Housing Service Lead  
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment  
Susan Howl, Democratic Services Manager  
Libby Jarrett, Service Lead Revenues and Benefits  
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer  
Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer  
Andrew Wood, Service Lead - Growth Development and Prosperity  
Jody Harding, Principal Environmental Health Officer for Private Sector Housing

**Councillor apologies:**

Panel member: B De Saram

Non Panel members: S Gazzard, K McLauchlan

Chair .....

Date: .....