

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of Overview Committee held online via the Zoom App on 12 November 2020**

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

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.10 pm

#### **66 Public Speaking**

Three members of the public had registered to speak and were called in the order in which they registered.

Mr Richard Eley was of the view that the Our Towns Study should be abandoned and be replaced with a smaller, nimbler initiative which could react faster and attract Government funding. There was a real need to help town centres and many within communities were willing to contribute on an ad hoc basis and enable communities to work together.

Mr Barrie Hedges of Totally Locally Axminster provided an insight into the impact on the town centre of various recent events such as the closure of Axminster Carpets and the Trinity House store. There were signs of revival and the Covid-19 pandemic had fostered community spirit. However, there was a pressing need for a vision for Axminster and for action led by EDDC in order to seize opportunities to support towns in East Devon.

Mr Ian Styles of Axminster Property outlined the commercial investment in the town which had also enabled the purchase and revival of Trinity House, with all nine units now let. Mr Styles agreed with the need for a plan for Axminster and emphasised the need for urgent and considerable investment in the town. Mr Styles invited EDDC to work with the commercial sector and investors which would result in a more decisive and realistic way of working.

The Chair thanked the public speakers for their contributions.

#### **67 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020 were agreed as a true record.

#### **68 Declarations of interest**

Minute 72 High Street TAFF & Our Towns Scheme update.  
Councillor Ian Hall, Personal, Devon County Councillor, Axminster Division. Member has made a Localities Grant of £1,000 for IT improvements.

Minute 72 High Street TAFF & Our Towns Scheme update.  
Councillor Marcus Hartnell, Personal, Member runs a business in Seaton.

Minute 72 High Street TAFF & Our Towns Scheme update.  
Councillor Tony Woodward, Personal, Member of the Green Party.

69 **Matters of urgency**

There were no matters of urgency.

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

There were no confidential or exempt items.

71 **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.

The following points were discussed:

- The Overview Committee suggested that it would benefit the Scrutiny Committee to have the same presentation on the Draft Financial Strategy
- It was vital to adhere to the Climate Declaration and to maintain the commitment to the carbon reduction programme

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That Cabinet adopts the Financial Plan and commits to endorse the sum of £323,000 allowed in the Plan to ensure that the carbon reduction programme is met and that the Council endeavours to secure the shortfall still to be found from other sources.

## 72 **High Street TAFF & Our Towns Scheme update**

Rob Murray, Economic Development Manager, introduced the report which provided an update on the reasons for the deferment of the Our Towns Study. It was noted that there was now the need to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions and to re-cast the brief of the Study due to the recent changes in the economy.

The following points were discussed:

- Members noted the points made by the three public speakers at the start of the meeting
- Energy and action were needed now rather than waiting several years for service plans to address the issues
- It was requested that Cranbrook be included in the Study moving forward as, following the recent decision by the Strategic Planning Committee, it was likely that there would need to be significant investment in Cranbrook town centre
- Support for towns would require a combination of approaches with commercial investors and local government working together with others
- EDDC could help businesses to create or improve on a digital presence
- There should be a balance between support for a digital presence and support for community contact and interaction
- Data on high streets / towns would be commissioned as part of the policy development for the Local Plan
- The High Street TaFF in its current form should be closed and the £50k set aside for the Our Towns Study work diverted to economic development with partners and stakeholders to support town centres, including Cranbrook
- Work on the Our Towns Study should not continue

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Recommended to Cabinet:

1. That £50k is diverted to assist the Economic Development Team to work with our key coastal and market towns, including Cranbrook, to include councils and key business stakeholders and investors to better understand challenges,

opportunities and aspirations of each town and work collaboratively to attract funding and support businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond

2. That the High Street TaFF is closed
3. To not continue with the Our Towns Study and that the high street and town centre data gathering underpinning the Our Towns Study is incorporated into the evidence base development for the new Local Plan and planning policies, with an equal focus on a digital and traditional presence in town centres.

## 73 **Forward Plan**

It was agreed to monitor the item on assisted housing needs pending the outcome of the work by John Golding, Strategic Lead for Housing, Health and Environment.

The Forward Plan was noted.

### **Attendance List**

#### **Councillors present:**

N Hookway (Chair)  
V Johns (Vice-Chair)  
B De Saram  
I Hall  
M Hartnell  
T Woodward  
K Blakey  
V Ranger

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

P Arnott  
S Chamberlain  
P Faithfull  
P Hayward  
G Jung  
D Ledger  
A Moulding  
H Parr  
C Pepper

#### **Officers in attendance:**

Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance  
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer  
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer  
Robert Murray, Economic Development Manager  
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)  
Andrew Wood, Service Lead - Growth Development and Prosperity

#### **Councillor apologies:**

M Allen

F King  
S Bond  
S Gazzard

Chair .....

Date: .....