

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the consultative meeting of Poverty Working Panel held Online via the Zoom app on 22 November 2021

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 11.00 am and ended at 1.39 pm

11 Public speaking

No members of the public had registered to speak.

12 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

13 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 September 2021

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 September 2021 were received and accepted.

14 Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector consultation - report from Jamie Buckley- Community Engagement & Funding Officer

A report on the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector consultation had been circulated in advance. Jamie Buckley, Community Engagement and Funding Officer highlighted the following points from the report:

- East Devon is the only district in Devon which does not have a Council for Voluntary Service (CVS).
- The gap became more apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic when EDDC stepped in to assist as appropriate.
- VCSE groups had been consulted on a draft proposal for a CVS and 28 responses had been received which was lower than hoped but still gives useful information.
- The introduction of a CVS could assist groups with issues such as networking, funding and funding applications, legal and data protection advice and support and training provision.

Discussion of the report and issues raised included the following points:

- The setting up and running of voluntary, community and social enterprise sector support would need a financial contribution from EDDC.
- EDDC Officers are liaising with the new part time officer in the post created by the CCG and it was noted that the focus of this post is on the NHS and healthcare.
- It would be helpful to know what level of return could be expected for any financial contribution from EDDC.
- Regarding an expected return, it was noted that the quality of the people involved and the experience they would bring would be key to the success of voluntary, community and social enterprise sector support, rather than just the level of financial contribution.
- VCSE groups could support each other and share expertise to provide training.

- Training could also be provided by way of online/video sessions with larger charities sharing expertise and best practice.
- It was noted that the first point of contact at EDDC for VCSE groups is Jamie Buckley.
- It was noted that there is currently no additional EDDC Officer capacity to support voluntary groups and any work commissioned would need to take Officer capacity into account.
- A database had been discussed previously on many occasions and would be very difficult to administer.

The Chair thanked Jamie Buckley for her report.

15 **New Household Support Fund briefing paper from Libby Jarrett - Service Lead - Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services & Corporate Fraud**

Libby Jarrett outlined the new Household Support Fund which had been launched by the Government. The following points were included:

- Funding had been delivered to Devon County Council who must work with District Councils to develop support schemes.
- The money must be spent by the end of March 2022 and 50% must go to families with children.
- Funding is for immediate needs such as food, energy and water and can also be used for wider essentials such as boiler servicing and transport related costs.
- Funding can be used for housing costs where an existing support scheme does not meet an exceptional need.
- Other examples of hardship support which is available included funding for school holiday voucher scheme, funding for Citizens Advice Devon for energy relief schemes, support for Action for Children Centres and funding for BAME groups. Further details of some of these schemes is still awaited.
- EDDC had received just over £142,000 of the Government funding distributed by DCC.
- The EDDC scheme has been live for a week and the application form for those requesting support is on the EDDC website under the 'Request Financial Support' tab.
- The application form is generic in order to cover most hardship applications and Officers will work with applicants to understand the root causes and wider needs as well as identifying all types of support which the applicant may qualify for.
- The data obtained will help to inform future policy development and interventions.

Sharon Church, Benefits Manager, reported on the number of applications received in the first week of the Household Support Fund being live and updated Members on the development of the dashboard and the work of the Financial Resilience Officers in partnership with other organisations. The update included the following points:

- During the first week of the scheme, 90 applications had been received.
- 35 awards had been made totalling £3,515, the majority of which were for food, energy and water costs.
- 63% of the awards were made to households with children.
- 24% of applications came from households with at least one person in work.
- The data showed that single people continue to struggle financially and data analysis would enable greater understanding of household make up.

- EDDC Officers would continue to work with partners to identify residents who would not normally apply for support, or who would seek support elsewhere.
- Officers would continue to work with Team Devon to understand wider poverty issues.

Discussion included the following:

- There was concern that a number of people seeking support are in work.
- The rising cost of living is a significant cause for concern.
- Regarding communication with residents, it was noted that social media is used regularly, however, other avenues should also be used such as local newspapers, to ensure maximum coverage. Schools and Citizens Advice are also effective means of communication. Foodbanks should be notified of the Household Support Fund as soon as possible.
- It was noted that a fund of £100,000 remains set aside for hardship support in East Devon.
- DCC also holds a balance of £5million which will be reviewed in the new year.
- There was concern regarding homelessness among single people as well as family homelessness due to high rent arrears.
- Very high rents in the private rental sector are exacerbating the problem.
- It was noted that EDDC is experiencing issues with recruiting a Housing Options Officer.
- Concern was expressed regarding loan sharks in the run up to Christmas. Officers are not aware of any incidences of residents using loan sharks, however, it was difficult to collect information for various reasons.
- Libby Jarrett would liaise with Team Devon to co-ordinate awareness and advice for residents about the problems associated with using loan sharks.

The Chair thanked Libby Jarrett and Sharon Church for their reports and presentation.

16 **Food Poverty briefing report from Sue Bewes - Housing Services Manager**

A briefing report from the Housing Services Manager, Sue Bewes, had been circulated to all Members prior to the meeting. The following points from the report were highlighted:

- Twelve years previously, the Housing Service had recognised that it would be beneficial to invest in East Devon's communities to enable them to become more resilient.
- The Housing Service Plan 2018/19 supported this objective by planning to deliver 30 events in partnership with HALFF charity (changing lives through food) which promoted healthy eating and cooking.
- A timeline of food support work was outlined which covered the period September 2018 to the present.
- The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic required changes to be made to the way food support was delivered across East Devon.
- In January 2021 the Housing Service started to create a database of the 26 community groups based in East Devon's towns, including Broadclyst.
- In August 2021, a group of organisations with shared interests began food deliveries through their networks under the East Devon Food Partnership.
- The Housing Service, under its Housing Strategy 2020/24 continues to work in partnership with support agencies and groups across East Devon in line with the EDDC Public Health Strategy and the work contributes directly to the Poverty Reduction Strategy by working in partnership with local voluntary and community groups to address food poverty, including working with food banks to develop a food re-distribution hub.

- The arrangements for Christmas 2021 were outlined.
- In the longer term, the aim is to engage local communities and to enable them to become more self-sufficient and sustainable.
- Community Development Workers will support the Food Partnership during its first year and work is on-going to map food support in rural areas.
- A short film made by the EDDC Climate Action Officer with funding from COP26 would be available on the EDDC YouTube channel. The film, Food for Thought, outlines the partnership between FareShare SouthWest, Exeter Food Action and the East Devon Food Partnership.

During the subsequent discussion, it was noted that it is not sustainable in the longer term to support food poverty in this way. Work is on-going regarding the Team Devon approach on food insecurity across the County, however, it was recognised that excellent work is already underway in East Devon as outlined in the presentation.

It was agreed that Sue Bewes would provide an updated list of food providers.

The Chair thanked Sue Bewes for her report.

17 **Poverty Strategy Action Plan updates from:**

Updates from services had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The updates from Finance and Growth, Development and Prosperity were noted and there were no questions.

An update on Housing was provided and included the following points:

- An upgrade to 120 homes had been completed which would assist with the reduction of heating costs.
- A bid had been submitted to the current round of the Social Housing De-carbonisation Fund for £500,000 and the result of the bid should be known before Christmas. EDDC would provide £880,000 of match funding.
- The previous round of housing upgrades had shown the need to upgrade the fabric of homes, the 'Fabric First' approach, before the installation of green homes technologies.
- The stock condition survey will provide details of housing stock which falls in the lowest EPC value and is least energy efficient which leads to higher heating costs for tenants.
- Regarding 'Community days' the Housing team has consulted with tenants and as a result will be organising skip days, community garden builds and training for tenants in minor DIY and decorating skills. Community Centre sessions with the Climate Change Officer will assist tenants with changing to greener energy tariffs and reducing the cost of fuel.
- Regarding the review of the use of discretionary funds, work between Housing and Finance teams continues and the unaffordable high rents in the private rented sector are a major cause of concern.

Subsequent to the updates being circulated, updates from EDDC Private Sector Housing had been received. Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer, advised that the Private Sector Housing team is working with Exeter ECOE and retrofit companies to deliver eco top up and also working with Lendology to arrange loans for home improvements. PSH is also supporting private tenants with winter resilience projects.

The Chair thanked Officers for their updates and advised that this would be a regular agenda item to monitor further updates.

18 **Date of the next meeting**

Dates for future meetings in 2022 had been arranged; 31st January, 21st March and 23rd May. Further dates for the rest of 2022 will be arranged following the annual Council meeting.

From January 2022, meetings would commence at 10.00am.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

M Allen
M Armstrong (Chair)
M Chapman
B De Saram
P Jarvis
T Woodward

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott
P Faithfull
P Millar
E Rylance

Officers in attendance:

Sue Bewes, Housing Services Manager
Jamie Buckley, Community Engagement and Funding Officer
Sharon Church, Benefits Manager
Jo Garfoot, Acting Housing Service Lead
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Sarah Helman, Democratic Services Officer
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
Sally Raynes, Economic Development Officer – Employment and Skills

Councillor apologies:

S Hawkins
M Rixson

Chair

Date: