

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the consultative meeting of Scrutiny Committee held Online via the Zoom app on 3 March 2022

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.21 pm

45 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

46 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 December 2021 were received and accepted.

47 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

48 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

49 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential / exempt items.

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

There were no decisions made by Cabinet called in by Members for scrutiny.

51 Report on the convention of appointing Honorary Aldermen and Honorary Alderwomen

At the meeting on 2 December 2021, the Committee had requested a report on the convention of appointing Honorary Aldermen and Honorary Alderwomen addressing the following:

- How Honorary Aldermen and Honorary Alderwomen have been selected in the past, what criteria were used and on whose recommendation,
- What does eminent or meritorious conduct include,
- A breakdown by party and qualification of those who have received the honour in the past twelve years,
- Options for the future, including processes for granting and removal of the honour,
- Referenced examples of protocols from other areas.

The Chief Executive Officer presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- The current procedure is relatively informal.
- The need to define 'eminent services', including on a local level.

- The report had gone back to 2003, covering a period longer than twelve years and showed the appointments by political groups.
- The report included a number of questions and considerations for the Committee to debate and provided examples of protocols from other areas.

Discussion on the report included the following:

- There was the suggestion that the current system had been abused and there is a need to review the methods by which the appointments are made, including the introduction of a formal appointments panel.
- The title of Honorary Alderman does not confer any rights or privileges not enjoyed by members of the public.
- In recent years a lot of work had been done to modernise the Council and a decision to remove the award of the title would reflect a more modern approach.
- A definition of 'eminent' includes the fact that a person is famous and respected within a particular sphere. With regard to considering former Councillors for the award of the title, 'eminent' could include gaining respect and the way in which they have served their communities.
- People who are deserving, including those who have provided long service and a significant contribution, are recognised in all walks of life.
- There needs to be a tighter procedure and a clear definition of reasons for nominations.
- Should long service be a criteria for awarding the title, it should also take account of the fact that a significant contribution could be made during a Councillor's first term and there may be good reason why the former Member had not stood for re-election.
- Quality of service, rather than only length of service should be considered.
- Councillors' families may also make sacrifices to enable a Member to serve and it is good for families to know that this work has been acknowledged.
- The terms 'Honorary Alderman' and 'Honorary Alderwoman' may seem archaic and a more modern term such as 'Honoured Citizen' could be considered.
- Receiving the title was considered to be a great honour.
- Should the Council be minded to continue to confer the title, a small cross party working group could be set up to consider the details of the nomination process and report back to Council.
- Any Member should be able to submit a nomination for the title, setting out specific reasons for the nomination to include eminent service rendered.
- A requirement for five Councillors to sign a nomination could be considered as part of the process.
- A written record of nominations and appointments should be kept in order to provide a transparent audit trail.
- Any new protocol for conferring the title should be in place by the next elections in 2023.
- Whether to continue to invite Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen to civic events and Council meetings and whether apologies need to be given for Council meetings.
- There was discussion regarding whether to continue awarding car parking permits moving forwards.
- Should the Council proceed with a new protocol, it should include a formalised process for removing Honorary Aldermen and Alderwomen should the need arise.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO FULL COUNCIL

- a. That the appointment of Honorary Aldermen and Honorary Alderwomen should continue,
- b. That a small cross party working group be constituted to include the Chair of the Council, the Leader, Group Leaders and Members to bring the number to approximately 9, as determined by the Monitoring Officer, to give political balance and to report back to Council with recommendations on the process for nominations and appointments going forward,
- c. That the working group adopts the criteria that nominees should have served for a minimum of 8 years, with the ability to recognise exceptional circumstances and that

there is a form completed by fellow Councillors which sets out the eminent service which has been undertaken,

- d. That the working group proposes the exact criteria for 'eminent service' but that the Scrutiny Committee recommends reference to the form used by Wokingham Borough Council [Appendix 8 of the report] which it considers to be a good example,
- e. That Honorary Aldermen and Honorary Alderwomen should continue to be invited to civic events, but not invited as a matter of course to Council meetings. Should they attend Council meetings, they will continue to be welcomed, but apologies will not be recorded if they do not attend,
- f. That the issuing of car parking permits to newly appointed Honorary Aldermen and Honorary Alderwomen should be discontinued, but that the privilege should be allowed to continue for those who have been appointed to the position in the past, and
- g. Should the Council wish to adopt a new protocol, it should include the formalised process for removing Honorary Aldermen and Honorary Alderwomen.

52 **Local Plan Sites - Allocations to Delivery - verbal update**

As requested at the meeting held on 2 December, further advice had been sought from the Monitoring Officer on the ability of the Scrutiny Committee to further consider the Goodmores Farm planning application as a specific case, and the consultation process which surrounded it.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer read out the advice as follows:

If the Committee wishes to consider how the application was handled and factors which influenced its processing as well as considering whether the consultation that was carried out was suitable then this is permissible. This would be from a discharge of function or service perspective and with a view to potentially informing service improvement. What the Committee cannot do is consider the planning merits of the application / rationale for the grant of permission as that would be outwith the role of the Scrutiny committee. The Joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting of 17th January 2022 [minute 43c] recommended '*a review of the Statement of Community Involvement and consultations on planning applications to consider making greater use of site notices to publicise planning applications*' and it might be sensible to consider Goodmores Farm as part of this work if the concern relates to the consultation specifically.

It was agreed to include this matter on the Forward Plan.

53 **Performance Report quarter three 2021-22**

The Committee wished to commend officers and their teams for their on-going work during difficult circumstances which is much appreciated.

In response to a question regarding the percentage of planning appeal decisions allowed against the authority's decision to refuse, the management notes were referred to in that the only trend that can be identified in the allowed appeals is a continued difficulty in defending appeals against the refusal of proposals for house extensions.

The Performance Report for quarter three 2021-22 was noted.

54 **Forward Plan**

The Committee discussed the Forward Plan.

Regarding the proposal from Mid Devon District Council for a joint review into the planning controls and regulatory requirements associated with the bio-energy industry within Devon, in particular anaerobic digesters, there was particular concern about the industrial scale digesters.

The Chair agreed to speak to the Chair of Strategic Planning regarding bringing this matter forward so as not to impact on the timetable for the new Local Plan.

With the addition of the item at minute 52, the Forward Plan was noted.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

T Wright (Chair)

M Allen

A Bruce

M Chapman

O Davey

J Kemp

T McCollum

H Parr

E Rylance (Vice-Chair)

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott

C Brown

B De Saram

A Dent

V Johns

G Jung

R Lawrence

P Millar

A Moulding

E Wragg

Officers in attendance:

Wendy Harris, Democratic Services Officer

Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer

Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Mark Williams, Chief Executive

Councillor apologies:

V Ranger
J Bonetta
A Colman
C Gardner
S Hawkins

Chair

Date: