

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Joint Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 16 January 2019

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 9.00am and ended at 1.09pm.

1 Public speaking

There were no public speakers at the meeting.

2 Declarations of interest

Cllr Ian Hall; minute 3; Personal interest: Chairman of Cloakham Lawn Sports Centre and Devon County Councillor

Cllr Stuart Hughes; minute 3; Personal interest: Member of South West Regional Flood Defence Committee and Devon County Councillor

Cllr Graham Godbeer; minute 3; Personal interest: Member of East Devon AONB

Cllr Jill Elson; minute 3; Personal interest: Exmouth Community Transport Group

Cllr Roger Giles; minute 3; Personal interest: Member of Plastic Free Ottery

3 Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets 2019/20

The Chairman welcomed the Strategic Lead Finance to open the meeting with an overview of the budget position in the context of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the main factors influencing this and future budgets.

The draft budget assumed an increase in Council Tax of £5 per year, and the implications of reducing that were explained in terms of an increasing deficit. The draft budget had an overall position of a £156k funding gap, which was acceptable at this stage but Members were reminded to be aware of it in considering any recommendations on the budget to Cabinet.

No cuts in service were proposed in this budgets, but there was a clear increase in demand for some services. Members were reminded that there was regular monitoring by the Cabinet to keep track through the year of any variances in planned budget or service delivery.

Discussion on the covering report from Members included:

- The Transformation Strategy was already agreed by Council and continued to be updated as projects progressed. Work continued in exploring efficiencies and income generation;
- A request had been submitted from Cranbrook Town Council for funding a Deputy Town Clerk but had not been included in the draft budget. In response, the local Ward Member made her objection to any impact on frontline services, which she felt would happen if that request was not supported. The committees did not make any specific recommendation about the request;
- The draft capital budget surplus shown would be offset by the underfunded position in the current year.

Planning service plan

The Scrutiny Committee had made some recommendations to the Service Lead for Planning in relation to the existing service plan, at their meeting in November. The Service Lead confirmed that he had amended the draft service plan accordingly, with more

emphasis on Section 106 work and adding a performance measure on tree preservation related work.

Clarification and debate covered:

- Reference to regard to neighbourhood plans welcomed;
- The council cannot insist that house builders must use its building control service to check on quality. Recommendations have been made about building control standards and required qualifications for working in that field, but a change in legislation to ensure this is required;
- Lack of overage monitoring in the plan; in response Members were informed that the Strategic Planning Committee were due to review the charging schedule, and a policy review to drive down the number of cases with overage;
- Lack of liaison with Economic Development and SMART objectives; in response, Members were told that there were measures for delivery both through the service plan and the Local Plan.

Regeneration and Economy service plan

The Portfolio Holder for Economy spoke about the forward thinking service plan, commenting that it took some resource to deliver, but that delivery outcomes were being achieved from the existing plan, and this would continue.

Clarification and debate covered:

- Boosting resilience of the local economy was already in place, with a range of business support from East Devon in concert with its EHOD partners, joint working with the Property and Estates team, and in the number of businesses supported through funded advice services;
- Queens Drive redevelopment had already received some national attention, and it was hoped that, in response to a question, that international prominence could come in due course as other elements are completed, such as the watersports centre and the Michelin star chef restaurant;
- Establish clear evidence of need before developing case for workspace for local micro and SME businesses. Members were informed that this was undertaken as part of the project development process, often through surveying local businesses of their need, but could be clearly stated in the service plan;
- Lack of SMART targets in the service plan or reference to Brexit implications, and no objectives for inward investment. In response, the Chairman and Vice Chairman agreed to address the SMART objective issue with the Strategic Lead Organisational Development and Transformation outside of the meeting, to feed into future service plans;
- Lack of numerical data about how many workspace units are planned for delivery, so difficult to monitor if delivery on track;
- No mention of rural proofing in current plan.

Property and Estates service plan

The Portfolio Holder for Asset Management informed Members of his involvement in the service plan, explaining that it covered not only the day to day work of the service in managing the current assets, but also commercial investment, and building accurate data on assets to enable efficient corporate management. The plan was proactive in working to generate money from the council's assets, as well as how those assets can be increased.

Clarification and debate covered:

- Any projects in the plan that required work for a long period, such as a year of work, should be broken down with milestones, in order for more effective monitoring to be undertaken;
- Building condition including such matter as damp and mould as well as health and safety and repair issues are picked up through the survey of each asset and addressed as necessary.

Growth Point Team service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- Key facilities in Cranbrook objective required, where possible, a more detailed breakdown of those facilities and the timeline for delivery. In response, Members were informed that those facilities being brought forward were determined by the Cranbrook DPD, but agreed that some cross-referencing could be done to provide more detail;
- Further clarity was required on the targets with regard to the Delivery and Investment Team proposal and when additional inward investment resource would be in place.
- The objective on raising the profile of the area did not contain a measureable target. In response, Members were informed that there was a degree of measurability in the number of communications and award applications.

Streetscene service plan

The Portfolio Holder and Deputy Portfolio Holder for Environment advised Members of their close involvement with officers throughout the year, which helped form the service plan. The continued to work on efficiencies whilst still maintaining frontline services.

Clarification and debate covered:

- “Principles of provision” for public toilets was explained as the principles of what the council should provide. The public toilet review was due to re-start this financial year and consultation and reports on this process would come forward, including these principles as part of the review process;
- Recycled plastics go to Cheshire for processing into a product that is sold onto the manufacturing industry;
- Performance is tracked by the service, which viewed alongside the Viewpoint Survey show good levels of satisfaction, but there is an increase in demand which the service are struggling to keep up with. Members were reminded that controlling weeds on highways was the responsibility of the County Council;
- Income from the Strand big screen was based on calculations of the business case to give a realistic figure;
- There was no potential, in response to a question, in offering recycling of waste oil to domestic properties because of the impurities level being higher than for commercial waste; however residents could still put waste oil in their food recycling waste

Environmental Health and Car Parks service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- Need to increase staffing levels of community engagement officers in order to help alleviate other related issues that fell to both the Council and others. Work under the Community Safety banner was proving successful, but a request was made to explore if the number of such staff could be increased. This issue would be flagged to the Overview Committee and there was agreement to prepare a business case on

need for future years, bearing in mind the impact on the other partners involved in community safety;

- No reference to Brexit in the plan, in particular relating to animal welfare and food. In response, Members were informed that leaving the European Union had been identified as a corporate risk. This issue would be flagged to the Overview Committee;
- Increases in car park charges would adversely impact on local businesses who were already struggling with footfall levels. In response, Members were informed that it was a difficult balance to both increase income to pay for providing council services, against what customers were willing to pay to park. The service plan had set out that this was a review, including consultation, not a decision. The Portfolio Holder for Asset Management echoed this approach of balancing between maximising the asset with what the community require;
- Remove the working “to ensure fairness and” in the same objective as it was not needed or relevant to the objective;
- The issue of loneliness as a challenge to public health was raised; Members were informed that the Scrutiny Committee had this issue on their work plan.

Governance and Licensing service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- The Council was required to have a Sex Establishment Venue Policy in case any such application is made;
- Work with local schools for promote local democracy will continue, with an aspiration to increase it subject to school involvement.

Organisational Development and Transformation service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- Changes to the Investor in People standards meant that a new standard of “platinum” had been added, of which only two councils had successfully obtained to date;
- 2019 had been launched as a “green year” by the Government, and the Strategic Management Team had decided to widen this out to consider for all aspects of the Council, not just the new Council Plan;
- Regular reporting is made in performance monitoring reports on short and medium term absence of staff, and is handled well by management.

Finance service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- A report on a Retail Relief Scheme would be presented to Cabinet in February on the adoption of a local scheme in order to release specific measure to assist struggling high streets;
- Public Toilet Rate Relief requires primary legislation to permit billing authorities to award themselves rate relief, which would be an advantage to this authority because of the number of public toilets it maintains; however this legislation was not expected until 2020 at the earliest. Work on this would be linked to the ongoing public toilet review being undertaken by Streetscene;
- Request for an amendment to the timescale for the delivery of actions to deliver savings under the Transformation Strategy, such as completed by September 2019;

Countryside and Arts service plan

Clarification and debate covered:

- The two AONB business plans had been through extensive consultation and expected to go before Cabinet in February;
- There was ongoing work between the Countryside and Planning teams in regard to works to trees in improving efficiencies, as had been previously discussed extensively by the Scrutiny Committee; any change to delegated procedures would have to be agreed by Council through amendments to the constitution;
- A “sports strategy” was explained as being covered by the Playing Pitches Strategy. This was limited in delivery by the need for land in some areas. An update of the strategy would be considered by the Chairman of the Overview Committee following advice on remit and in consultation with the Strategic Planning Committee;

Housing service plan

The Chairman reminded the committees that the Housing Review Board would be examining this service plan, but welcomed any comments from Members on the general fund aspects of the plan.

Clarification and debate covered:

- Recent motion to Council (on findings on extreme poverty) had been taken into account in the preparation of the service plan. The Strategic Lead Housing Health and Environment explained to Members that the biggest threat in the risk register was the ability of tenants to access universal credit. A report on this issue had been drafted, and may well involve a wider Devon group to assist with the considerable analysis that would be required;
- Comments from Members in appreciation of Housing and Council Tax staff in assisting the public with completing universal credit applications;
- No reference to climate change work in the service plan. In response, Members were advised that there is a corporate approach to this issue and there were some references in some of the service plans; actions the Council could take on this issue would also form a thread through the new Council Plan.

Draft Revenue Budget 2019/20

Members looked at the draft Revenue budget detail within the estimates. Clarification was sought on some elements set out within the estimates, including:

- Estimate for transport costs under the Corporate Services had a significant variance to reflect the reimbursement agreement for relocation to new offices;
- Employment costs reduction for Economic Development due to the removal of a previously required post was challenged as a poor decision in light of the increasing workload for that service. A proposal was put to add this back into the budget at a minimum to bring back this post to the service, although the Committees were told that this post covered administration and mainly related to the Business Centre and not the direct Economic Development function;
- Variance in supplies and services under Corporate Buildings was explained as a transfer of costs relating to staff rather than an increase;
- Increase in premise costs for Streetscene was to cover necessary work under health and safety requirements;
- About a £100k increase on both Cleansing and Parks & Gardens budgets were queried. In both cases 50% of the increase was due to the governments pay award with the other 50% due to an increase in the corporate services recharge. This was explained in full as **Parks & Pleasure Grounds** employment costs have risen by £112,000. This is due to a rise of £57,000 in employment costs, ie salary rises but

also an internal corporate recharge of £55,000. This £55,000 is made up of £33,000 office accommodation recharge and £20,000 Strata PC Support; **Cleansing** employment costs are similar in that there is a rise of £52,000 in salary rises and £48,000 office accommodation / strata recharge

- The increase in burial income forecast was due to some increase in charges and the Council undertaking physical burials in house rather than contracting out;
- Customer receipts forecast for parks and pleasure grounds had been revised to a more conservative level following levels in the current year;
- Increase in depreciation level under the Housing Revenue Account would be referred to the Housing Review Board to consider under their remit.

Draft Capital Budget 2019/20

Members looked at the Capital Programme detail within the estimates. The programme was formulated by the Capital Strategy and Allocation Group, who had assessed each project through a scoring matrix before deciding to add to the programme.

Clarification was sought on some elements of the programme, including

- Projects highlighted in yellow were projects agreed in principle, but required further decision from Cabinet or Council once detailed costings and timescale were confirmed;
- The description for refurbishment of toilets at the Magnolia Centre covered two locations – the bus station and at the London Inn car park;
- Section 106 schemes, This income was “net off” but would be set out in the final budget book published once the budget was agreed.

The Chairman thanked the officers involved in preparing the service plans presented to the Committees.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

1. To recommend to Council that the Council Tax for 2019/20 be increased by £5 a year;
2. To recommend to Council that the Draft Service Plans for 2019/20 be adopted with addition of:
 - a. The Planning Service Plan includes overage monitoring;
 - b. The Regeneration and Economic Service Plan ensures that business development opportunities are based on clear evidence of need; and includes developing a strategy for commercial unit delivery;
 - c. The Growth Point Team Service Plan includes more detail on the delivery of Cranbrook key facilities with timescales; and plans for inward investment;
 - d. The Environmental Health and Car Parks Service Plan includes a business case to consider extra resource to increase community engagement;
 - e. The Governance and Licensing Service Plan to specify what the local democracy activities currently are and what further activities could be undertaken;
 - f. The Finance Service Plan to make it clear that the Transformation Strategy to be completed by September 2019;
 - g. The Countryside Service Plan to revise the wording around ‘inactive’ in the second objective;
 - h. Any amendments to make objectives more SMART following a review by Strategic Lead – Organisational Development and Transformation together with the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees
 - i. Review all service plans to include reference to Brexit as required.

3. To recommend to Council that the Draft Revenue Budget for 2019/20 be adopted;
and
4. To recommend to Council that the Draft Capital Budget for 2019/20 be adopted.

OVERVIEW COMMITTEE RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

1. To recommend to Council that the Council Tax for 2019/20 be increased by £5 a year;
2. To recommend to Council that the Draft Service Plans for 2019/20 be adopted with addition of:
 - a. The Planning Service Plan includes overage monitoring;
 - b. The Regeneration and Economic Service Plan ensures that business development opportunities are based on clear evidence of need; and includes developing a strategy for commercial unit delivery;
 - c. The Growth Point Team Service Plan includes more detail on the delivery of Cranbrook key facilities with timescales; and plans for inward investment;
 - d. The Environmental Health and Car Parks Service Plan includes a business case to consider extra resource to increase community engagement;
 - e. The Governance and Licensing Service Plan to specify what the local democracy activities currently are and what further activities could be undertaken;
 - f. The Finance Service Plan to make it clear that the Transformation Strategy to be completed by September 2019;
 - g. The Countryside Service Plan to revise the wording around 'inactive' in the second objective;
 - h. Any amendments to make objectives more SMART following a review by Strategic Lead – Organisational Development and Transformation together with the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees;
 - i. Review all service plans to include reference to Brexit as required.
3. To recommend to Council that the Draft Revenue Budget for 2019/20 be adopted and include an additional £25k for staffing for Economic Development;
4. To recommend to Council that the Draft Capital Budget for 2019/20 be adopted.

Attendance list

Councillors Present:

Roger Giles (Chairman)
Graham Godbeer (Vice Chairman)
Rob Longhurst
Peter Faithfull
Geoff Pratt
Cherry Nicholas
Ian Hall
Brian Bailey
Bruce de Saram
Stuart Hughes
Marianne Rixson
Cathy Gardner
Eileen Wragg
Mike Allen
Eleanor Rylance

Councillors Also Present:

Dean Barrow
Ben Ingham
Susie Bond
Ian Thomas
Andrew Moulding
Geoff Pook
Tom Wright
John Dyson
Marcus Hartnell
Phil Skinner
Geoff Jung
Jill Elson

Officers

Richard Cohen, Deputy Chief Executive
Henry Gordon Lennox, Strategic Lead Governance and Licensing
Karen Jenkins, Strategic Lead Transformation and Organisational Development
Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Andrew Ennis, Service Lead Environmental Health and Car Parks
Andrew Hancock, Service Lead Streetscene
Libby Jarrett, Service Lead Revenues and Benefits
Tim Child, Senior Manager Property and Estates
Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Service Lead Housing
Charlie Plowden, Service Lead Countryside and Leisure
Andy Wood, East of Exeter Projects Director
Ed Freeman, Service Lead Planning Strategy and Development Management
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

Councillor Apologies:

Steve Hall
Douglas Hull
Tim Dumper
Simon Grundy
Val Ranger
John Humphreys
Alan Dent
Phil Twiss
Steve Gazzard
Brenda Taylor
Darryl Nicholas
Maddy Chapman
Pauline Stott

Chairman

Date.....