

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House on 3 November 2022

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.03 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 6 October 2022 were agreed and signed as a true record.

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 for scrutiny.

51 Portfolio Holder Annual Report - Finance

Cllr Jack Rowland, Portfolio Holder for Finance, presented his Annual Report and thanked the officers involved for their assistance with its preparation, namely Simon Davey, Libby Jarrett, John Symes and Richard Easthope.

The report highlighted the following:

- The General Fund position was looking favourable in the current forecast.
- It was noted that a number of requests for considerable sums had come through, following recent decisions, which totalled in excess of £500,000 and which would come out of the General Fund.
- The funds shown in the Treasury Management report included monies collected on behalf of other precepting authorities and a high level of liquidity was required due to the need to draw on these funds.
- Regarding budgeted income from car parking, the income projected for the whole year is £3,720,000 and as at the end of September, income received for the year to date was £3,108,190. It should be borne in mind that the remaining budgeted income of £616,810

would be collected over the next six months, when the car parking winter rate would apply.

In response to questions from Members, the following points were noted:

- The figure of 980 more council tax collections included new build homes, empty homes brought back into use and homes which had been sub-divided.
- Regarding investment strategy, Members were referred to the Treasury Strategy which sets out where and how investments are made and the associated risks.
- The Medium Term Financial Plan sets out the financial modelling for the next 10 years including projected deficits. It was noted that the projected deficit of approximately £3.8m in 2025/26 is due to the Government re-basing of business rate income. The Medium Term Financial Plan must address how the deficit will be made up in the following years, and this is set out in full in the Plan and its appendices.
- There is a need to keep a healthy General Reserve balance to mitigate against future unanticipated costs.
- With regard to EV charging points in car parks, it had been very difficult dealing with the providers, and although charging points were in situ they were not necessarily connected. A number of charging points were about to become operational. An EV policy review report would be brought to Cabinet later in the year setting out the position and what more could be done.
- Regarding card payment facilities in car parks, it was noted that the majority of car parks would take card payments, with all using the Ringo system, subject to an adequate phone signal.
- Figures for car parks were based on the number of transactions, and it was therefore difficult to know how many people were actually using car parks and how successful the charging system had been.
- It was noted that staff in the Revenues, Benefits, Corporate Customer Service, Fraud and Compliance service had been redirected to work on dealing with the delivery of various Government support schemes. Recruitment was also an issue. The team worked in an agile manner which enabled staff to be redeployed within the service and conversations were ongoing to ensure that the service was properly resourced going into the winter months.

The Committee wished to record its thanks to Libby Jarrett and her team for its excellent work in supporting local residents experiencing hardship.

The Portfolio Holder was thanked for his report which was noted and accepted.

52 **Key issues in the service plans - briefing by the Chief Executive**

The Chief Executive introduced the Service Plan 2023-24 template and outlined how this informs the budget setting process and the subsequent discussions on the draft budget in January 2023.

The main changes to the Service Plan template, in line with the Council Plan, were noted as follows:

- Providing services with an opportunity to take stock of the current situation following the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Addressing the challenges of workforce planning.
- Addressing the future digital and data programme which supports customer access and improved ways of working.
- Support the work required under the financial sustainability model which feeds into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

It was noted that section 3 of the template is new and draws on the Council Plan, showing how each service will give meaning to and deliver on the following areas:

- Systems thinking
- Digital transformation
- Customer access
- Performance management data
- Asset management
- Income maximisation

Section 4 would enable more emphasis to be put on workforce planning to address issues which had emerged over the past few years.

Section 5 on carbon and resource use has an increased emphasis on understanding the actual and measureable benefits of carbon output reduction.

Attention was also drawn to section 7 of the template which addresses the need to be better synchronised with the pressures affecting Strata and the increasing demands from its other partners.

Responses to questions from Members included the following points:

- The development of apprenticeships is a key piece of work being undertaken by the Personnel Committee and it was noted that the apprenticeship sector is now much broader than has traditionally been the case. The Council is working on a programme of events to inform local schools and colleges of the value and opportunities available in the public sector with the intention of attracting apprentices to enable the Council to develop staff for the longer term. It was noted that the current Reward Review sits alongside the development of apprenticeships and is also intended to provide long term career progression within the Council.
- With regard to carbon and resource use and measurement via a carbon accounting tool, it was noted that the Council had been working with Exeter University who had been providing the information. It was recognised that the Council needs to have more in-house expertise to provide a more focussed understanding and assessment of carbon saving investments.

The briefing was noted and accepted.

53 **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan was agreed.

Prior to the close of the meeting, there was a brief discussion regarding the elections in May 2024. It was noted that there is the possibility of the introduction of voter identification for this election and the implications of this for both the Council and for voters' engagement with the democratic process. Regulations and Government guidance are still awaited which is impacting on the timing of public communication.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

J Bonetta
M Chapman
O Davey
J Kemp (Chair)
E Rylance (Vice-Chair)

B Taylor

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

J Rowland

Officers in attendance:

Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance

Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer

Libby Jarrett, Service Lead Revenues and Benefits

Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer

Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Mark Williams, Chief Executive

Councillor apologies:

M Allen

J Bailey

A Bruce

C Gardner

S Hawkins

D Key

H Parr

J Whibley

T Woodward

Chair

Date: