

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of LED Monitoring Forum held at Online via Zoom app on 17 January 2023

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.22 pm

26 Public Speaking

The Chair began by welcoming the new LED Director of Leisure, who introduced himself and outlined his background.

Cllr Paul Millar made a verbal statement of thanks and recognition, explaining that this would be his final meeting as a serving Councillor.

A question was then read out on behalf of Mr Andrew Tyerman. Mr Tyerman stated that the EDDC Public Health Strategic Plan 2019-23 highlights a 15.5 year life expectancy gap for Exmouth residents between the least well off and their more affluent neighbours, and noted that the first remedy in the strategy to tackle this inequality is physical activity. He sought to understand how the Council and LED work together to ensure an increased LED membership cost did not exclude older people from participating in physical activity and asked if a discounted off-peak membership rate had been considered for over 65s.

The LED CEO responded that discounted rates are targeted towards people on low income such as those on pension credit, universal credit and other means-tested benefits; an approach reinforced in the Leisure Strategy. It was appropriate to target support towards the least well-off rather than the over-65s indiscriminately, many of whom in East Devon are reasonably well off.

The Chair agreed that the Council's priority was to focus its finite resources towards supporting people on low income, to make a positive difference.

27 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 October 2022

Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

28 Declarations of interest

Cllr A Dent: Minutes 31 – 35: Affects Non-Registerable Interest: Member of LED Community Leisure as a service user.

Cllr P Millar: Minutes 31 – 35: Affects Non-Registerable Interest: Member of LED Community Leisure as a service user.

29 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

30 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There was one item to be considered in private section (minute 35 refers).

31 **LED Facilities and Activities Update**

The LED CEO introduced the update report which summarises the activities going on, and invited questions.

Discussion and clarification included the following points:

- The workforce is currently stable and LED works hard to retain its staff but there are ongoing problems recruiting at an operational level, particularly with lifeguards due to competition for those roles within the district..
- LED now uses electricity that is 100% generated from renewable sources; an energy consultant also monitors the market on a daily basis to track energy prices and, where appropriate, to lock in on daily rates for weeks or months at a time, when prices drop.
- Significant savings could be made from improvements to the pool plant and from the installation of air source heat pumps; the new Director of Leisure is keen to work with the Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation to progress this promptly.

32 **LED Community Engagement Report**

The LED CEO introduced this report which outlines the work of the LED Community Engagement team, with people of all ages. The Council has secured funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to be used for outreach community engagement work, and this extra funding will help the team to deliver outreach to harder to reach groups.

Clarification and discussion included the following points:

- The Community Engagement Team work with a lot of health groups and Cllr Rowland will provide contact details to the LED CEO for the Re:store Axe Valley CIC as he believes there is a lot of synergy between the work they are trying to achieve and what can be done through LED.
- A Member commented on the support that LED have given for the Exmouth Stroke Survivor Club; this has included some equipment, and the Member asked how the equipment is being used and if the group needed more. The LED CEO will look into this further to bring more information to the next meeting.
- It is intended that the Community Engagement Team will deliver a presentation to Forum members in the summer, following the May 2023 elections, to outline what they do and answer detailed questions.

33 **LED KPI Dashboard November and December 2022**

The KPIs evidenced a gradual improvement to approximately 80-85% of pre-Covid levels by November 2022, followed by a traditional decline in December. The LED CEO commented that anecdotally, the December drop off appears more severe than for the same month in pre-Covid years, and the January KPIs will be an interesting indicator of what can be expected for this calendar year. From April, it is intended to start comparing KPIs year on year.

A Member asked that the Forum has sight of the December 2019 KPI Dashboard for the purposes of comparison against the data pre-Covid.

34 **Exmouth Pavilion report**

The Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation introduced the first of two reports, which considered the Exmouth Pavilion from an assets and placemaking perspective. A second report prepared by the LED CEO detailed the issues around Exmouth Pavilion from an LED perspective. The Forum were asked to consider both reports together.

The first report outlined a baseline summary of issues facing the Pavilion, with a series of high level options for the Forum to consider. The Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation remarked that decisions would need to consider wider implications of the Cultural Strategy and the objectives of the Council, and factor in LED. The Pavilion was also of relevance to the placemaking work for Exmouth and the consultation undertaken in the summer 2022.

The LED CEO ran through the second report, commenting that the Pavilion was a thriving facility pre-Covid but was devastated by the pandemic, and is beginning to recover, with a good number of shows and activities booked. The building is an aged facility however, and the roof badly leaks; water runs down the walls of the changing rooms and staff put buckets down, but shows might have to be cancelled as the changing rooms are not fit for purpose. The issue is around what the Council can afford to invest to get the building into a usable condition for the public, given that it will be some years before any replacement facility can be built.

In discussion at length, the following points were made:

- Members recognised the financial challenges but expressed agreement that Exmouth must continue to have a theatre; the Pavilion is an important operating centre for culture and for the general wellbeing of Exmouth residents.
- Members agreed that the current situation is untenable and a decision concerning repairs to the roof was needed urgently.
- One Member expressed that careful thought should be given to spending £400k on replacing the roof of the Pavilion if it is to be demolished in 5 – 10 years' time, stating that this would be a gross misuse of taxpayers' money.
- It was accepted that in the event that a decision is taken to build a new theatre, this could take a minimum of 5-7 years and possibly up to 10 years, so an interim solution is needed. Officers could be asked to come up with a proposal aimed only at the short term of 5-7 years.
- Some Members suggested the Ocean Suite at Ocean might be a suitable interim venue as an alternative to the Pavilion building; the LED CEO felt this would not be appropriate; the top floor of Ocean has a low ceiling and small stage with a seating capacity of 200 and would therefore be suitable only for small entertainment. The Pavilion has a capacity of 550 since tiered seating was purchased.
- Some Members expressed a view that the theatre is currently in the wrong place and should be relocated to a different area with more parking and ability to attract more footfall. One Member argued however that the Pavilion is a top tourist attraction that should not be moved; other seaside resorts have their theatre near to the seafront, and he felt this is where the theatre for Exmouth should be.
- Members were in agreement that the placemaking exercise consultants should be involved, to see if they can propose an appropriate way forward.
- It was confirmed by the Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation that a stock condition survey is in place which includes a rolling programme over 5 years.

In a vote, Forum Members approved the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

1. Not to dismiss any option at this stage.
2. That the placemaking consultant for Exmouth (to be appointed) be asked to consider within wider work the options put forward in this report for the Pavilion, initially determining alignment against the themes, characteristics and terms of reference agreed by Cabinet.
3. That repairs to the roof of Exmouth Pavilion take place as a matter of urgency.
4. An urgent report be brought to Cabinet outlining works needed to the Pavilion over the next 5 - 7 years noting the Forum's request that support is given to undertaking urgent repair works to the roof.

The meeting then went into private session.

35 **LED Budget Report 2023/24**

The Assistant Director Countryside & Leisure introduced this item which dealt with a request from LED to provide a budget allocation of £1.498m for its 2023/24 service fee, noting that £1.372m is currently included in the Draft Revenue and Capital Budget 2023/24.

The LED CEO explained that the reasons for requiring the additional funding for this year were down to the significantly increased costs of energy, the knock-on effect on cost of living, and the knock-on cost on wage demands.

Forum members took account of a number of points in considering LED's budget allocation request, including:

- A recent Local Government Association report suggested that 40% of council areas were at risk of losing their leisure centres or seeing reduced services before 30 March 2023, with the leisure industry facing some very challenging times
- Despite multiple and considerable attempts made through meetings with local MPs and letters written directly to Government throughout the two year period of Covid19 to recover LED's lost income that mirrored the arrangements made separately for local authority run 'in house' leisure services from Government, this Council has still not received a response from Government, and this is putting acute pressure on the Council's budgets.
- There is a need to better understand the financial detail behind LED's request for a higher level of support and the decisions being made by LED's board to find significant savings in their operations. Section 7.5.3 of the Leisure Strategy provides a pathway to do this, recommending a review of the current arrangements with a clearly laid out business plan from LED for the remainder of its contract period that provides a negotiated annual management fee, as opposed to a 5-yearly agreement, with detailed annual profit and loss information per site, along with what has been allocated to each site from the annual fee. This information will provide greater transparency and help the Forum to make more informed decisions.
- LED will be working closely with the Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation to significantly reduce costs via energy reduction measures (e.g. installation of air source heat pumps, and photovoltaic panels on the roofs of swimming pools) and by seeking to amend dual-use agreements.

Following discussion at length, Members voted in favour of the following recommendation.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

That Cabinet recommends to Council to agree the original budget figure that has been put into the accounts but to ask officers to work closely with LED to better understand the extra request, so that the LED Monitoring Forum can consider that at a later date.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

P Arnott
A Dent
B De Saram
S Hawkins (Chair)
N Hookway
G Jung
P Millar (Vice-Chair)
J Rowland

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

K Bloxham
S Gazzard
V Johns
M Rixson
E Rylance

Representatives of LED Community Leisure in attendance:

Karen Best, Director of Finance
Peter Gilpin, CEO
Richard Purchase, Chairman of LED Board
Alan Waistell, Director of Leisure

Officers in attendance:

Andrew Hopkins, Communications Consultant
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer
Tim Child, Assistant Director Place, Assets & Commercialisation
Charles Plowden, Assistant Director Countryside and Leisure
Simon Davey, Director of Finance
John Golding, Director of Housing, Health and Environment
Gerry Mills, Project Manager Place & Prosperity (Exmouth)

Councillor apologies:

D Bickley
P Hayward
J Loudoun

Chair

Date: