

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Poverty Working Panel held at Online via Zoom app on 26 June 2023

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.20 am

1 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 March 2023

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 March 2023 were received and noted as a true and accurate record.

3 Declarations of interest

Cllr I Barlow: Minute 4; Affects Non-Registerable Interest: He has a Ukrainian family in one of his houses.

Cllr B Collins: Minute 5; Affects Non-Registerable Interest: Director of Foodsafe CIC.

Cllr S Smith: Minute 5; Affects Non-Registerable Interest: Community Manager of an organisation which could be affected by the appointment of a Community and Voluntary Service for East Devon.

Cllr M Goodman: Minute 5; Affects Non-Registerable Interest: Involved in a campaign with Rotary to fundraise for families at Christmas.

Cllr P Faithfull: Minute 5; Affects Non-Registerable Interest: Trustee on the Ottery St Mary Feofees Trust, as an Ottery Town Council representative.

Cllr P Faithfull: Minute 5: Affects Non-Registerable Interest: Member of Ottery St Mary Refugee Response Group.

4 Update on emergency help for residents and priority areas over the coming months

The Assistant Director – Revenues & Benefits and the Benefits & Financial Resilience Manager delivered a presentation which outlined at length the work of the Revenues and Benefits team and what is planned for this year to provide emergency help for residents.

Discussion and clarification included the following points:

- The team has received the occasional request for support for Ukrainians, and they have been helped through the Household Support Fund or the Council's own cost of living funds. They are also entitled to welfare benefits.
- The team have identified that some people fall into poverty as a result of Department for Work and Pensions sanctions, and it is often the case that these people have mental health issues. Financial Resilience Officers work actively with job centres to get decisions overturned and have been quite successful, with those affected often getting payments backdated.

- The Assistant Director – Revenues & Benefits will obtain numbers on how many people are sanctioned by DWP in East Devon, for context, in order that the Poverty Panel can explore whether this is something members would like to consider lobbying over.
- The Assistant Director – Revenues & Benefits will raise with the Council Tax Manager reports of potential scam calls concerning Council Tax banding reductions, and consider putting out a press release to warn residents.
- East Devon DC works with Devon County Council on administering the Household Support Fund and it is agreed to split the funding into two parts; i) targeted support where households are identified to get a payment, and the team write to inform these residents how to make a claim; and ii) a smaller pot of money for direct applications. The Benefits & Financial Resilience Manager confirmed that all of the funding will be spent.
- Since it is usually a relatively small sum, financial support is given to households as a lump sum and not in instalments.
- Causes of poverty are often complex and can involve mental and physical health needs, high energy bills and poor budgeting skills. Support is based on assessment of individual needs.
- As well as targeted support, available support is promoted through social media and through partner agencies.
- Where households are identified as needing furniture or electrical appliances, they are referred to Eco for a home visit. Where appropriate, Eco will source the goods and the Council will pay for them through the Household Support Fund.

Members noted the report.

5 **Appointment of a Community and Voluntary Service for East Devon**

The Director – Housing, Health & Environment and the Management Information Officer ran through this report which provided details of the work undertaken to secure a new East Devon Voluntary Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) support service.

Having been without VCSE support for several years, East Devon DC has secured a contract with Devon Communities Together to establish an overarching support service using grant funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund of £60,000 per year, for three years.

Devon Communities Together are an independent charity with a long-established reputation for working closely with rural communities and the groups and organisations that support them. The new service will be designed in close collaboration with East Devon's VCSE sector to encourage joint approaches and provide support for the whole sector in areas such as governance, training and funding advice.

The VCSE service specification and the Devon Communities Together delivery statement were set out with the report.

Discussion and clarification included the following points:

- It was clarified that the project costs outlined in the report assume a project end date of March 2026.
- One member expressed concern that using the funding in the manner set out in the report could add an additional unnecessary layer of bureaucracy and mean that individual town VCSE coordinators could miss out on the financial support they really need. The Director – Housing, Health & Environment recognised the concerns and responded that Devon Communities Together will do a lot of work around ensuring the various community and voluntary groups receive the targeted support that they want, and where they want it, to help them through complex legal and financial issues, and to secure funding and draft

policies. He expressed confidence that Devon Communities Together will add value in securing investment for the voluntary sector in East Devon.

Members noted the report and supported the direction of travel.

6 **Looking back: review of Poverty Action Plan 2022-23**

The Public Health Project Officer delivered a presentation concerning the review of the Poverty Action Plan 2022-23, with examples of what has been achieved over the past year. A final annual report for 2022-23 is being prepared.

Members recognised the extent of the work involved in delivering on the action plan across services, and thanked the Public Health Project Officer for her work.

7 **Planning forward: Poverty Action Plan 2023-24**

The Public Health Project Officer delivered a presentation outlining a proposed new style action plan for 2023-24: recommending:

- To streamline reporting poverty actions along with other reporting processes, by using Service Plans for 2023/24 to identify poverty-related actions.
- If the draft proposed action plan is agreed, to work with any services as needed, to strengthen the links between service plans and poverty actions.

Members thanked the Public Health Project Officer for her work and supported the aforementioned recommendations.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

P Arnott
M Chapman
B Collins
M Goodman
D Haggerty
J Heath
D Ledger (Chair)
M Martin
M Rixson
S Smith

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

I Barlow
T Dumper
P Faithfull
E Rylance

Officers in attendance:

Jo Avery, Management Information Officer
Sharon Church, Benefits Manager
John Golding, Director of Housing, Health and Environment

Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Libby Jarrett, Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits, Corporate Customer Access, Fraud
& Compliance
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer

Chair:

Date: