

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Poverty Working Panel held at Online via the Zoom app on 13 November 2023

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.07 pm

8 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 June 2023

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 June 2023 were noted as a true and accurate record.

9 Declarations of interest

Cllr M Goodman: Minute 11; Affects Non-Registerable Interest: He works closely with the Sid Valley Food Bank and the Benefits Manager on the Christmas appeal for Sidmouth.

10 Public speaking

No members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting.

11 How East Devon are working with partners towards building the financial resilience of our residents - presentations by the Financial Resilience and Private Sector Housing Teams and some of our key partners

The Benefits and Financial Resilience Manager introduced this item which provided an overview of how the Council supports the district's more vulnerable residents through collaborative partnership working both internally and with external partners.

Members saw presentations from the following departments and agencies, detailing at length how they work holistically to support residents with examples of outcomes and residents feedback, and an outline of the shared work going forward:

- Millie Harris, Financial Resilience Team, EDDC
- Jody Harding, Private Sector Housing, EDDC
- Tara Bowers, Exeter Community Energy
- Lorraine Whiting, South West Water
- Dean Stewart, Citizens Advice East Devon

The Benefits and Financial Resilience Manager thanked all partners for their contribution to the meeting and for their continuing work with the Council.

Discussion and clarification included the following points:

- Private landlords are expected to inspect and maintain their properties but Private Sector Housing have wide-ranging powers to intervene in the event that the properties are not adequately maintained.
- The Private Sector Housing team currently has a full complement of Officers, and resources are managed to deal with damp and mould issues during the winter season, and project works in the spring and summer. There have been fewer referrals for damp and mould issues than would be expected for the time of year however, suggesting that residents may be reluctant to report their landlords for fear of potentially losing their homes.

- A Cranbrook Ward Member raised that there are Cranbrook residents with heat provision from Eon Heat who are potentially in fuel poverty, and she would like to explore what more can be done to raise awareness in Cranbrook of the help that is available. It was confirmed that the Financial Resilience Team have referral links with the food bank in Cranbrook, and Eon Heat does come up in discussions with residents.
- Citizens Advice ran a campaign last year about loan sharks. Going forward, they are looking to set up a Preventative Debt team, to be proactive in the community about how to manage a budget and avoid pitfalls.
- Citizens Advice advisors carry out deep-dive work with specific vulnerable people who are not good at managing their finances, in instances where a visit to the office is not enough, to carry out more detailed and significant work with those who most need it. This can include practical assistance with setting up online banking and direct debits.
- The Revenues and Benefits team hope to be in a position to bring data to a future Working Panel meeting around the percentage of people who no longer need help, due to the success of the work that has been done to support them.
- Information is available on the Council's website concerning financial help, and providing links to other websites and resources. Available support is also promoted via social media posts, and by way of press releases to reach residents who are digitally excluded.
- Project Food, funded by Devon County Council, supports people with learning cooking skills and how to prepare nutritious meals on a budget.

The Chair thanked all speakers for their presentations, which highlighted the valuable work being carried out.

12 **East Devon Poverty Actions Annual Review 2022-2023**

The Public Health Project Officer presented the Annual Review of the first year of East Devon's Poverty Actions, explaining that the Poverty Working Panel developed a Poverty Strategy and an Action Plan, published in 2021, to inspire as well as to celebrate and share good work. The actions were not intended to be done all at once or to be too onerous for already busy teams.

The 2021 Action Plan was structured around five objectives with the following themes:

- Helping people on low incomes
- Strengthening families and communities
- Promoting an inclusive economy
- Addressing the high cost of housing
- Improving health outcomes for people on low incomes

The Annual Review was structured around the same aforementioned themes and the Public Health Project Officer provided a range of examples demonstrating the contribution and care that the Council's services have made towards poverty reduction in the district. The actions from the 2021 Action Plan were not all completed, and the expectation was that they would be delivered over time, dependent on capacity.

It was noted that the 2021 Action Plan was a large document and with the agreement of the Working Panel, a simplified Action Plan has been published for 2023-24 which reflects the same five strategic objectives and is structured service by service, to streamline reporting for future annual reviews.

The Working Panel were asked to approve the Annual Review, upon which the Public Health Project Officer will arrange for it to be published online alongside the Action Plan for 2023-24.

In discussion, one Member noted that some of the excellent work that has been done in delivering the 2021 Action Plan will not have been captured because it is such a weighty document, and the simpler Action Plan for 2023-24 is more appropriate, going forward.

In a vote, Working Panel Members approved the Annual Review.

The Chair thanked the Public Health Project Officer for her work in liaising with services for the purposes of delivering the review.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

M Chapman
M Goodman
D Ledger (Chair)
M Martin
S Smith

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

K Bloxham
P Faithfull
E Rylance

Officers in attendance:

Sharon Church, Benefits Manager
Jody Harding, Principal Environmental Health Officer
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

Councillor apologies:

P Arnott
B Collins
D Haggerty
J Heath
M Rixson

Chair:

Date: