

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 24 January 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.47 pm

60 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 November 2023 were agreed and signed as a true record.

61 Declarations of interest

Minute 66. Report on UK Shared Prosperity Fund Evaluation Plans.

Councillor Vicky Johns, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Member is employed by an arts charity.

Councillor Vicky Johns, Affects Non-registerable Interest, Member of Ottery St Mary Town Council which owns the Ottery St Mary station hub.

62 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

63 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

64 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no items which officers recommended were dealt with in this way.

65 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 by Members for scrutiny.

66 Report on UK Shared Prosperity Fund Evaluation Plans

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is a significant source of devolved funding for the investing in local communities and supporting local businesses, with EDDC using its £2.6m allocation to fund 13 projects. The report provided an overview of the UKSPF funded activity for 2022-23 and the key findings of the evaluation work undertaken to date. It was intended that the report would be provided on an annual basis to update the Committee on how UKSPF funded activity was performing relative to the EDDC UKSPF Evaluation Strategy.

In presenting the report, the Economic Development Officer advised that the Government should be measuring the quality of the impact of the funding and not just the quantity.

Questions and discussion included the following points:

- Under the funding regulations, 4% of the budget was permitted for administration costs and this had enabled EDDC to focus on projects evaluation and hire the Economy Projects Assistant to undertake this work.
- The setting up and work of the Arts and Culture East Devon network (ACED) was proving to be very valuable, particularly the in-person meetings and more workshops would be welcome.
- As the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) released more data relating to the UKSPF, a greater understanding will be gained which will assist with understanding qualitative outputs.
- It was noted that originally there had been 14 projects, 2 of which had been amalgamated, and it was suggested that the website be updated to reflect this position.

The Committee thanked the Economic Development Officer and the Economy Projects Assistant for the report and for their work which benefits and promotes East Devon.

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Committee note the UKSPF evaluation undertaken, along with the challenges identified and proposed recommendations.
2. That the Scrutiny Committee agreed to officers providing written feedback to DLUHC on the need for qualitative metrics to be made available to measure the success of projects where quantitative metrics alone are not appropriate.

67 **Report on consultancy and agency spend 2022**

The Committee considered the report which detailed capital and revenue spend on consultants and specialist advice and agency staff for 2022 – 23.

The Finance Manager advised that the Council used the services of consultants and specialist advice and agency staff when there was no in-house expertise or capacity or to cover staff shortages.

Questions, comments and discussion included the following points:

- Attention was drawn to the expenditure on Price Waterhouse Coopers LLP for the service reward review [report page 36, line 12]. It was noted that the staff reward review had been well received and was now resulting in positive outcomes regarding recruitment and retention of staff. This should also reduce the need for future use of consultancy and agency staff and result in savings.
- With regard to expenditure on Terraquest [report page 36, line 7], this work had now been brought back in house.
- It was noted that expenditure on Anthesis (UK) Ltd [report page 36, line 1] relates to the Interconnector project and not the day to day operation of the district heating networks.
- It was also noted that there was considerable expenditure due to the Local Plan work.
- It was worth highlighting those areas where it was difficult to recruit or retain staff in future reports.

The Committee thanked the Finance Manager for his report.

RESOLVED

That the Committee note the details of expenditure on consultants and agency staff in 2022 – 23.

68 **Portfolio Holder report on Economy**

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Cllr Matt Hall, presented his report which provided a summary of some of the main areas of progress made over the last six months. Following on from the previous report, the Portfolio Holder highlighted that the Economic Development were producing a new Economic Development Strategy (EDS) for East Devon without consultancy or agency support. The work highlights collaboration with other portfolios.

Discussion and responses to questions included the following points:

- It is difficult to provide commercial sites in East Devon and attract a variety of businesses who would employ a range of employees, including young people.
- The first draft of the Economic Development Strategy is with the Portfolio Holder for initial review, with a final draft to Cabinet currently planned for May.
- A district wide survey for the Economic Development Strategy is under development and will go live on 19th February.
- Business leaders had been invited to assist with developing the Economic Development Strategy and this had been well received. It is hoped to continue these meetings.
- There is a need to create more sustainable sites and communities to provide employment for everyone, and Members need to be mindful of this when considering the new Local Plan.
- There is also a balance to be struck between providing employment and protecting the landscape.
- The Climate Strategy is heavily referenced in the emerging Economic Development Strategy.
- It was noted that the Council owns employment land, and a lot of work is being undertaken by other teams to assess viability before sites are put forward for the Local Plan.
- The Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) is the process by which viability of sites is considered.
- East Devon is well placed for provision of logistics, with good progress being made in the Enterprise Zone.

Correction: Members queried on pg.4 of the report a bullet point which reads “Three quarters of those aged 16+ in East Devon are economically inactive due to retirement”. This should have read “Three quarters of those aged 16+ in East Devon and economically inactive are economically inactive due to retirement”.

The Portfolio Holder was thanked for his report and the Economic Development Team were thanked for their work.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

69 **Quarterly performance report Q2 2023 - 24**

The Monitoring Officer presented the report and noted that the area showing cause for concern was corporate complaints and that this was currently being addressed.

It was noted that the performance framework is under review as is the performance management system and presentation of information. The new Council Plan will set out the measures to be taken although this will take time to filter through.

It was agreed that the definition of the indicators should be included in the quarterly performance reports going forward.

RESOLVED

That the performance against delivery of key performance indicators for the 2nd quarter of 2023 – 24 was noted and that the progress of the performance framework review being developed was also noted.

70 **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan was discussed and the following points noted and agreed:

- The interim update on progress with S.106 and CIL resources and processes would be added to the meeting of 7 March.
- Portfolio Holder report on Sustainable Homes and Communities would be received later in the year, with the scope to be agreed and to include matters not covered by the Housing Review Board and the Poverty Working Panel.
- Report on car parks review to be received later in the year, pending information on progress with the review.
- The scope of Portfolio Holder reports to be agreed with the Chair and Portfolio Holders in sufficient time prior to the relevant meeting.

With the above amendments, the Forward Plan was agreed.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

B Collins
R Collins
M Goodman (Chair)
A Hall
V Johns
D Mackinder
J Whibley

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Faithfull
M Hall
R Jefferies
G Jung
D Ledger
J Loudoun

Officers in attendance:

Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Robert Murray, Economic Development Manager
John Symes, Finance Manager
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance & Licensing (Monitoring Officer)
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Tom Winters, Economic Development Officer
Andrew Wood, Assistant Director Growth Development and Prosperity
Zoe Smith, Economy Projects Assistant

Councillor apologies:

I Barlow
J Heath
S Smith

A Toye

Chair

Date: