

Report to: Council



Date of Meeting 8 May 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Annual report of the Overview Committee 2023-24

Report summary:

To review the work of the Overview Committee during the 2023-24 civic year.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That Council note the work that the Overview Committee has undertaken during the 2023-24 civic year.

Reason for recommendation:

To inform Council of the work of the Overview Committee.

Officer: Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer, sjames@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ Better homes and communities for all
 - ☒ A greener East Devon
 - ☒ A resilient economy
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Report in full

The Overview Committee

Overview and Scrutiny is a non-executive function carried out by three committees, the Overview Committee, the Scrutiny Committee and the Housing Review Board, within a set of guiding principles of effective scrutiny promoted by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

The Overview Committee principally provides 'critical friend' challenge and reflects the voice and concerns of the public and its communities prior to decisions being taken so as to make an impact on the delivery of public services.

Specific functions of the Overview Committee, relating to policy development and review, include:

- To assist the Council and the Cabinet in the development of its budget and policy framework by in-depth analysis of policy issues.
- To conduct research and carry out community and other consultation in the analysis of policy issues and possible options.
- To consider and propose mechanisms to encourage and enhance community participation in the development of policy options.
- Question Members of the Cabinet and/or committees and Senior Officers about their views on issues and proposals affecting the area.
- Subject to prior Council approval of an annual work plan, liaise with other external organisations operating in the area, whether national, regional or local, to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working.

The Chair of the Overview Committee for 2023-24 was Councillor Anne Hall, with Councillor Dan Wilson as Vice-Chair.

Words from the Chair

Having a fresh start in May 2023 with a new council term we have made good progress with several policies coming through to Committee with good buy in from Members and some excellent reports coming through from Officers. I thank Members and Officers for the support and work to help make this Committee a success.

I look forward to working more closely with Cabinet members and to continue to see new policies implemented.

The following examples summarise the Overview Committee's work over the 2023-24 civic year.

1. Proposals for a Place and Prosperity Framework for East Devon District Council

In July 2023, the Overview Committee considered the Place and Prosperity Framework which sets out the mechanism where Place and Prosperity proposals are screened against the borrowing requirements of the Public Works Loans Board in a standardised way with sufficient assessment of the risk. Additionally, it sets out the governance process to enable agile and robust decision-making, this being by way of a Place and Prosperity Investment Board as a sub-committee of Cabinet, supported by senior officers.

The Committee recommended an amendment to the Framework to reflect the addition of an additional non-executive member on the Place and Prosperity Investment Board. The Framework was subsequently adopted by Council with the Chair of Overview Committee included as the additional non-executive member at Stage 1 of the Framework process.

2. Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets 2024-2025 and Draft Council Plan

At a joint meeting in January 2024, the Overview Committee and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Revenue and Capital Budgets 2024-2025 and the Key Service Plan Objectives for 2024-2025 for the Council services.

The draft Revenue and Capital Budgets were recommended to Cabinet for adoption with two amendments to be considered; i) the creation of a budget for planning appeals within the Planning budget; and ii) the inclusion in 2024-25 of a budget for beach matting at Beer, Budleigh and Sidmouth.

The Service Plans were also recommended to Cabinet, having regard to the comments made by members as follows: i) the inclusion of the Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan in the Planning Strategy.

At the Cabinet meeting on 31 January 2024, the Leader thanked the joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees for their useful input in this matter and the aforementioned recommendations were incorporated into Cabinet's recommendation of the Budget to Council.

3. StreetScene Public Bin Review

In October 2023, the Overview Committee considered a report which set out a review of the StreetScene bin collection service. The review had arisen due to Cranbrook ward members requesting, through a question to Council, a review of equitable bin charging across the district, and also from the Service's own planned work to review service delivery within operations tied to the recycling and waste contract work.

The review examined the Council's litter, recycling and dog waste collection service charges and operational model. The Overview Committee considered the overall policy and the findings of the review and recommended that the proposed increase to the litter bin collection rate should be applied to the dog bin collections, and that the increase to all town and parish service charges should be spread over two years.

The Overview Committee's recommendations were noted and agreed by Cabinet in February 2023.

4. Public Toilets update report

The Overview Committee received an update report in November 2023 which set out the background to the Public Toilets Review Project, the progress to date, next steps and timetable implications.

The report addressed both progress with Category A sites, being those sites where the Council was retaining and investing, but also the challenges encountered with Category B and C transfers and the limited interest particularly by Parish and Town Councils but also more widely by others.

The project was at a crossroads in terms of how to move specific challenging elements forward, and officers and Cabinet sought the Overview Committee's feedback on next steps in terms of moving the project forward.

Following discussion at length, the Committee recommended to Cabinet to extend the closing date and any necessary revenue budgets for Category B and C sites until 31 March 2025 to allow a further 12 months to enable an urgent revisiting of negotiations with town and parish councils to look at freehold disposals and other changes to the offer according to a specified timetable and including a renewed effort through Ward Members to engage town and parish councils, with the reality of reduced or removed public toilet provision at the sites, should agreement not be reached.

The Committee also recommended to Cabinet that this Council write to the Secretary of State to push for public toilets to become a statutory service, and to invite other councils in Devon and Cornwall to also do so.

The recommendations were supported by Cabinet at its meeting on 29 November 2023.

5. Beach Amenity Development Plan

The Beach Amenity Development Plan (BADP) was a missing piece in the Council's adopted Greenspace Strategy. East Devon's beaches are a core part of the district's tourism offer and central to delivery of key parts of the Council Plan, and the Climate Change Strategy.

The BADP lays out an ambitious yet achievable vision of how this key resource will be managed in the next five years.

The Overview Committee recommended the BADP to Cabinet in January 2024 and also recommended that consideration be given to improving the process for applying for concessions and activities on EDDC managed beaches.

The BADP was subsequently approved by Cabinet in February 2024.

6. East Devon District Council Scrutiny Improvement Review – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)

At an extraordinary joint meeting in February 2024, the Overview Committee, Scrutiny Committee and Housing Review Board (the Overview and Scrutiny Committees) considered a number of recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Improvement Review carried out during October and November 2023 by the CfGS, following a Motion at Full Council in July 2023.

Following discussion, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees resolved to note the letter and recommendations from the CfGS and to request that the Democratic Services Manager prepares an Action Plan identifying the resources require to deliver the recommendations. The Action Plan is to be submitted to a further joint meeting by 30 April 2024, recommendations from which will be presented to Full Council during May 2024.

7. Scrutiny Protocol for Scrutiny Committee, Overview Committee and Housing Review Board

Also at February's extraordinary joint meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees recommended to Council to approve the draft Scrutiny Protocol subject to revision of some wording to allow longer than 35 minutes for questions at the Chair's discretion, and the inclusion of wording setting out that reports to the Committees will be authored by Officers and not by Members.

Thanks were expressed to the Monitoring Officer for her work on the draft Protocol.

The Protocol was approved at Full Council on 6 March 2024.

8. Tree Strategy for East Devon District Council

Trees are an integral part of the environment, contributing to the health and wellbeing of a population and the sustainability of communities, and it is vital to protect and value trees, for future generations.

EDDC also has a duty to protect its residents from harm and to ensure a safe environment for all. It is therefore vital that trees and woodlands in the district are managed effectively and that any potential risks from trees are identified, assessed and addressed.

The creation of a Tree Strategy for EDDC will help to frame the important issues and challenges within a robust and deliverable document that helps the Council to make informed and measured decisions, according to its resources, that help protect and grow the district's trees and woodlands into the future.

In March 2024, the Overview Committee recommended to Cabinet the development of a Tree Strategy for EDDC, and to procure an external resource to draft the Strategy, as agreed previously by Council.

9. Public Health Strategy 2024-2027

Public health is the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts of society.

This Council believes it has an overarching responsibility to consider health and wellbeing in all its activities. The Public Health Strategy sets the scene locally, gives a flavour of what the Council has already achieved, and outlines the strategic aims and priority activities. It identifies how the organisation will meet these aims and acknowledges the vital role that partners play, explaining how key council strategies and plans fit together.

Although not a statutory requirement, the Public Health Strategy demonstrates this Council's commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of communities across East Devon.

The Overview Committee considered the new Public Health Strategy in March 2024, and recommended it to Council for adoption.

10. East Devon Parking Strategy 2024-2031

Car parking provision is fundamental to reducing road network congestion, influencing travel habits, facilitating economic prosperity and supporting the delivery of Council services through income generated by car parking charges.

In October 2023, the Overview Committee reviewed and agreed the proposed principles and objectives for the Council's Car Parking Strategy for 2024-2031. The draft Strategy was subsequently considered by the Committee in March 2024 having been produced through internal consultation as well as being the subject of an elected member workshop, to which all members had been invited.

The Overview Committee recommended the Car Parking Strategy to Cabinet, subject to appropriate amendments reflecting the Committee's discussions. The Committee also recommended that public consultation is not undertaken, subject to appropriate consultation on any decisions resulting from its adoption, and that a small politically-balanced Working Group or Portfolio Team be convened to deliver key elements of the Strategy, with relevant Ward Members and Portfolio Holders invited whenever appropriate. The recommendations will be considered by Cabinet in May 2024.

The Strategy represents a commitment to defining and delivering the right balance between financial and non-fiscal priorities, and setting a framework that guides future policy and decision making as well as underpinning the day-to-day operational work of the Parking team.

11. Coach Tourism in East Devon – Task and Finish Forum

In March 2024, the Overview Committee resolved to set up a Coach Tourism in East Devon Task and Finish Forum, to review a Council Motion on Notice proposed by Cllr Del Haggerty with a view to increasing coach passenger visitors to East Devon. The Forum is expected to report back to the Overview Committee by December 2024.

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications.