

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 7 November 2024

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.44 pm

19 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 July 2024 were agreed and signed as a true record.

20 Apologies

Cllr Joe Whibley had sent apologies for the meeting and had requested a short statement to be read out on his behalf. The Democratic Services Officer read the statement which expressed Cllr Whibley's concern at the inappropriateness of asking 15 Members of the Committee, plus Officers, to drive across the District to attend a meeting to discuss climate change targets. Cllr Whibley considered that a virtual meeting would have been more appropriate to reduce impact on the environment.

21 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

22 Public speaking

A member of the public, Mrs Anne Membery, had registered to speak but was unable to attend in person. Mrs Membery had submitted a statement which was read out by the Democratic Services Officer.

The statement questioned whether the fees paid to the consultants, WSP, to produce the 10 year strategic plan for Exmouth were justified. Mrs Membery considered that the strategic plan contained suggestions for Exmouth which were not feasible. Mrs Membery had also made a statement at the meeting of the Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront Group on 9 September 2024 and had been advised that the matter has gone to consultation.

Mrs Membery requested that the online consultation be scrutinised as it was difficult to complete and asked how many people had completed the consultation, and when the results would be made known.

A response had been provided by the Corporate Lead, Major Projects and Programmes and was read out by the Democratic Services Officer.

The response advised that the Exmouth Placemaking Plan was currently being reviewed internally and that this would include the deliverability and consideration of the funding for each of the projects. This work would be considered by the Placemaking in Exmouth Town and Seafront Group in the next 3 to 4 months.

The consultants, WSP, were engaged following a formal procurement exercise, as the Council does not have the necessary in-house expertise for the extensive technical work involved. Costs are carefully monitored to ensure value for money.

With regards to the consultation, Officers work with communications colleagues to ensure that consultations are accessible and Officer support is available for respondents who are finding it difficult to engage.

23 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

24 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential / exempt items.

25 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.

26 Climate change report

The Portfolio Holder, Climate Action, was unable to attend the meeting but had submitted a written statement which was read out by the Democratic Services Officer.

The statement included the following points:

- 2024 is the final year of the original Climate Change Strategy,
- The Climate Change Team had been reviewing the strategy for 2025 onwards to ensure that the related Action Plan would deliver the required carbon reductions,
- The Carbon Descent Plan [attached to the report] had been produced in partnership with the South West Energy and Environment Group (SWEEDG) and provides a theoretical road map to reduce carbon emissions by 2040,
- SWEEDG met with all EDDC services in 2024 and this work is integral to the on-going review of both the Strategy and the Action Plan,
- 79% of EDDC emissions relate to 2 areas: the Council's housing stock and procurement,
- Comparisons with other authorities can be misleading: some councils fail to include scope 3 emissions in their calculations. The report noted that removing scope 3 emissions would show an approximate reduction of 20% from 2018 – 2024, however, the result would be disingenuous and, therefore, this approach had not been adopted by EDDC,
- Table 1 of the report summarises delivery to date and the Portfolio Holder was pleased to note that 67% had either been completed, or was on-going. No actions had been assessed as not achieved and 10% were no longer relevant,
- Section 4 of the report highlighted significant achievements during the plan period and the Climate Change Officer and services were thanked for their work in delivering such a wide range of results,
- The recruitment of a Climate Change Manager was welcome as all services continue to implement the changes needed to move towards the Council's net zero goal.

The Assistant Director, Environmental Health, introduced the report which provided a review of the Climate Change Action Plan 2020 – 2040 and looked at actions achieved and impact on carbon emissions. Key points covered in the presentation included:

- The current position with regard to carbon emissions between the years 2020/21 and 2023/24, showing an increase in emissions arising from procurement. It was noted that carbon emissions are allocated to procurement solely based on cost,
- Carbon footprint excluding social housing and scope 3 emissions,
- A review of the 82 actions in the Action Plan,
- An explanation of the Carbon Descent Plan carried out with SWEEG at the end of 2023, which is the basis of the new draft strategy and will underpin the next Action Plan,
- The findings of and actions arising from the Carbon Descent Plan,
- The theoretical carbon descent, should all the measures in the Carbon Descent Plan be implemented,
- Key achievements across the Council's services,
- Lessons learnt including the fact that carbon reduction has been inconsistent despite the Action Plan being followed and, most notably, that SMART targets had not previously been set,
- Moving forward SMART targets would be set alongside annual reporting to the Scrutiny Committee.

In response to a question from a Councillor unable to attend, the Assistant Director, Environmental Health, confirmed that, going forwards, Members could be involved directly in working with SWEEG.

Responses to Members' questions, and discussion, included the following points:

- Regarding establishing the carbon footprint of the Council's housing stock, the Council does not collect data from residents, but uses industry standard data, accessed by SWEEG, on which to base assumptions as to energy usage,
- It was noted that the calculation of carbon footprint for procurement is based on cost and that this is a blunt measurement tool, however, the calculations are adjusted for inflation,
- Setting up a scheme to sell credits is expensive and complex and it takes a long time before credits have any value. This could be considered again at a future date,
- Properties were chosen for decarbonisation based on the least efficient and costly properties to be dealt with first. A mix of measures was used including air source heat pumps, solar panels, replacement doors and windows,
- The private sector housing team carries out extensive outreach work to provide advice to residents, advice is also available on the website and through Exeter Community Energy,
- It will be important to provide accurate year on year comparisons going forward as measurement of emissions, such as through procurement, becomes more sophisticated and accurate,
- Additional EV chargers are to be installed at Blackdown House and on-street for those residents who do not have a driveway,
- Concern was expressed as to the need to spend money in the best way to decarbonise Council housing stock,
- There was a request for a Portfolio team to fully discuss and consider climate change issues in greater depth outside of formal Committee meetings,
- Members would welcome greater involvement with SWEEG,
- It would not be possible legally to insist that Council tenants source their energy from green suppliers,
- Council tenants could be encouraged to provide information as to the benefits they are experiencing following decarbonisation of their properties and information and advice could be shared with tenants regarding green energy suppliers and any cost savings available,
- It was noted that it is difficult to quantify the impact on carbon reduction by planting more trees due to the many variables involved, however, the Climate Change Officer would speak to SWEEG with regard to the data available,
- It is important to know the size of the tree canopy rather than the number of new trees planted in order to know whether green spaces are being properly protected and maintained and this is being addressed in the new Tree Strategy,
- Concern was expressed that easy to achieve measures are not being implemented,

- Installation of smart meters in Council properties would assist the resident and the Council at no cost to EDDC, although it was noted that smart meters can prove to be contentious, in part due to misinformation,
- Concern was expressed that trees planted on new developments are not properly protected and so are less likely to survive,
- It was noted that the calculation of carbon counting is very complex where 3rd party suppliers or contractors are involved,
- Enforcement of rain water harvesting could be considered as part of the Local Plan process,
- There was concern that reports to Cabinet do not quantify climate change impacts and only state whether the risk is medium or high, but without detailing the risk,

Members were requested to email any further questions or ideas to the Assistant Director, Environmental Health.

It was agreed:

1. That the Scrutiny Committee note the progress made in achieving the actions specified in the Climate Change Action Plan 2020 – 2040.
2. That the Scrutiny Committee note the lessons learnt and how these can be applied to the development of the next Climate Change Action Plan.
3. To request that all Members be included in the development of the Climate Change Strategy going forward and that SWEEG be brought in to provide technical information and expertise to assist Members.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

1. That Cabinet note the progress made in achieving the actions specified in the Climate Change Action Plan 2020 – 2040.
2. That Cabinet consider the lessons learnt and how these can be applied to the development of the next Climate Change Action Plan.
3. That all Members be included in the development of the Climate Change Strategy going forward and that SWEEG be brought in to provide technical information and expertise to assist Members.

27 Verbal update on progress with Scrutiny Action Plan and member training

The Democratic Services Officer read out the update from the Democratic Services Manager on progress with the Scrutiny Action Plan and member training.

The following points in the Action Plan were highlighted:

- The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the three scrutiny function Committees had met to discuss the Terms of Reference. The preferred option is to meet four times per year with other scrutiny work carried out through Task and Finish Forums and briefings. It is proposed to align the membership of the Overview Committee and Scrutiny Committee to 13 members. Revised Terms of Reference would be considered by the Constitution Working Group as part of its work programme,
- With regard to resources, a draft job description had been prepared for a Scrutiny Officer role, which was subject to the job evaluation process,
- Senior Officer support for the three scrutiny Committees was now in place,
- Scrutiny training for Members would be provided by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny on 28th November,
- Chairs and Vice-Chairs to meet quarterly to review the work programmes for each Committee, including increasing links with the Audit and Governance Committee,
- Cross party pre-meeting briefings would be arranged as and when required,
- Training for officers on scrutiny processes would be provided in January 2025,

- A new performance management system had now been procured which would assist with tracking outcomes and regular updates on Overview and Scrutiny Committee work would be included in the Councillor Newsletter.

The update would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

28 **Work programme**

The Chair noted that not enough items for scrutiny were being submitted to add to the work programme. Members were requested to complete a scrutiny proposal form so that the Committee could consider whether to add items to its work programme.

It was noted that a scoping report is still required for consideration of the Exmouth sea wall item, and further information is required as to whether a South West Water Sewage TaFF is still appropriate, given the Devon wide involvement in this matter.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

I Barlow
K Bloxham
M Chapman
O Davey
M Goodman (Chair)
A Hall
M Hall
M Hartnell
V Johns
Y Levine
D Mackinder (Vice-Chair)
A Toye

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

R Collins
P Faithfull
N Hookway

Officers in attendance:

Matthew Blythe, Assistant Director Environmental Health
Catherine Causley, Climate Change Officer
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Catrin Stark, Director of Housing and Health
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Councillor apologies:

J Brown
J Heath
J Whibley

Chairman

Date: