

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 2 October 2025

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.40 pm

21 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 September 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record of the meeting.

22 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest in items on the agenda.

23 Public speaking

There were no public speakers.

24 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

25 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential or exempt items.

26 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.

27 Finance Report: Agency and Consultant Expenditure for 2023/2024 and 2024/2025

The Principal Accountant, Melissa Muir, presented the report which summarised directorate oversight of consultant, specialist advice and agency staff spending for 2023/2024 and 2024/2025.

Expenditure within the Council is carefully managed and monitored to ensure it is incurred solely when necessary. This includes providing coverage for staff absences, supplementing capacity when permanent recruitment is not feasible, or acquiring additional skills and expertise on a temporary basis.

The employment of agency workers and consultants differs across directorates, accounting for approximately 16% of the Council's total workforce. Procedures are followed to regulate spending and allocate resources where required.

The significant work undertaken within the Housing and Health Directorate during this period to reduce the reliance on agency staff and improve the stability of the service through the recruitment of permanent staff is of note.

Responses to questions and discussion included the following points:

- Regarding setting aside a percentage of the budget for a capital project to cover agency and consultancy costs, this depends on the individual project and estimates of what would be required;
- It was noted that the use of agency staff and consultants where necessary provided best value for the Council;
- Current in-year monitoring of expenditure had not indicated any specific concerns;
- Year on year expenditure fluctuates depending on the nature of projects and requirements at the time;
- It was noted that there are still some legacy payments relating to the relocation to Blackdown House. Officers would provide further details following the meeting;
- The question was raised as to whether local government reorganisation would result in greater reliance on agency staff and it was noted that budget setting would be undertaken in the usual way;
- Officers would look into benchmarking against other comparable local authorities in order to keep best practice under consideration;
- Within the Place Directorate, the main driver of the expenditure on consultants and agency staff was the capital projects such as repairs to Exmouth sea wall.

The Chair thanked the Principal Accountant and the Finance Manager for the report and for attending the meeting.

It was agreed to note the report.

28 **Work programme 2025 - 26**

The work programme was discussed and the following points were noted:

- Councillors were not putting forward items for the work programme. This could be construed that Councillors were content that matters did not require scrutiny;
- Items for the work programme ideally required a six month lead time;
- The number of scheduled meetings was questioned as to whether there were too many and it was noted that most Scrutiny Committees would expect to hold four meetings per year;
- There was a need to decide how to engage Portfolio Holder reporting to the Committee;
- There was frustration when meetings were cancelled at very short notice with little or no explanation;

The following changes were agreed to the work programme:

- To cancel the meeting scheduled for 6 November due to there being no items for the agenda;
- To move the UKSPF evaluation report from the 5 February to 5 March 2026;
- To retain the meeting scheduled for 4 December, but to cancel the meeting should no items of business come forward in sufficient time.

With the above changes, the work programme was agreed.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

I Barlow

K Blakey
J Brown
B Collins
M Goodman (Chair)
A Hall
M Hall
V Johns
Y Levine
D Mackinder (Vice-Chair)

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

C Brown
R Collins
J O'Leary

Officers in attendance:

Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Melissa Muir, Principal Accountant
John Symes, Finance Manager
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Councillor apologies:

M Chapman
O Davey
M Hartnell
J Whibley

Chair

Date: