

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the joint budget meeting of Scrutiny Committee and Overview Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 14 January 2026

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 2.15 pm

36 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous joint meetings held 10 December 2024 and 15 January 2025 were agreed.

37 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

38 Public speaking

No members of the public had registered to speak.

39 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

40 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential/exempt items.

41 Decisions made by Cabinet called in by Members for scrutiny in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules

There were none.

42 Draft Directorate Plans 2026- 2028

The Chief Executive introduced this item and advised that Directorate Plans were being presented for a two year period, or until Local Government Reorganisation [LGR] whichever was soonest. The Plans would be kept under review alongside the resource provision and budget. The Council was ambitious in its plans for the next two years and had considered its priorities carefully.

With regard to reporting and monitoring, it was agreed to update the Plans as to how and where this would be undertaken.

43 Place

The Director of Place presented the Directorate Plan for 2026 – 2028 and summarised the composition of the Directorate which brought together 4 key service areas and

included 7 Portfolio areas. The Director highlighted challenging areas of risk and time-bound projects which had to be delivered, and which stretched both capacity and capability across several Directorates.

Questions, clarification and responses included the following points:

- Regarding cutting back on the de-carbonisation of swimming pool heating, the Director of Place would provide further information regarding the likely impact of this;
- Work had been undertaken in the summer of 2025 regarding the vacancy level in Streetscene and how this could be reduced. There was uncertainty for all staff around LGR, however, particular issues for Streetscene staff were around pay and conditions and recruitment processes;
- Work was on-going regarding the funding mix for the Cranbrook Leisure Centre, various Beach Management Schemes and the District Heating Scheme;
- Regarding the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, it was proposed to run Councillor workshops going forwards to update members;
- The Playing Pitch Strategy was in need of updating which is currently underway and progressing well;
- The Tree, Hedge and Woodland Strategy had recently been adopted and it was vital to work with partners to ensure delivery;
- Regarding targets for determining planning applications, it was noted that performance was monitored carefully due to nationally set targets;
- It was noted that the Directorate Plan does not include a specific metric around planning enforcement. This could be added to the Plan but would have to be in a way which was meaningful.

The Chair thanked the Director of Place and Officers for the excellent Plan and noted the challenges and the work involved within the Directorate.

44 **Housing & Health**

The Director of Housing & Health presented the Housing & Health Directorate Plan for 2026 – 2028 and highlighted key pieces of work with their associated challenges and opportunities. It was planned to start conversations with other Devon housing stock holding local authorities regarding LGR. Training for staff on trauma informed approaches would be undertaken shortly.

Questions, clarification and responses included the following points:

- With regard to the relationship with town and parish councils, the Emergency Planning Officer was continuing to build the community resilience network and liaise with local councils regarding emergency planning;
- Turn around times for void and re-let properties had improved over the past year;
- Regarding the Exmouth pilot for anti-social behaviour wardens, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner provided funding for previous financial years, and it was not clear yet whether funding would be available for the next financial year;
- Timescales for reviewing fees and charges do not always fit with dates for financial years such as a review of Licensing fees and charges which is on-going.

The Chair thanked the Director for their report and noted the amount of work to be undertaken within the Directorate.

45 **Finance**

The Director of Finance presented the Finance Directorate Plan for 2026 – 2028 and highlighted the work undertaken on the Poverty Strategy and the visit from the DWP for the pilot of the Place Based work, and the work being undertaken on e-notifications for

local residents. Conversations were on-going with other local authorities regarding integrating finance systems for LGR.

Questions, clarification and responses included the following points:

- With regard to empty homes, these are now charged the full amount, or more, for council tax and there is now a reduced risk of individuals claiming an incorrect reduction;
- Across Devon each District Council sets its own council tax support scheme and these will need to be considered as part of LGR. Council housing rents are set at national level in terms of the framework of annual increases;
- Regarding the Customer Charter and the increasing digitization of services, concern was expressed that some residents do not have access to digital communication. The Council has always provided alternative means of contact for residents and this will be reflected in the Customer Charter;
- It was noted that a small element of council tax would not be collected each year which was included in the budget as a reduced percentage;
- All organisations had to consider how to reach residents who do not use digital means of communication. The Customer Charter was person-centred to meet the needs of individuals and Ward Members were encouraged to work with individual Council tenants to ensure that their needs were understood;
- The Poverty Working Group was moving into a monitoring phase and it was proposed to report on the continuing anti-poverty work on an annual basis via the appropriate Committee.

The Chair thanked the Director of Finance for the report.

46 **Governance**

The Director of Governance presented the Governance Directorate Plan for 2026 – 2028. The Director provided an overview of the new structure of the Directorate and appointments to key posts, including the new procurement function and corporate oversight of projects, programmes and strategies. This will result in the management structure within the Directorate being fully populated. It was noted that LGR would have considerable impact on the Directorate. Key projects would have to be prioritised depending on resources available.

Questions, clarification and responses included the following points:

- Training for town and parish councils was on-going and wider work on engagement was in course of preparation;
- The revised report template was ready and Officers would be trained in its use imminently;
- The People Strategy had launched recently and a report would be brought to the next Personnel Committee.

The Chair thanked all Directors for their reports and for their work.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder Council, Corporate and External Engagement also thanked the Executive Leadership Team and Officers for their Directorate Plans and presentations.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET:

That Cabinet approves the Directorate Plans for 2026 – 2028 for the Place, Housing & Health, Finance and Governance Directorates.

47 **Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets 2026 - 2027**

Cllr Anne Hall took the Chair for this item.

The Director of Finance gave a presentation on the draft budget covering key areas.

The budget process and timeline was outlined, with Council set to approve the final budget on 25 February 2026. LGR and the Fairer Funding review were highlighted as key factors impacting the budget.

Questions, clarification and responses included the following points:

- Concern was expressed as to the level of the Council's debt and whether the Council could meet its obligations should LGR be delayed or not go ahead. It was noted that the Council was obliged to evidence that debt could be afforded;
- With regard to figures for net interest, it was noted that interest receipts were predicted to drop due to lower interest rates and lower levels of cash held by the Council in investments. Interest payable would also drop due to lower interest rates and the removal of some capital projects from the programme;
- Regarding the new town, Marlcombe, it was noted that an assertive, upfront approach was needed and that this would come with a significant funding requirement;
- The outturn report at the end of the financial year would provide detailed information on the level of various reserves;
- Regarding the reactive and preventative maintenance of trees, it was confirmed that there was budget provision, however, the Director of Place would look into this further. The Portfolio Holder for Environment – Operations advised that trained staff were in place although an unforeseen event, such as a serious storm, could place the service under pressure;
- It was noted that there was a significant increase in staff costs in the General Fund FTE increases. Increases in the homelessness team and digital team were due to staff moving onto permanent contracts and it was agreed that further description in the Budget Book would be helpful;
- It was noted that movement of staff and teams between services had impacted figures in the Budget Book;
- It was confirmed that there was budget for the train station toilets in Exmouth to remain open;
- It was noted and commended that fees and charges included an increase in line with inflation.

Appendix 1 – Draft Revenue Budget 2026 – 2027 – Special Items

The Committees considered the Special Items set out at Appendix 1 [page 59] of the report.

1. Play Park Consolidation Study - £20,000

The intent behind the study was to provide a complete understanding of the legal obligations regarding the provision of play parks, including in respect of S.106 agreements. The study would also assist with understanding implementation planning moving forwards into LGR.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET:

That the Play Park Consolidation Study at a cost of £20,000 be included in the budget.

2. Cultural Strategy Delivery - £37,500
3. Tourism Strategy Delivery - £30,000

Activity had previously been funded through the UKSPF [UK Shared Prosperity Fund] which would be coming to an end after the current financial year. Work had been undertaken to clarify which elements of the activities should continue in the next financial year.

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism noted that the Culture Strategy and the Tourism Strategy had been developed to complement each other and both supported the local economy.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET:

That the Cultural Strategy Delivery at a cost of £37,500 and the Tourism Strategy Delivery at a cost of £30,000 be included in the budget.

4. CVC service by Devon Communities Together - £60,000 and £3,000 for Devon Connect platform

This had also been funded through the UKSPF funding and provided significant help throughout the District.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET:

That the CVC service by Devon Communities Together - £63,000 be included in the budget.

5 and 6. Streetscene Operational Staff pressures - £118,000 and £34,000

This request reflected the need for additional capacity within the Streetscene service due to growth in the District, particularly in the west end of East Devon, and seasonal fluctuations in the summer months.

The Portfolio Holder Environment – Operations noted that the budget for Streetscene had not increased in line with development in recent years.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET:

That the amounts of £118,000 and £34,000 to cover Streetscene operational staff pressures be included in the budget.

7. LATCo client side manager - £60,340

The Director of Finance advised that this item had been withdrawn.

The above agreed items would now be incorporated into the draft budget going forwards for agreement by Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET:

That the draft revenue and capital budgets for 2026 – 2027, including the associated fees and charges schedule, be approved.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

K Blakey
P Fernley
M Goodman (Chair)
A Hall (Chair)
V Johns
Y Levine
D Mackinder
A Bailey
B Bailey
K Bloxham
R Collins
T Dumper
J Heath
D Wilson

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

N Hookway
G Jung
J Loudoun
T Olive
P Faithfull
P Hayward
S Jackson

Officers in attendance:

Simon Davey, Director of Finance
Tracy Hendren, Chief Executive
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Catrin Stark, Director of Housing and Health
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Andrew Wood, Director of Place
Matthew Blythe, Assistant Director Environmental Health
Andrew King, Assistant Director for Housing (Regulated Services)
Gemma Roberts, Assistant Director for People and Performance
Emma Congerton, Assistant Director Statutory Housing
John Symes, Finance Manager
Tom Winters, Interim Economic Development Manager

Councillor apologies:

I Barlow
J Brown

A Bruce
B Collins
O Davey
M Hall
J Whibley
M Hartnell

Chair

Date: