

Annual Report of the Overview Committee 2018/19

- 1 The Committee started their civic year in discussing the case for an Events Strategy, and a new post of Business Development and Events Officer. The proposal had come forward as part of the Transformation Strategy to deliver increased income generation, with delivery of a clear purpose, direction and ambition of maximising the potential of some of the Council's assets. The committee discussed the required skills set of such a post, and welcomed the evolving change in approach of how the Council views its assets, balancing income generation with community need.
 - 1.1 The committee recommended to Cabinet to approve the Events Strategy and to recruit the post, as well as referral back to the Strategic Management Team to discuss where in the Council such a post would sit.
 - 1.2 As means of update, an events consultant has been appointed to work with the Council during 2019 on planning a programme of event for Queen's Drive Space in Exmouth, and the Gate to Plate event in Honiton on a three-day week basis.
- 2 The committee received a thorough presentation from Tony Norton, Head of the Centre for Energy and the Environment, College of Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Sciences at the University of Exeter. Mr Norton presented the report prepared by Andy Wood, East of Exeter Projects Director, alongside some slides of the data presented in the report relating to the deployment of renewable energy.
 - 2.1 Slides were shared with the committee relating to the progress report to parliament, showing how the policy deficit on delivery of renewable energy set out how current national policy, and the regular amendment or replacement of policies, would not deliver what was required to meet the government target. This policy deficit had been taken into account as part of the evidence base for the GESP process.
 - 2.2 The Portfolio Holder for Economy spoke about the changes already in place but voiced that there was a clear need for further work on how the Council can contribute towards the goals of the GESP and look at own practices. He proposed that a step forward could be that he held a think tank on the topic, with an open invitation to any Members interested in the subject to contribute. The Chairman agreed this as a way forward, asking the Portfolio Holder to provide a report back to the committee on the findings of the think tank, so that the committee continued to debate the issue and make proposals to the Cabinet in due course. The committee awaits a report back on this topic.
- 3 The committee welcomed the opportunity to debate principles of the Commercial Property Investment Framework back in September 2018. Work by officers and the Asset Management Forum had produced a framework that was set to deliver £450K additional net rental income per annum by 2020/21 through circa £20,000,000

investment. Aside from income, additional benefits would come from regeneration, business rates income, New Homes Bonus, employment, prosperity and the unlocking and accelerating delivery of sites. The Framework had been drawn up to provide a clear, costed, risk managed and structured programme of investment, using rigorous criteria and with the appropriate decision making capabilities to respond to market opportunities in an agile but safe manner.

- 3.1 The committee had, for some time, championed the need to develop sources of income for the Council, in order to help alleviate the expected deficit in the Medium Term Financial Plan. The committee had looked at examples of other authorities in producing income from their own, and purchasing additional, assets.
- 3.2 The committee debated the principles of the framework and resolved to support those principles. The framework was considered by Cabinet in February and subsequently approved by Council with an availability of up to £20K through existing resources or Public Works Load Board funding.
- 4 The committee had received a draft submission to The House of Lords Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities, which covered a number of specific examples as evidence. The discussion was taken into account by the Deputy Chief Executive in finalising the submission that was considered by Cabinet before being submitted.
- 5 The committee considered the latest version of the Transformation Strategy and the Financial Plan for 2019 – 2020, with specific support for the Transformation Strategy to look to protect the delivery of front line services. Both documents were subsequently agreed at Council.
- 6 The Digital Strategy was also considered by the committee, with debate covering the benefits to the community with the continuing improvements to service delivery, but also mindful that human interaction was still, and would continue to be, available to those who needed it. The strategy was recommended to Cabinet and subsequently adopted by Council.
- 7 The results of the Viewpoint Survey were shared with the committee, and some feedback was given on how the format could be further improved in communicating the results of that survey.
- 8 Continuing the theme of the Digital Strategy, the committee welcomed a presentation on the change in the Council's digital offer to Firmstep. This software solution would meet the growing customer demand for choice to transact online, with better customer journeys in the process. The solution provided the option of a customer account, which provided access to all the relevant information to that customer, as well as providing feedback on how any transactions were progressing. A number of

practical examples were shared with the committee.

- 8.1 The committee discussed the benefits of the changes, including how front line staff could assist customers through the process to help boost the customer confidence for future use. Members were also assured that there was recognition that not all transactions can be offered online, because of their complexity.

- 9 The committee received a report on Poverty, homelessness, human rights and health and wellbeing in East Devon. This report, presented to Cabinet, set out the scope of the project. Cabinet had resolved to agree the themes for a localised investigation and analysis of poverty and related social welfare issues, working with Devon County Council. Overview members debated how the scope could be enhanced, with a recommendation covering these suggestions to go forward to the Devon Strategic Partnership Welfare Task Group.

- 10 The committee completed their civic year considering a report on Environmental sustainability and climate change emergency. The committee were pleased to learn Devon County Council had agreed to declare a 'climate emergency' and welcomed the move to work with the County, using the expertise of Exeter University. They wanted to see some specific proposals on how the District can sustain itself, and felt that the targets should be brought forward.