

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Overview Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 27 June 2019

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.12 pm

1 Public Speaking

There were no questions raised under this item.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 28 March 2019 were confirmed as a true record.

3 Declarations of interest

Minute 6. Annual report of the Overview Committee 2018 - 2019.
Councillor Ian Hall, Personal, Devon County Councillor for Axminster Division.

Minute 8. Overview Forward Plan.
Councillor John Loudoun, Personal, Councillor for Sidmouth Town Council.
Councillor Marcus Hartnell, Personal, Shop owner in Seaton.

4 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

5 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no items classified in this way.

6 Annual report of the Overview Committee 2018 - 2019

The Chairman read out the Annual Report of the Overview Committee 2018 – 2019 and took questions.

Issues in that report that were highlighted as of interest to members and to be further considered included:

- More information and progress on the GESP was required;
- Circulate slides on forthcoming Firmstep software implementation;
- Undertake further work on poverty and look locally too as well as take part in the Devon wide initiative as part of the Devon Strategic Partnership Welfare Task Group. The committee agreed to invite that Group to a future meeting to provide an update;
- Continue the work started in the previous term on climate change, looking at what could be done locally and seeking clarification on how and to what level targets could be brought forward. It was reported that a report “Climate Change Emergency – Our Response” was before the Cabinet on 10 July 2019.

Further discussion on future work for the Committee, prompted in part by the report, took place under minute 8 Overview Forward Plan.

RESOLVED:

That the Devon Strategic Partnership Welfare Task Group be invited to attend a future meeting of the Overview Committee.

7 Brief outline of scoping issues

The Democratic Services Officer briefly outlined the scoping template currently used by both the Overview and Scrutiny committees in determining how a topic would be handled by that committee.

The criteria covered:

- Broad topic area;
- Specific elements of that area;
- What isn't included, to make expectation clearer;
- Desired outcome that Councillors want to reach;
- Who should be consulted for evidence gathering;
- What evidence and data already exists that can be reviewed – including work carried out by other authorities;
- What experts to the committee need to hear from;
- How the work is handled – by committee meeting, or through smaller task and finish groups that can incorporate other Councillors;
- Timescale.

The scope was agreed to use as it stands, but may be considered for review in the future.

8 Overview Forward Plan

The current forward plan of work for the committee includes:

Work already allocated

- Review of draft drone policy for 25 July 2019
- Previously planned public toilet review for 25 July 2019 had been pulled by officers, as the report was still under preparation and due to go to Cabinet in September, which may lead to referral to Overview on some aspects of that review later in the year
- New Council Plan on 29 August 2019
- Joint meeting with the Scrutiny Committee on 5 September 2019 on service plans, and again on 15 January 2020 on the service plans and budget for 2020/21
- Economic Development update report on 14 November 2019

There was debate on the review of public toilets, both in terms of the controversy it would attract, and the impact that any public toilet closure would have on both residents and visitors. The need for a clear equalities impact assessment was also stressed. The committee were in agreement that there must be debate at Overview committee before any decisions were made by the Cabinet, because of the potential scale of impact on the District as a whole.

Advice was given to the Committee that the committee cycle as it stood meant that the minutes (and therefore any recommendations) would not be before Cabinet until their next scheduled meeting in September. Options therefore were for the Chairman to ask the Leader if he could address the Cabinet with this request at their meeting on the 10 July, or request that the minutes are taken as a matter of urgency at that meeting on the 10 July. Any matter of urgency has to be agreed by the Leader.

Work not yet allocated or scoped:

- Natural Capital in the Heart of the South West document
- Business case for increase in community engagement officers – this fell under the remit of the Housing Review Board, where the issue had already be raised, but could also be monitored by the Overview Committee as part of its review of the service plans;
- Review of Governance Arrangements (committee structure/Cabinet and Leader model) – a report was going to the 10 July Cabinet recommending that the Overview undertake this work, working with the Portfolio Holder for Transformation think tank on the topic. In response to a question, the Chairman advised that the objective was to look at the models of governance available and debate what best suited the Council as it stands now. The review would be mindful of any legal restrictions on models, and look to seek views of other authorities with their experiences of the different models.
- Select Committee report on Coastal Town Regeneration
- Select Committee report on Rural Economy
- Review out of hours telephone system provided by the council for residents and tenants – the Portfolio Holder for Environment had raised this issue with the Chairman, as he had experienced a poor response to a call but also felt that the system had not been reviewed for some time and therefore should be considered by the Overview Committee.

In addition to this, a number of topics had been identified as part of the induction training that afternoon and through consideration of the minutes of the previous meeting. These were:

- Climate change – including rising sea levels.
- Income generation – continuing the work of the Committee from the previous civic term in order to help the budget position, look to find more income generation opportunities. A suggestion was made to add to that investigating the Council financing, through loan, broadband in areas still not benefiting from the Connect Devon and Somerset project;
- High street and village centre regeneration – expand to include the development of new high street in reference to Cranbrook, and centre initially on the towns before later work on villages;
- Community focus
- Promotion of EDDC services to local residents
- Fairer funding from Government for the south west region
- Improving working with Town and Parish Councils
- Tackling poverty
- Reviewing internal recharges – understanding the breakdown of recharges, and being satisfied that these are correctly applied to be confident that the Council is as efficient as possible before examination of making further budget reductions
- Street trading
- Right to buy effect on housing stock

- Use of modular buildings (“flat pack”) to deliver housing
- Public toilets review
- Transport – specifically fares for 16 – 18 year olds still in education but not qualifying for state help. A suggestion was made to widen this to look at the timetable too, as many recent changes has resulted in longer and more complex journeys for residents, particularly to the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital;
- Policy implementation – that policies put in place were being applied in practice. Whilst no specific examples of where a policy was not being applied were given, the suggestion that equalities would be a good starting point
- GESP involvement

Councillor Hall informed the committee of previous work of a Housing Task and Finish Forum that had encompassed a number of elements, including modular housing. The committee agreed that the report of that work be circulated, in order to help clarify the scope of the work. Assisted living was requested to be included in that scope.

Discussion on climate change centred around what could be done, and what could be influenced, by the District Council. This included aspects such as the Council using single use plastics, or how to encourage residents not to use single use plastics. A suggestion was made to have the majority of the focus on what could be achieved locally, with a smaller proportion on lobbying Government. Other factors included coastal erosion and rising sea levels.

The committee were advised that the work they wished to undertake was considerable, required scoping to determine what would be involved in each topic, and prioritising. Whilst some of the issues could be organised into themes, it still represented a considerable volume of work for the committee and the officer resource required to provide information and facilitation to the committee. A question was asked about increasing the number of meetings held in a year – in response, the committee were asked to bear in mind the resource implications of officer time and increased time that councillors would have to put in.

Some prioritisation was suggested, with the remaining areas being circulated to the Committee membership for feedback on prioritisation and to start to scope the topics.

RESOLVED

1. Check the developing service plan for Housing at the September meeting of the committee for reference to any additional community development officers;
2. That the Chairman requests of the Leader that he speaks at Cabinet on 10 July 2019 to request an opportunity to look at the public toilet review ahead of Cabinet consideration of that review in September 2019;
3. That a scope for income generation, including the Council providing broadband, be brought to the 25 July meeting;
4. That a scope for High Street and town centre revitalisation strategy be brought to the 25 July meeting with a view to this work being undertaken as a Task and Finish Forum;
5. That the items to be scoped and allocated are circulated to the Committee membership to ask for comment of priority and scope.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

N Hookway (Chairman)
V Johns (Vice-Chairman)
B De Saram
I Hall
M Hartnell
S Hawkins
J Loudoun
M Rixson
C Wright

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

K Bloxham
S Bond
B Ingham
S Jackson
G Jung
A Moulding

Officers in attendance:

Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

Councillor apologies:

M Allen
S Chamberlain
F King
T Woodward

Chairman

Date: