

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Overview Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 14 November 2019

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 9.20 pm

28 Public Speaking

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

29 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 August were confirmed as a true record.

30 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were given.

31 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

32 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no items classified this way.

33 Presentation from Jurassic Fibre

The meeting was joined by Michael Maltby, Chief Executive of Jurassic Fibre who gave a short presentation followed by a question and answer session.

Michael Maltby introduced himself as a resident of Sidmouth who had founded Jurassic Fibre in response to the position regarding the roll out of high speed broadband in the UK which he considered to be currently unfit for purpose, and based upon his experience of better provision overseas. Jurassic Fibre was a large scale project designed to be delivered across the South West, applying state of the art techniques to the development of fibre optic broadband.

It is planned to have a commercial launch in February 2020, when a live network will have been set up which should, over time, ultimately reach approximately 350,000 premises, including coverage of much of East Devon and parts of the M5 corridor. Phase 1 currently underway encompasses about 12,000 premises to the east of Exeter and on the western side of East Devon. Mr Maltby said that the impact of Gigaclear projects was unclear and he understood Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) were going to undertake an open market review.

He concluded by saying that about 80% of the premises in East Devon could be served by the Jurassic Fibre network by 2023, so it raised the issue of how this would help the Council and what the Council's approach would be to putting fibre into their own offices or housing stock, particularly if tenants requested it.

He stated that increased connectivity would assist in service delivery and local businesses would benefit, as part of a broader economic focus.

The Chairman thanked Michael Maltby for his presentation and invited comments or questions from Committee members.

Discussion included the following;

- Problems with Gigaclear and CDS had been raised previously at Scrutiny Committee with concerns about the essential requirement for decent rural broadband. Concerns remained after hearing from Jurassic Fibre that the rural hinterland would still be left isolated.

Mr Maltby responded by saying that there were connectivity problems all across East Devon, in towns as well as rural areas. They had been working with farmers to put wayleaves across their land, but the costs of extending the network to more dispersed areas were prohibitive to the extent that it was unlikely that many remote areas would be reached, unless there was government subsidy.

- Dealing with a private company was very different to dealing within the public sector procurement processes.

Q 1 – How many of the 350,000 premises would relate to untried or new customers as opposed to those picked up from competitor companies?

Q 2 – Wayleave permissions were an enormous strain on Gigaclear and responsible for many of their delays and problems. Will the same issue affect Jurassic Fibre?

Mr Maltby responded by saying that the Jurassic Fibre approach was to roll out fibre to the premise which was not going to be available in communities in East Devon, and that in relation to the wayleaves issue, they were trying to negotiate with farmers so that they are able to be part of the project rather than simply receiving a request to dig on their land.

- Q 3 - What about packaging of other services for the end user, such as TVs, telephones or other devices?

Mr Maltby said that Jurassic Fibre regarded themselves as digital plumbers, putting in a decent connection whilst the rest of the package for end users can be offered by the likes of Netflix with whom they do not want to compete.

- Q 4 - How much would it cost to install?

Surveys had suggested that a standard installation would be expected in around 80% of the premises. In relation to Council housing stock the Council would not have to pay if individual tenants took up the service. Costs were outlined during the presentation, but would be charged at a fair rate to customers, with an infrastructure related return expected.

- Q 5 - How would the connectivity to the Council housing stock be delivered?

A tenant may want to connect to the Jurassic Fibre network but the Council would need to agree that this could be done. Permissions could be given on a street by street or estate basis.

- Q 6 - What is the proposition to the Council?

There is no detailed proposition yet. This needs to be the subject of further discussion to define the Council's ambitions in relation to digital infrastructure.

- Businesses need fibre to continue to be competitive and the roll out of a further fibre network should be welcomed to encourage progress and further development.

34 **Economic Development update**

The Chairman invited the Economic Development Manager, Rob Murray, to present the key issues from his report, which provided an update on Economic Development activity

and summarised the findings of this year's House of Lords (HOL) Select Committee inquiry into Rural Economies.

Rob Murray referred to headline economic indicators for East Devon, such as employment and unemployment rates; businesses across the District including top employers by the numbers of employees; enhancing productivity via tailored business support and the drive to increase productivity across core sectors, an initiative offering a range of fully funded workshops and one-to-one support for pre-start and existing businesses across East Devon.

He went on to say that as a result of the launch of Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership Growth Hub service in 2016, more businesses have benefitted from Growth Hub support in East Devon than in any of the other 14 LEP districts.

East Devon Business Centre (EDBC), has through a focussed process of improvement, marketing and communications (including social media) been turned into a positive net income generator to EDDC with 100% of offices let and meeting room income increased by 67% compared with 2014-15.

East Devon had led on the production of the Shared Economic Strategy for Exeter and the Heart of Devon (EHOD) (2017-2020) which sets out the ambition, growth priorities and approach to enable growth of the regional economy.

In relation to Brexit, EDDC became one of the first local authorities in the country to publish detailed online guidance to inform and support businesses preparing for Brexit. Rob Murray referred to more effective engagement with planning, and events such as Honiton Gate to Plate which had been a big success.

Economic Development Priorities 2019-2020 have recently been presented to Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees in September by Cllr Blakey and the Deputy Chief Executive with the following two key priorities in the coming year:

- The 'Our Towns' Study to improve understanding of our main towns
- Business Centre extension & additional workspace in East Devon

EDDC Evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy included views and question responses provided through consultation with representatives from economic development, planning policy and development management as well as with our rural district members. They reflected the concerns, issues and opportunities expressed and identified through a specific 'think tank' session held on Weds 29th Aug 2018. The Select Committee's final report was published in April 2019.

Its key recommendations included the development of a coherent rural strategy; rural proofing of policy impacts and place-based approaches to delivery.

In terms of a rural strategy, it is clear that rural economies are facing significant opportunities and challenges, including the UK's impending departure from the EU, cuts to local authorities' budgets, digital connectivity, affordable housing, and an ageing rural population, which make this an ideal moment for the Government to develop a comprehensive rural strategy, to set out its ambition for rural areas

The Government needs to rethink and reform the rural proofing process to ensure that relevant policies and legislation are attuned to the needs of rural communities and rural economies.

Discussion on this item included the following;

- Q 1 – What is the impact of the changes to Flybe on the local economy?
Rob Murray responded to this by saying that this was one of the biggest risks to the local economy, the airport and engineering roles.
- Q 2 - Could events such as Gate to Plate be replicated in other towns? Potentially they could.
- Cllr Allen moved a vote of thanks to Rob Murray for his achievements since taking up his role. Thanks to his efforts, EDBC was no longer losing money and was now operating with a profit, and Gate to Plate had been highly successful. He stated his view that EDDC needed a proper Economic Development resource to deliver the Council Plan, on a tactical and strategic level, and to enable local people to develop skills which will deliver a thriving future economy.
- Q 3 – How can Exmouth Town Council be encouraged to develop a Business Improvement District (BID)?
People need to work together locally to achieve this, and it is left to Councils at all levels to engage with local businesses to promote BIDs, most notably with their largest business rate payers to meet the minimum support required.
- Q 4 – What is the difference between Gate to Plate and Taste of the West?
The former is an EDDC brand in its entirety, whilst the latter is a private sector organisation who we partnered with last year to support the delivery of our Gate to Plate event.
- Q 5 – How many of the economically inactive are over 50 years of age who cannot find jobs, or single parents unable to take up available employment?
This would need to be checked outside the meeting but the term economically inactive people does not simply refer to retired people.
- Q 6 - What do Town Centre Managers do and what are the benefits of having one?
They lobby on behalf of local businesses, encourage local events, develop a local vision.
- There is not much churn in the businesses occupying the EDBC and there is a waiting list of 6/7 businesses to go in.
- Q 7 – In relation to the ‘Our Towns study’ which will dovetail into the High Street TAFF, what are the project costs?
This is still under debate.
- Q 8 - The Propeller group in Exmouth are having a positive economic impact. Are there any plans to roll out any other incubators across East Devon, for example in the Growth Point area?
This local initiative operates as a result of having two years Business Rate Relief, but there is no funding to new businesses. In principle this policy remains open to do more.
- Q 9 – With poor transport and the slashing of existing services, what can we do to help people obtain local work within easy reach?
Encouragement is being given to rural areas to develop more economic work spaces locally.
- There needs to be a debate about developing an Economic Development Strategy and the resources to do this.
- Q 10 - The 8% increase in employment referred to in the report is very large. Is this accounted for by double counting and more part time jobs? Zero contracts create an inability for people to take other jobs to support their income.
The term total employment includes anyone over 16 years of age, in full-time or part-time employment, so is a deceptive statistic.

RESOLVED that:

1. Members note the progress made in delivery of local economic development activity.
2. Members note the local evidence submitted by EDDC to the HOL Select Committee enquiry and the main findings of the rural strategy report.

35 **Update on Draft Drone Policy**

The Chairman invited the manager of Property & Estates, Tim Child, to provide a verbal update on progress. Although he was not in a position to present a Policy to Committee, he could outline progress and next steps.

A policy had been drafted over the summer, and consultation had taken place with the legal team and key departmental colleagues on it. Accordingly, officers were aware of a range of legal issues involved relating to the operation of UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles – Drones) on or over land belonging to EDDC, particularly in relation to enforcement. As a result, they did not want to present a policy which may not be practically enforceable and which the Council have no mechanism for ensuring compliance against.

Tim Child referred to the draft in progress which introduced a policy inviting an application from people who wish to fly drones. In the case of requests from commercial operators who may want to survey by use of drones, for example, the safety of cliffs or work to be conducted on roofs, EDDC may want to approve this and then seek evidence of public liability insurance, conduct risk assessments and possibly charge a fee. However, in the case of private individuals, it is considered unlikely that they would apply at all.

So there is a final piece of work to be completed about the practical enforceability of a policy before bringing it to the Committee. Tim Childs advised that it could be presented to the next meeting before then going on to the Asset Management Forum to be reviewed and monitored with other Council policies.

There was brief discussion about the fact that the CAA have just introduced a new registration scheme requiring operators to have Identification numbers which can be recorded. Operators have to be over the age of 13 years and pass a test.

36 **Poverty in East Devon**

The Chairman invited the authors of the report, Libby Jarrett, Service Lead for Revenues, Benefits, and Customer Services and Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Service Lead for Housing to present the key issues.

Amy Gilbert-Jeans gave a brief introduction, stating that the report had been drawn out of a number of data sets that EDDC have access to. Since it was such a multi-faceted issue officers would have been unlikely to be able to address every aspect of it, largely due to the fact that EDDC had limited influence over national policy.

However, the report provided Members with a detailed assessment of a number of factors that relate to poverty within East Devon, and outlined work that is already undertaken that links with poverty as well as information around how customers are currently supported.

From this work a series of recommendations had been identified to better support people living in East Devon who may be impacted by poverty, which is a follow up to the recommendation made by Cabinet on 6th March 2019.

Particularly with reference to Recommendation 1, the creation of an East Devon Poverty Strategy, the costs of delivery are likely to be attached, whilst Recommendation 9, the work on fuel poverty needs to be developed.

Discussion on this item included the following;

- Members thought that the report was an excellent piece of work with substantial research having been undertaken.
- Q 1 – Was support given from Devon Strategic Partnership (DSP)?
Much data was obtained by EDDC and classified as sensitive, and so analysis was done by EDDC thereby limiting the involvement of others. However, officers are happy to share the report with the DSP.
- More information was required in order to understand the reliance on food banks by people.
- Building co-ownership properties for local people would be highly advantageous, and multi-generational housing along similar lines to that being built in Germany and Switzerland.
- There were suggestions for further recommendations from Members, particularly in the light of witnessing a local family which had become victim to a S21 eviction by a private sector landlord, and who subsequently could not find alternative accommodation. It was suggested that a recommendation be developed by which the Council would work more closely with the private rented sector and specifically to review the reference requirements placed on potential tenants.
- Funding for Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) should be maintained since they are of great positive benefit. It was confirmed that the Council wanted to safeguard funding for the CAB and other independent sources of advice for people in poverty.
- As EDDC does provide some funding for the CAB, there was a potential to influence the direction of their work with respect to services which could be offered outside the five towns with a CAB service, so that people outside the towns could benefit from an outreach service or more services via phone or online.
- £16,000 of new budget had been identified as required. It was clarified that this was a resource identified as being necessary to develop the poverty strategy itself. The Strategic Lead for Finance, Simon Davey, confirmed that the significant time required to put the report together for Committee indicated that external assistance was needed to develop the Strategy over a 3-4 month period.

Cllr Allen thanked officers for their report and made a number of comments in relation to specific recommendations therein. He then referred to a paper which he had recently drafted and circulated to Committee members before the meeting which he wanted to formally propose for incorporation with the recommendations already presented in the report. He said that the paper contained one recommendation consisting of twenty one points.

The Strategic Lead for Finance pointed out that the additional recommendation and associated actions from Cllr Allen had not yet been considered by officers or costed.

The Chairman stated that the meeting should address the nine recommendations in the report. The one received from Cllr Allen could then be added to the minutes of the meeting and would be considered going forward in the developing poverty strategy, after scoping and legal and financial consideration.

Cllr Allen stated that much of his recommendation should be debated.

Cllr Hartnell stated that he agreed with the comments of the Strategic Lead for Finance, and that there was a need to consider the legal and financial implications of any recommendations or actions. He went on to formally propose that the Recommendations 1-9 contained in the Poverty Report were accepted, and that Cllr Allen should then talk to officers and the Chair of Overview about his further proposal before the report is presented to Cabinet. The proposal could be noted in the minutes for further discussion.

Cllr De Saram seconded the proposal by Cllr Hartnell.

Cllr Loudoun said that he had wanted to make amendments to the recommendations in the report.

The Chairman invited Committee members to vote on the proposal put forward by Cllr Hartnell. It was carried by a majority, with one member abstaining, on the basis that they had not debated the recommendations in the report.

Cllr King had wanted to ask about the costs and benefits of the recommendations, and sought clarification about the outcomes sought by the recommendations if it was not considered possible to lift people out of poverty.

Amy Gilbert-Jeans clarified that it was not suggested that the Council could not lift people out of poverty, but that it could not do this alone.

Cllr Allen wanted to formally raise concerns in relation to Members not being allowed to put forward proposals which had not been costed beforehand. He felt that this would suppress debate and would seek further clarification at Council about this matter. He considered this to be a level of interference from officers which would close proposals down before they were scoped.

The Strategic Lead for Finance clarified that he had suggested that it was sensible for Members to have details available to aid their discussion and decision making, but had not said that proposals could not be considered if they had not been costed.

Members expressed disappointment that they had not been able to debate the recommendations in the report further.

The Strategic Lead for Health, Housing and Environment, John Golding reassured the Committee that the poverty strategy will cover all the points made and explore all matters legitimately related to poverty.

Cllr Armstrong confirmed that the Council should be tackling issues relating to poverty, and as Portfolio Holder for Homes & Sustainable Communities, she would be leading on this work with the Finance Portfolio Holder, Libby Jarrett, Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Natalie Brown and George Whitlock. She intended to take on board Cllr Allen's comments on Economic Development and get the support of the whole Council.

RECOMMENDED:

That Cabinet;

1. Consider funding the creation of an East Devon Poverty Strategy to further develop and target the areas identified within this report that we are able to influence and to support a corporate approach to ensure consistency across Council Services.
2. Carry out a review of the funding and delivery arrangements for Money Advice to ensure that we're focussing on the key issues identified in the report.

3. Recommend that Council protect the existing funding levels contributed for Money Advice to Homemaker South West and Citizens of circa £120,000 for 2020/21 to enable the review (Recommendation 2) to be undertaken.
4. Update Corporate Debt Policy to include; Breathing Space in-line with proposed Government changes & to consider any other supportive measures that may be beneficial.
5. Agree to the Council's frontline services, in collaboration, setting up a series of local events across the District with key stakeholders that focus on Universal Credit, Money/Debt advice (including how to avoid Loan sharks), budgeting, fuel poverty, etc with the over-arching aim of supporting people to become more financially resilient.
6. Consider lobbying central Government directly and/or through our MPs in the following areas;
 - Right to Buy
 - Removing the freeze on Local Housing Allowance Rates in order to be reassessed to reflect market rents.
 - Universal Credit – More financial support to be given to customers to help with the transition. More funding to be given to local Councils to reflect the support that customers need with moving onto this Benefit.
7. Continue to explore opportunities to increase our supply of social housing through either redevelopment of existing stock and/or building new Council Housing, in conjunction with a review of the current Housing Revenue Account business plan.
8. Agree to the Council working alongside East Devon foodbanks to better understand demand and eradicate dependency that could lead to a reduction and possible extinction of the need for foodbanks in the district.
9. Undertake a detailed analysis of fuel poverty in the district with a view to developing a separate action plan.

37 **Update on the High Street Task & Finish Forum**

The Chairman provided an update to Members on the work of the High Street TAFF.

Cllr Hookway and Cllr Hartnell had met with the Deputy Chief Executive, Richard Cohen and the Economic Development Manager, Rob Murray, in September to discuss how the two strands of work relating to the 'Our Towns Study' and the High Street TAFF would be progressed. A draft report had recently been received. It had four recommendations, including that the 'Our Towns Study' would be undertaken by an external expert commissioned for the purpose. This would be funded through Business Rate Pool Funds.

A steering group of members would report to Overview Committee, publishing a series of reports. Two members of the Overview Committee would join the steering group, alongside the Economy Portfolio Holder and Rob Murray.

Cllr Loudoun proposed that this was put on the agenda for the next meeting and the report circulated before the meeting.

Cllr Allen seconded the proposal.

This was agreed by those present.

38 **Report back from the Overview Committee Working Group on Governance held on 17 October 2019**

The Chairman introduced a report drafted by the Monitoring Officer following the informal meeting on 17th October of the Governance Working Group, and following a recommendation to Council to establish a Working Group to include representatives of the LGA. An initial meeting of the Governance Working Party took place on 11th November, which was joined by Members of the LGA who were very positive about the discussion which took place.

A series of dates have been agreed which would continue into 2020, the next one scheduled for 25 November.

Cllr Allen suggested that meetings were arranged to take place in the evening.

The Chairman confirmed that all following meetings had been arranged during the evening.

Cllr Loudoun confirmed that although the working group was open to all Members, determining the outcomes needed to remain solely with members of the working party. The Chairman confirmed that this would be the case, and also that the next meeting would set out Terms of Reference and the scope of work to be progressed.

39 **Overview Forward Plan**

The Chairman drew Members attention to the next meeting of the Committee which would be a Joint meeting with the Scrutiny Committee focussing on the Service Plans and Budget for the next financial year.

On 30 January, Committee would consider the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Regeneration of Seaside Towns if it was published.

On 27 February, it would discuss governance arrangements.

Cllr Loudoun said that Members had agreed to put the Drone Policy on the agenda for the next meeting, but suggested that the Public Toilet Review could wait until March.

The forward plan for the committee was noted.

Proposal received from Councillor Allen for Overview Committee on 14 November 2019

Recommendation:

That Cabinet;

1. Consider funding the creation of an East Devon Poverty Strategy to further develop and target the areas identified within this report that we are able to influence and to support a corporate approach to ensure consistency across Council Services.
2. Carry out a review of the funding and delivery arrangements for Money Advice to ensure that we're focussing on the key issues identified in the report.
3. Recommend that Council protect the existing funding levels contributed for Money Advice to Homemaker South West and Citizens of circa £120,000 for 2020/21 to enable the review (Recommendation 2) to be undertaken.
4. Update Corporate Debt Policy to include; Breathing Space in-line with proposed Government changes & to consider any other supportive measures that may be beneficial.
5. Agree to the Council's frontline services, in collaboration, setting up a series of local events across the District with key stakeholders that focus on Universal Credit, Money/Debt advice (including how to avoid Loan sharks), budgeting, fuel poverty, etc with the over- arching aim of supporting people to become more financially resilient.
6. Consider lobbying central Government directly and/or through our MPs in the following areas;
 - Right to Buy
 - Removing the freeze on Local Housing Allowance Rates in order to be reassessed to reflect market rents.
 - Universal Credit – More financial support to be given to customers to help with the transition. More funding to be given to local Councils to reflect the support that customers need with moving onto this Benefit.
7. Continue to explore opportunities to increase our supply of social housing through either redevelopment of existing stock and/or building new Council Housing, in conjunction with a review of the current Housing Revenue Account business plan.
8. Agree to the Council working alongside East Devon foodbanks to better understand demand and eradicate dependency.
9. Undertake a detailed analysis of fuel poverty in the district ***with a view to supporting residents in fuel and water poverty to reduce their energy and water bills by providing advice to residents on the availability of the benefits of achieving financial savings through installing energy and water efficiency measures, switching to cheaper energy tariffs, and installing water meters.*** Develop a separate action plan to *Partnering with utilities providers (experience shows home visits have proved to be the most effective method of engaging residents who are in fuel poverty)*

10 Work with HOTSW Carers Hub and Careers SW to develop:

- Improved adult skills training,
- careers counselling to raise young people's awareness of the employment opportunities with local employers and deliver additional apprenticeships in the growth sectors in the Exeter and Heart of Devon economy.
- Consider funding a learning and development service at Exmouth and Honiton and appointing an employment advisor with HOTSW/ LABGI joint funds, to support 45+ older residents into employment, further education or training, and voluntary placements or work experience.

11. Work with JobCentre Plus to relieve initial burden of Childcare for 3-6 months with single parents or returners to work with A levels using Flexible Support Fund

12. Learn from organisations such as "Business against Poverty" to mobilise Business actions against poverty in East Devon

13 Promote actions to increase hours worked by part-time workers on benefits

14. Promote the Living Wage to East Devon Employers by developing an accreditation by EDDC so that they become accredited as "Living Wage employers"

15. Work with Private Rented Sector to improve duration of tenure for reliable tenants and EDDC to enhance checks on quality and suitability of homes

16. Target the 7 Wards in highest need which are in the top 10% of deprivation nationally

17. Use Disabled Facilities Grants to improve homes where disabled tenants require action

18 Continue to develop Homelessness strategy in terms of Rapid Rehousing and Rough Sleepers with 5 year Funding in the Council's MTFS

19. Sustain funding to Young Devon (£20k) and Citizens Advice Bureau.

20. Review Money advice services to over-indebted 18+ aged people including retired residents

21. Consider developing a "Lifebelt" scheme using small loans for those in immediate risk of losing a home. The funding to come from New Homes Bonus supplemented by Crowdfunding

Attendance List

Councillors present:

N Hookway (Chairman)
V Johns (Vice-Chairman)
M Allen
B De Saram
M Hartnell
S Hawkins
F King
J Loudoun
M Rixson
T Woodward
P Millar

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

K Bloxham
J Bailey
D Ledger
E Wragg
G Jung
M Armstrong
S Jackson
J Rowland
S Bond
P Faithfull

Officers in attendance:

Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Libby Jarrett, Service Lead Revenues and Benefits
Amy Gilbert-Jeans, Service Lead Housing
Robert Murray, Economic Development Manager
Tim Child, Senior Manager Property and Estates
Andrew Wood, East of Exeter Projects Director
Giles Salter, Solicitor

Councillor apologies:

S Chamberlain
I Hall

Chairman

Date: