

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at Online via the Zoom app. on 18 June 2020

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.45 pm

170 Public speaking

There were 2 members of the public wishing to speak.

Councillor Ian Barlow Chairman of Sidmouth Town Council spoke of his concern over the lack of toilets open in the town especially with the run of good weather there had been recently as well as forecasted in the near future. Sidmouth Town Council contributes £40k to EDDC to run the toilets, Cllr Barlow felt they were not getting their fair share of this service. East Devon benefits from toilet facilities being open in order to look favourably to residents and visitors. Opening the toilets was better than the alternative of people using outdoor spaces as an option to relieve themselves. The financial aspects of opening the toilets could be dealt with at a later date. This was an urgent public health matter, the toilets needed to be opened now.

In answer to a question Cllr Barlow confirmed that the Town Council had funded the building of 4 new toilets on the seafront which were to be opened shortly. He said he knew toilet provision was a discretionary service EDDC provided but it was an important service to the town and part of the overall package. If people were being encouraged to come here then they had to be given such facilities.

Councillor Colin Pady represented the views from Colyton Parish Council. He was concerned over the haste in which the Cabinet meeting had be convened but understood the need for the debate concerning the opening of toilet facilities in the district. Residents in Colyton were concerned that toilets were still closed and wished to have them opened as quickly as possible for themselves as well as supporting tourism, even if it meant voluntary help for extra cleaning the toilets. There was a growing elderly population in East Devon who had an increasing need for public conveniences.

171 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 June 2020

The minutes of Cabinet held on 9 June 2020 were confirmed as a true record.

172 Declarations of interest

Minute 175. Reinstating StreetScene seasonal resource and additional budget to allow improved public toilet opening.

Councillor John Loudoun, Personal, is a member of Sidmouth Town Council.

Minute 175. Reinstating StreetScene seasonal resource and additional budget to allow improved public toilet opening.

Councillor Paul Hayward, Personal, works for a parish council that has a toilet leased by EDDC.

173 Matters of urgency

There was one item that was dealt with in this way recorded under minute 175.

174 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were no items that officers recommended should be dealt with in this way.

175 **Reinstating StreetScene seasonal resource and additional budget to allow improved public toilet opening**

The Service Lead StreetScene confirmed that the detail was in the report and highlighted the two elements that were to be debated - reinstating the seasonal resource of agency staff and the need to open more toilets for longer hours with improved facilities. He stated there had been no specific Government guidance about opening public toilets in order to be COVID-19 compliant. The rules/guidance in the report were based on the extensive Covid-19 secure guidance issued by the government related to how businesses should re-open safely (including shops with facilities for customers such as toilets and changing rooms), as well as guidelines for operators of outdoor facilities. All the guidance mentions improved cleaning frequency and hygiene standards, better signage, frequency of hand washing and cleaning after every use (for changing rooms). As soon as guidance concerning public toilets became available the present position would be reviewed. He spoke of the need to provide this important service and that it was linked directly to EDDC's economic recovery and tourist industry.

The Portfolio Holder for Coast, Country and Environment said at the start of the COVID-19 emergency all the district's public conveniences were locked to comply with government emergency measures. When the government relaxed the regulations for people to travel and to use beaches, EDDC reacted swiftly to open 10 of its public conveniences under strict government guidance and risk assessments. That was at Easter and things had moved on since then with the need to consider opening more toilets and over a longer period of time with limited funding. He suggested Town and Parish councils help get the message across for the public to take their litter home to relieve the pressure on StreetScene operatives.

Discussions included the following:

- The need to ensure safety to StreetScene operatives when dealing with heavier bins due to increased usage
- 8pm was too early to lock the toilets up for the day
- To ensure public health there must be more toilets available
- The need to support and boost town centres and businesses, tourism was vital for the area
- Ensure we give the service East Devon residents expect from us
- The need to provide more toilets as we approach the summer months
- This was a difficult decision as we cannot open all the toilets due to financial constraints stemming from the COVID-19 situation
- This would give the local economy the chance to bounce back and for East Devon to recover
- If businesses don't survive over the next six months they would be in an even worse situation than they were now.
- The need to look seriously in opening as many of the proposed toilets as we can to get the tourists back
- Sadly there was a minority that did not all share the same level of public decency respect for public facilities and restraint, with hand sanitizers as an example, being stolen or vandalised at a cost to the council

- The virus was still contagious, there was an underlying public health issue to keep people safe
- Ward members should lobby their MP's for more government funding for public toilets
- Approach Town and Parish Councils who may wish to contribute to these extra costs
- It was difficult to keep to social distancing in some older toilet blocks
- The need for appropriate signage on closed toilets to make clear where the nearest open facilities were
- Advertise where open toilets were at the point of entry to towns and resorts
- Public toilets were not a mandatory provision by the council, we rely on tourist but local people pay the precepts in their council tax
- Consider bringing back charges to use public toilets or seek sponsorship from businesses who benefit from having them
- 4 July 2020 certain tourism facilities officially reopen, if pubs and cafes cannot open this would affect the pressure on public toilet facilities.
- There was a need to re-open all toilets now and also to review their provision and investment in their standards
- Costings should be provided on an option 'D i' for re-opening all toilets until 8pm in the summer, but only 5pm in the winter. Costs to be considered in the future
- That this subject and the number of toilets open be kept under constant review.

The Chairman, Portfolio Holder for Coast, Country and Environment and other members wished to thank and relay their gratitude to Andrew Hancock and his great team of staff and officers for keeping operations rolling out in this most challenging of times and speaking on behalf of all the district's residents.

RESOLVED that Cabinet;

1. Note the use of the StreetScene agency budget of £62k to enable StreetScene Operations to meet statutory responsibilities in relation to street cleansing and maintain an Outstanding Environment.
2. Agree to option Ci (which requires an additional budget of £76,962 for 9 months until March 2021) as recommended in the report for opening public toilets further and delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder Coast, Country and Environment to progress the virement request in accordance with Financial Regulations and if not agreed to recommend to Council to approve the additional budget.
3. Approve an extensive communications effort to explain why this restricted opening and over budget resource is required and approach the Town & Parish Council's benefitting, seeking a contribution to the costs.
4. Approve a long term review of public toilet stock taking account of the 'new normal', requiring consideration of financial sustainability and Covid-19 secure building adaptations and investment within the stock with a report to be brought back to Cabinet for consideration.
5. Seek to arrange a Zoom meeting with the district's three MPs, with a view to lobbying government for additional funds to support the additional spend being incurred on public toilets.

REASON:

Using the agency resource would allow EDDC to keep beaches, parks and streets clean in the face of increased demand, restoring staffing to normal levels. Due to Covid-19 secure guidelines, a greater degree of cleaning was required of public toilets. Opening any more than 10 would require more budget and staff resource. Cabinet had to decide on what level was appropriate. With the new normal of Covid-19 and the pressure on public finances, there was a need to review what level of provision was sustainable and what building adaptations/refurbishments may be required, hence a full review being needed.

Attendance List

Present:

Portfolio Holders

M Armstrong	Portfolio Holder Sustainable Homes and Communities
P Arnott	Leader
J Bailey	Portfolio Holder Corporate Services and COVID-19 Response and Recovery
P Hayward	Portfolio Holder Economy and Assets
G Jung	Portfolio Holder Coast, Country and Environment
D Ledger	Portfolio Holder Strategic Planning
P Millar	Portfolio Holder Democracy and Transparency
M Rixson	Portfolio Holder Climate Action
J Rowland	Portfolio Holder Finance
E Wragg	Deputy Leader

Also present (for some or all the meeting)

Councillor Denise Bickley
Councillor Kevin Blakey
Councillor Kim Bloxham
Councillor Colin Brown
Councillor Fred Caygill
Councillor Sarah Chamberlain
Councillor Iain Chubb
Councillor Bruce De Saram
Councillor Alan Dent
Councillor Peter Faithfull
Councillor Ian Hall
Councillor Marcus Hartnell
Councillor Sam Hawkins
Councillor Nick Hookway
Councillor Mike Howe
Councillor Sarah Jackson
Councillor Fabian King
Councillor John Loudoun
Councillor Tony McCollum
Councillor Andrew Moulding
Councillor Geoff Pook
Councillor Geoff Pratt
Councillor Eleanor Rylance
Councillor Philip Skinner

Councillor Ian Thomas
Councillor Joe Whibley
Councillor Tony Woodward
Councillor Tom Wright

Also present:

Officers:

Simon Davey, Strategic Lead Finance
John Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment
Henry Gordon Lennox, Strategic Lead Governance and Licensing
Andrew Hancock, Service Lead StreetScene
Susan Howl, Democratic Services Manager
Anita Williams, Principal Solicitor (and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Mark Williams, Chief Executive
Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer

Chairman

Date: