

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporate Overview Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 1 February 2007

Present:

Councillors:

G K Liverton (Chairman)
R C Peachey (Vice-Chairman)

Mrs K J Bamsey
G P Chamberlain
JED Falby
K W George
C F A Gibbings
B O Ingham
J A Knight
Ms S M Merritt
A W J Reed
T G Reeves
C H Wale
S C Wragg

Also Present:

Councillors:

Miss V Ash
T A Cope
P A Diviani
Miss J M Elson
A R Giles
A T Moulding
Mrs F Newth
B Nicholson
Mrs HE Parr
Mrs P A Stott
Dr H W Waterworth

Apologies:

Councillor:

S Hughes

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.15pm

***33 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Overview Committee held on 4 January 2007, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***34 Item considered as a matter of urgency**

MSC Napoli

The Head of Street Scene Services advised Members of the situation with regard to cargo ship MSC Napoli which had beached in Lyme Bay on the evening of 20 January 2007. The ship had contained 2364 containers, of which 800 were on deck. 98 containers had

*34 **Item considered as a matter of urgency** (Cont.)

so far been removed from the stern. It was hoped to clear the stern of containers by the weekend. Of the 3500 tonnes of heavy fuel oil on board, 75% had already been removed and it was hoped to have all the fuel oil removed by Monday.

The good weather had assisted the operation and as each day went by prospects of a successful operation increased and the risk lessened. The MCA considered that if the current weather continued then there was no significant risk of the ship breaking up.

The Committee passed their thanks on to Mark Reilly, his team and the Coastguard for the work they were doing with regard to the MSC Napoli.

35 **Draft Service Plans and budget 2007/08**

Detailed consideration was given to the Draft Service Plans and budget for 2007/08. Before each Service Plan was considered Members noted the relevant part of the report of the Service Plans and Budget Task and Finish Forum which met on 22 January 2007. The Overview Committee had been tasked to consider whether each service had sufficient budget to match the service plans.

During the discussions the following points were made:

Organisational Development

Members were advised that a £100,000 contingency had been made in the budget for costs arising from appeals under Job Evaluation. It was anticipated that all the appeals would be completed by the end of March when the full costs of the exercise could be estimated.

It was noted that a benchmarking exercise was going to be undertaken across the Council to compare levels of staffing in each service. Members were reminded that all Services in the Central Services Directorate had to find a 12% reduction in their budgets under the reprioritisation exercise.

Information, Communication and Technology Service (ICT)

Chris Powell, Head of ICT, advised, in response to a question, that a budget had been made available to upgrade the Councils Microsoft software. It was hoped that the Council could shortly become a solely Microsoft environment. This would help the way different systems worked together. He confirmed that the Council did not purchase the latest software available, but let others run the risk of trialling new systems, such as Vista

Members noted that no target had been set for Local Performance Indicator L94 for 2006/07 – ‘percentage of switchboard calls answered within 5 rings’ (page 85 of the Service Plan booklet). The Customer Service Centre had always experienced difficulties in meeting the 2005/06 target of 88% of calls however a new Customer Service Centre Manager had been in post for 3 weeks and would be reviewing the targets in due course.

Environmental Health and Health Equalities

Members received and noted an additional paragraph to the Service Plan referring to the requirements of BVPI 166 – Environmental Health Checklist. This related to the reporting of variations from policies, procedures or standards.

It was noted that two additional Environmental Health Officers had recently been recruited, which would mean the section was fully staffed. Vacancies had previously been covered using agency staff. The Head of Service confirmed that staff cost were within budget.

Housing and Social Inclusion

Members were advised that the target in the Service Plan of 30 affordable houses was relatively low. In reality the service had been delivering 60 – 70 units per year. Once Cranbrook came on stream it was expected that considerably more affordable homes would be delivered.

Members were advised that the budget for dealing with the need for gipsy sites was placed under the heading of homelessness. It was relatively low for 2007/08, as it was predicted that most of the expenditure relating to this provision would fall in 2008/09. John Golding confirmed that he was awaiting the results of the County Council survey.

Members noted that the current resettlement grant was £1100, which was in place to free up under occupied houses for family occupation. There was a commitment to reduce under occupancy in the Housing Service Plan, possibly through increasing the resettlement grant. The need to make better use of the private rented sector was part of the service improvements proposed and Members were reminded of the successful deposit loan scheme run by the Council.

Finance

Concern was expressed about the substantial increase in administrative costs which had been brought about as a result of changes in government legislation in Housing Benefit administration and also results of the Job Evaluation exercise.

The Committee thanked Simon Davey, Head of Finance for his patience in explaining the service plan and budget papers.

Planning and Countryside

Members welcomed the Service Plan presented and particularly the improvements proposed. With the additional Enforcement Officer, it was anticipated that more enforcement could be undertaken. This would help with the growing workload of those officers currently in place. The creditability of the planning system depended upon enforcement.

Consideration was given to sustainability issues and members welcomed the additional training proposed on this issue. Karime Hassan, Corporate Director – Environment confirmed that he had written to an external organisation inviting them to submit a proposal for taking forward the climate change agenda including training on sustainability issues. There was a knowledge gap within the Council to achieve carbon neutral developments, which was the direction of travel for the Government.

Consideration was given to the appointment of a Member Sustainability Champion or Champions. The need to conduct an energy audit of the Knowle and all the Councils buildings was acknowledged and should form part of a climate change strategy.

The Chairman congratulated staff in the Building Control section for achieving ISO 9001.2000 standards.

Street Scene Services

Members noted that it was hoped to make big improvements in street cleansing this year as Performance Indicator BVPI 199a ‘% of land with unacceptable levels of litter’ was shown as below target.

Concern was expressed over the £33,000 requested for a replacement Boat Rib and Engine, Quad Bike and Jet Ski. It was considered that this was unnecessary expenditure

Street Scene Services(Cont)

in the current financial environment, as the Lifeguards were able to do their job without this.

Councillor Jim Knight advised that lighting had been vandalised at Seaton Cliff Field Strip and requested that for health and safety reasons a standard street lamp be installed at this location.

Members were concerned that a programme of education was needed for those members of the public not willing to recycle. Karime Hassan confirmed that this was needed and that a programme of education and enforcement would have to be built into the implementation plan for the new recycling contract.

Member congratulated Street Scene on the excellent service provided.

(Councillor T A Cope declared a personal interest as trustee of a beach rescue group and Councillor Mrs P A Stott declared an interest as a member of her family was involved with the lifeboat service)

Legal, Licensing and Member Services

There were no additional comments made on this service.

Economic Development and Property

It was noted that the focus of this service was moving towards the East of Exeter and regeneration aspects of the service. The important property management function was to keep all the Council buildings in good repair. A question was raised over the sale of Pound Lane, Exmouth and it was hoped that this would go ahead and raise a substantial capital receipt for the Council

Internal Audit and Governance

There were no additional comments were made on this section.

In Conclusion

Members wished to acknowledge and thank the Budget & Service Planning Task and Finish Forum for its hard work and diligence.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the draft service plans and revenue and capital estimates be approved with the exception of :
 - a) the deletion of the £33,000 proposed for replacement Boat Rib and Engine, Quad Bike and Jet Ski and no money be spent on any existing equipment;
 - b) the addition of £5,000 for lighting on Seaton Cliff Field Strip.
 2. that the additional paragraph on the requirement of BVPII 166, to the Environmental Health and Health Equalities Service Plan be accepted;

Chairman

Date.....