

# **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 7 November 2007**

### **Present:**

Councillors:

A R Giles (Chairman)  
J A Knight (Vice Chairman)

D Chapman  
Mrs C E Drew  
Ms V Duval Steer  
H J Jeffery

S C Luxton  
Mrs F I Newth  
Mrs M A Rogers  
Mrs E E Wragg

### **Also Present**

Councillors:

I Chubb  
T A Cope  
Miss J M Elson  
J P Halse  
S Hughes

Mrs A E Liverton  
G K Liverton  
A T Moulding  
Miss S Randall Johnson  
Mrs P A Stott

### **Apologies:**

Councillors:

D R H Hull  
K D Nicholas  
B Nicholson  
P J Skinner  
G M Troman

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 9.20pm

### **\*33 Condolences**

The Chairman and Members of the Committee wished to send their sincere condolences to Councillor B Nicholson on the recent death of his wife Wendy.

### **\*34 Minutes**

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

### **\*34 Quarterly monitoring of service plans – second quarter 2007/08**

Consideration was given to the report of the Policy Manager with regard to progress on the actions in the Service Plans for the period 1 July to 30 September 2007. This information was supplied to allow Members to monitor performance and identify any service areas where improvement was necessary. Members noted that Corporate Directors and Heads of Service were continually monitoring service plans as well as the Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Streetscene confirmed that work on the flood alleviation scheme for Imperial Field, Exmouth had now started. The Corporate Director in charge of Environmental Health confirmed that the Contaminated Land Officer had left the Council for a new job and had not been replaced as yet. Various options were being considered over

**\*34 Quarterly monitoring of service plans – second quarter 2007/08(Cont)**

replacement of this post. However it was noted that there was an Officer within the section with some experience in this area who could deal with housing on contaminated land issues. Members were informed that further site investigations were being undertaken on the land at Imperial Recreation ground and work was progressing in consultation with the Environment Agency.

It was noted that attempts were being made to increase the local employment benefits that flowed from the Council's investment in commercial workspace. There was also the need to make good use of the Council's assets. The Corporate Director responsible for Scrutiny Committee agreed to investigate with the Corporate Director responsible for Internal Audit and the Internal Audit Manager the implications of failing to successfully transfer the completion of the risk register and annual reviews to auditors. Members were concerned to hear that the Internal Audit section was struggling to cope due to a Member of staff leaving and another being away on maternity leave.

Members commented that the explanation in the Officer notes for many of the sections needed to give a fuller explanation and the document as a whole needed to be in plain English. They were keen that where a service plan was amber or red then the Officer responsible should be available to answer Members questions or a more detailed response be given.

The Head of ICT explained that the staff self service modules had not yet been extended to include, overtime, sickness, timesheets and expenses claims as there were more important things to be done first. But that this was being discussed for inclusion in the ICT work programme. A Member asked a question on what was the review of tax liabilities relating to benefits in kind to Members.

**RESOLVED**

1. that the performance and proposed remedial action against the Service Plans for the second quarter of 2007/08, be noted;
2. that the Corporate Director responsible for Scrutiny Committee check with the Corporate Director responsible for Internal Audit and the Internal Audit Manager on the implications of failing to successfully transfer the completion of the risk register and annual reviews to auditors;
3. that the Corporate Director responsible for Scrutiny Committee report back to the Scrutiny Committee on the question of 'benefits in kind' to Members.

**\*35 Quarterly monitoring of performance – Second quarter 2007/08**

Consideration was given to the report of the Policy Manager with regard to performance information for the period 1 July to 30 September 2007. This information was supplied to allow Members to monitor performance and identify any service areas where improvement was necessary. The Corporate Director responsible for Scrutiny Committee reported that the areas of Planning and Housing Benefits were the areas which were being targeted for improvements.

Members considered the report page by page and the following points were noted:

- L32 Percentage of tree preservation order applications determined within 8 weeks. Officers were commended for the good results;
- L12 Average void (empty) period for council homes (days). Officers were congratulated on their success in improving this performance indicator;
- BV78a Average processing time taken for all benefit claims. Extra resources were being made available to tackle the backlog;

35 **Quarterly monitoring of performance – Second quarter 2007/08(Cont)**

- BV218a & b Percentage of abandoned vehicles removed within 24 hours from legal entitlement to remove. The Head of Streetscene reported that he had looked to try and address this problem. He had been able to make improvements without committing more resources.
- BV109b Percentage of minor planning applications determined within 8 weeks. Members noted that if a Town/Parish Council had a genuine planning reason for objecting to a planning application then it would go before the Development Control Committee;
- BV204 Number of planning appeal decisions allowed against the authority's decision to refuse. The Vice Chairman expressed his concern over the high number of appeals lost. It was noted that the Head of Planning & Countryside Services was preparing a report with further information on this issue.

**RESOLVED**

1. that the performance and proposed remedial action against the Service Plans for the second quarter of 2007/08, be noted;
2. that other District Councils, within this Council's 'family' group, be contacted to discover what actions they have take to reduce the average processing time taken for benefit claims.

36 **IT policy for Members**

(Councillor S Hughes was in attendance for this item)

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of ICT on a new draft IT policy for Members. It was noted that Members had been provided with IT equipment and services by the Council for a number of years. The recent change in the method of delivery of email services to Members prompted a review of these arrangements and a draft policy had been attached to the report which covered all the areas relating to providing and supporting IT for Members.

The recent email system change had not gone smoothly and staff and Members were being asked for their recommendations for improvements to be ready for the next change. The fault finding service had been slow due to the handover between different suppliers. Friction had also developed between Officers and Members as a result of poor communication.

Some concern was expressed over the service for some of the Members who were both County and District Councillors, as messages were not forwarded between May and October, and were not picked up by those Members who did not attend the training. There was also the issue of some Members stating they did not have the time to look at two accounts. Other Members expressed their thanks to Officers in the ICT section for their help when dealing with the difficulties that arose. The Head of ICT reported that part of the problem with Members email arose because of the short 6 week period of notice that the Council's supplier gave to cancel its service.

Members then discussed aspects of the ICT Equipment and Services for Members draft policy presented. It was noted that there were four key changes proposed:

- A difference amount and method of payment for Members broadband;
- Transfer of ownership of broadband lines to Members;
- Email forwarding was no longer be carried out as a service;
- ICT with the Communication Portfolio Holder will determine if for Members training was compulsory.

A question was asked over the Council's policy at the present time for the payment of broadband and lines. Members noted that the current policy was to pay a maximum of £26 per month until April 2008. In response to a question from a Member, the Head of ICT

36 **IT policy for Members**(Cont)

agreed to investigate what would happen to map code transfers when a supplier went into liquidation.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- That Members had the opportunity to purchase their own ICT equipment when it reached the end of its useful life;
- Concern was expressed over the need for more punchy messages provided to Members to explain changes to email policy and training needs;
- It was confirmed that Members were entitled to free eye sight tests;
- That the draft policy on ICT Equipment and Services for Members was flexible compared with a more rigid policy adopted by other local authorities, such as Devon County Council;
- Emphasis on the importance of ICT training for Members.

The Monitoring Officer pointed out to Members that this was a very flexible policy, and that some Council's were much more prescriptive about how IT services to Members were delivered. Although there were some risks with a flexible approach, she felt comfortable that the policy proposed contained manageable risks.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that when future arrangements were made for the supply of services from a contractor, a minimum cancellation period of 90 days be applied;
  2. that that Members should be strongly encouraged to attend ICT training;
  3. that clearer punchier messages be provided to Members;
  4. that the word 'party' be added to the second line of the second paragraph before the word 'political' in paragraph 6.3;
  5. that reference to data disks be added in Appendix 1 paragraph 2;
  6. that subject to the changes proposed above, the ICT Equipment and Services for Members policy be agreed.

(Councillor S Hughes declared a personal interest as a member of the Executive Board)

(Councillor S Luxton declared a personal interest as a contractor for British Telecom)

37 **Anti Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum – implementation update**

(Gerry Moore, Community Safety Officer, was in attendance for this item.)

Members received a report from the Corporate Director – Communities updating Members on the implementation of recommendations arising from the Anti Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum and ways in which they may be implemented. The Chairman and other Members expressed their concern that several of the recommendations of Anti-Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum, agreed by the Executive Board with one exception on 14 March 2007, had not yet been implemented. The Chairman had requested an additional paper to be circulated highlighting the decisions taken on the recommendations of the Anti Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum, at Scrutiny Committee on 14

## **Anti Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum – implementation update**(Cont)

February 2007 and Executive Board on 14 March 2007. This was for the benefit of new Members to the Council.

The key elements in tackling the issues raised by the Anti Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum so far, have been:

1. Council's visioning exercise highlighted "a safe, clean and green environment" as a priority, (and work for "Children and Young People") as well as improved corporate working.
2. Neighbourhood Assessment pro-active work (alongside our partners such as the police, town and parish councils and other agencies) indicating 'hot spots' and issues of public concern in our main towns.
3. Streetscene "REACT" team being formed within and from Street Cleansing, part of whose role would be enforcement, particularly around fly tipping, littering and pollution.
4. Reletting Dog Warden/Pest Control/Community Warden contracts.

Detailed arrangements for new enforcement powers are being presented to the next Executive Board.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- The need to work to achieve closer partnership working with the Police;
- Problems with the vandalism that was continuing to occur at West Walks toilets, Seaton;
- The need to have a corporate approach to the issues highlighted by the Anti Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum;
- Four neighbourhood assessments had been completed in Axminster, Honiton, Seaton and Sidmouth and assessments were underway in Exmouth and Ottery St Mary;
- The neighbourhood assessments undertaken so far had indicated that one half to one third of the public were happy with the current situation in their neighbourhood. They had highlighted local anti social behaviour issues (that have now been addressed);
- The Council had undertaken 2 successful dog fouling prosecutions, which had taken place in Ottery St Mary and there had also been an ASBO issued in Exmouth;
- The letter approaching the Government to improve controls on guard dogs would be sent out shortly;
- Disappointment expressed that Town/Parish Councils had not yet been approached regarding the design of East Devon District Council car parks;
- The Council was finding local solutions to problems of antisocial behaviour in its car parks and have recently undertaken several measures to reduce the problem, including closing Foxholes car park in the evenings;
- A report would be sent shortly to the Executive Board regarding the Cleaner Neighbourhood and Environment Act;
- The District Council was looking to use their powers to remove cars being sold from the road, particularly in the Exmouth area;
- The importance of progressing schemes such as 'Park Smart' to reduce the problems of parking around schools in East Devon;
- The possibility of asking the Devon Youth Service to a future meeting of Scrutiny Committee to discuss anti social behaviour and binge drinking;
- The REACT team had recently been set up to tackle littering and fly tipping.

**37 Anti Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum – implementation update(Cont)**

**RESOLVED**

1. that a Youth Service representative be invited to attend a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee along with the Member Champion for Youth and Communities Portfolio Holder;
2. that the Council attempts to achieve closer partnership working with the Police;

**RECOMMENDED**

- 1 that consultation go ahead with Town/Parish Councils on the issue of the design of East Devon District Council car parks;
2. that a bid for CCTV at West Walk’s toilets, Seaton be made in the Capital Programme;

**\*38 Future of Scrutiny**

This item was deferred to a future meeting due to lack of time to properly debate it.

**\*39 Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

Consideration was given to the Forward Plan for the Scrutiny Committee. Members requested that the Chairman of the Primary Care Trust be invited to attend the next meeting on 5 December or if not then as soon as possible after this date.

**RESOLVED**

that the Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan be noted;

**\*40 Task and Finish Forum Status Report**

Members noted the Task and Finish Forum Status report which presented details of the current Task and Finish Forums. Members noted the progress made on the Task and Finish Forums (TaFF’s) set up at the last meeting and also the inclusion of the terms of reference for each TaFF.

The Vice Chairman reported that the ICT Investments TaFF had sat that afternoon when there had been a robust discussion on ICT investment issues. They had also given Officers a clear steer in the direction this issue should proceed in. The urgency in proceeding with the other two TaFF’s was stressed. The Planning TaFF would be the next to meet in January, in the evening.

**RESOLVED**

- 1) that the Task and Finish Forum Status Report be noted;
- 2) that the members of the Planning TaFF be, Councillors Ms V Duval Steer, A R Giles, H J Jeffery, J Knight, and Mrs E E Wragg.

Chairman ..... Date.....