

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 13 June 2007

Present:

Councillors:

A R Giles (Chairman)

D Chapman
Mrs C E Drew
Ms V Duval Steer
G Godbeer
Mrs F I Newth
K D Nicholas

B Nicholson
Mrs M Rogers
P J Skinner
G M Troman
Mrs E E Wragg

Also Present

Councillors:

P N Bowden
T A Cope
Miss J M Elson
M J L Green
S Hughes
D R H Hull

J A Knight
Mrs A E Liverton
G K Liverton
Miss S M Randall Johnson
Mrs P A Stott
S C Wragg

Apologies:

Councillors:

G P Chamberlain (Vice Chairman)
H J Jeffery

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.50pm

*1

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 21 March 2007, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

*2

Vice Chairman

In the absence of Cllr Chamberlain, Cllr Skinner was proposed and seconded as Vice Chairman for the meeting.

RESOLVED that Cllr Skinner be elected Vice Chairman for the meeting.

*3

What is Scrutiny?

The Chief Executive explained the role of the Scrutiny Committee and why it was an important committee in the Council's constitutional framework. The Scrutiny Committee together with the Corporate Overview Committee had four goals:

- To provide a 'critical friend' challenge to the Executive Board as well as to external authorities and agencies
- To reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
- To take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public, and
- To make an impact on the delivery of public services.

Members noted that the more specific role of the Scrutiny Committee was to provide a check on the decisions of the Executive Board and of Portfolio Holders and to monitor service delivery using performance reports.

*4 **Development of a vision for the newly elected Council and findings of the General User Satisfaction Survey**

Prior to the meeting Members had attended a briefing on the main findings of the General User Satisfaction Survey. The survey had been carried out during September, October and November 2006 by BMG Research of Birmingham, who had been represented at the earlier briefing. Members were now invited to consider the findings of the General User Satisfaction Survey and select any findings which they would like to draw to the attention of the Members' Panel to develop a vision for the newly elected Council.

Members were advised that one of the key outcomes of the survey was the large number of respondents who stated that they were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with the Council overall. This suggested that they were not sufficiently well informed about how the Council was doing, the services it provided and whether it was meeting its targets, in order to reach a decision.

Members were requested to consider the survey findings further in preparation for further consideration at the next meeting of the Committee.

- RESOLVED**
1. that the conclusions of the General User Satisfaction Survey be endorsed
 2. that the Survey findings be further considered at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee with particular emphasis being given to the responses received on how well informed residents felt about the following specific issues:
 - What standard of service you should expect from the Council?
 - How you can get involved in local decision making?
 - How well the Council is performing?
 - Whether the Council is delivering on its promises
 - What the Council is doing to tackle anti-social behaviour in your local area

5 **Revenue and Capital Outturn Report 2006/07**

Consideration was given to the report of the Financial Services Manager with regard to the Revenue and Capital Outturn figures against budgets for the 2006/07 financial year for General Fund Services, the Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme.

The General Fund closed the year with a surplus of £606,412. The main areas of variance included the Recycling and Refuse Contract, investment income, income from beach huts and the level of Housing Benefit subsidy received. A prudent approach had been taken when calculating the Housing Benefit subsidy. The exact level of subsidy would not be known until the end of the financial year but in 2007/08 provisional estimates would be reported to the Executive Board on a quarterly basis.

The Housing Revenue Account showed an annual saving of £107,136 and the Capital Programme outturn represented an under spend of £1,589,000, however £1,429,000 had been added to the 2007/08 capital programme to take into account scheme slippage.

Consideration was given to each page of the Outturn report booklet and the following points were noted.

- The savings due to staff vacancies in the Environment Directorate were not intentional savings but occurred due to a significant difficulty in recruiting Planning Officers.
- The variance in the Home Safeguard revenue outturn occurred mainly due to an incorrect estimate of the number of customers as although approximately 300 new

5 **Revenue and Capital Outturn Report 2006/07 (Cont.)**

customers had been acquired, approximately 200 customers had either moved into nursing homes or passed away.

- The cost to the Council of the Napoli incident had not been separately identified in the report as it was relatively small.
- The variance in the Street Scene transport budget had occurred due to overspends on fuel, insurance excess payments and an increase in leasing costs

Members were advised that the General Fund Balance was £0.670m above the minimum requirement. This figure would be considered in conjunction with the visioning exercise and could be earmarked for an 'invest to save' budget. Members noted that the size of the surplus would be affected by any alteration in Recycling and Refuse arrangements.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the Revenue and Capital Outturn Report be further considered once the proposed use for the revenue surplus had been established
 2. that it be noted that the size of the revenue surplus could be significantly affected by any alteration to the Recycling and Refuse contract

6 **Best Value Performance Indicators**

Consideration was given to the report of the Policy Manager with regard to the Council's performance against national Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) and Local Performance Indicators for 2006/07. Performance was compared with targets set the previous year, performance in 2005/06 and national average figures for district councils in 2005/06.

The Chief Executive advised Members of the importance of meeting Performance Indicators targets. The Audit Commission had categorised the Council as 'good' and failure to meet BVPI targets could result in this being amended.

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

- L72 Response to electoral registration canvass – the 0.75% increase achieved was mainly attributed to an increased number of residents in rural areas registering. It was recognised that a significant number of people in towns had failed to register. Exmouth and Seaton would be particularly targeted during the 2007 canvass.
- BV175 The percentage of racial incidents reported to the local authority that resulted in further action. This related to incidents reported to the Council by, for example, tenants in Council provided accommodation.
- BV11c Top 5% of earners with a disability. The Council actively welcomed applications from candidates with a disability together with applicants from ethnic minorities. It was recognised that the traditional job advertisement channels used may not target these groups and perhaps the Council could consider different publicity methods.
- L12 Average void (empty) period for Council homes & BV212 Average time to re let Local Authority Housing. Members were advised that there were incidents where properties were vacant for longer than necessary. The Housing Review Board were investigating this.
- BV127a Violent crime per 1,000 population in the local area. This and other crime indicators were national targets which should have been met. The Council had a statutory duty to help prevent crime and was therefore an active partner in the East Devon Community Safety Partnership.
- BV91b Kerbside collection of recyclables. This BVPI indicated that 100% of the district had a kerbside collection of recyclables, unfortunately this did not result in 100% of the district choosing to recycle.

6 **Best Value Performance Indicators (Cont.)**

- BV218a and b Abandoned vehicles investigation and removal. This was a national indicator which had been introduced to encourage speedier action in urban areas. It did not reflect the feedback received from the General User Satisfaction Survey. The Survey suggested that abandoned cars were one of the smallest areas of concern among residents.
- L34 percentage of visitors to local nature reserves showing satisfaction with visit. This indicator was zero as no survey had been undertaken in 2006/07.
- BV202 Number of rough sleepers. This indicator was very precisely defined and calculated and did not necessarily reflect the situation across the district.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that a detailed report on BV212: Average time to relet Local Authority Housing be presented to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee as a matter of concern;
 2. that a detailed report on BV218a and BV218b Abandoned vehicles investigation and removal be presented to a future meeting of the Committee

7 **Communications Task and Finish Forum Action Plan Review**

Members considered the report of the Policy Manager with regard to the progress made in meeting the recommendations proposed by the Communications Task and Finish Forum.

The Action Plan contained 55 recommended actions, of which:

- 40% had been achieved
- 33% were ongoing (which in effect meant that they had been achieved but needed to be repeated or reinforced over time)
- 11% were progressing
- 7% had been postponed, and
- 9% had been dropped.

Members were advised that the use of Parish Magazines as a medium for positive publicity had been investigated but feedback received resulted in this idea being dropped. It was suggested that the feedback had not been favourable as the newsheet had been sent to Parish Clerks and not directly to the Parish Magazine editors.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the use of Parish Magazines as a medium for positive publicity be revisited;
 2. that consideration be given to how Members can be reminded to check their pigeon holes when visiting the Offices.

*8 **Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

Consideration was given to the forward plan for the Scrutiny Committee. Members noted that the training evening had been postponed until later in the year. Members were encouraged to give thought to what areas they believed should be scrutinised at future meetings.

- RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan be noted.

*9 **Task and Finish Forum Status Report**

Members noted the Task and Finish Forum Status report which presented details of the current Task and Finish Forum.

RESOLVED that the Task and Finish Forum Status Report be noted.

Chairman Date.....