

# EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

## Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 25 October 2006

### Present:

Councillors:

P W Burrows (Chairman)  
A R Giles (Vice-Chairman)

Mrs R E Burrow  
Mrs C E Drew  
Mrs F I Newth

Mrs M A Rogers  
B J Toyne  
Dr H W Waterworth

### Also present:

Councillors:

T A Cope  
P A Diviani  
Miss J M Elson  
C F A Gibbings  
M J L Green

Ms S M Merritt  
A T Moulding  
B Nicholson  
A W J Reed

### Apologies:

Councillors:

R W Boote  
D J Cox  
H J Jeffery  
Mrs A E Liverton  
Mrs L A Roden  
Mrs E E Wragg

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.34pm

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### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 20 September 2006, were confirmed and signed as a true record subject to the amendment of minute 20, page 13, line 4 to read 'to enable all Members to be formally engaged in the decision making **and advisory processes**'. The minutes of the Joint meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committees held on 27 September 2006 were noted.

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### Performance indicators

Consideration was given to Performance Indicators BV64, BV204, BV 91 and BV8.

#### BV64: Vacant dwellings returned to occupation

The Corporate Director – Communities advised Members that the suspension of the Private Sector Leasing Scheme had limited the options for bringing empty properties back into use. The Scheme had been suspended as the Government considered that it was temporary accommodation. The agency responsible for running the Scheme had designed a new scheme that should obtain Government approval. In addition, the Council was progressing its Rent Deposit Scheme, funded by money that would otherwise have paid for the Bed and Breakfast charges for the homeless people concerned. This scheme had proved useful and it counted towards BV64 so it was expected that the performance measured by this Indicator would begin to show an improvement in future months.

24 **Performance indicators (Cont.)**BV204: Number of planning appeals allowed

Members were advised that there was no specific reason why the monthly target had not been met but were reassured that it was fully expected that the Council would be on target over the 12 month period.

BV91: Kerbside collection of recyclables

Discussion took place on the collection of refuse and recyclables. Recycling boxes were due to have been delivered to 100% of properties in the District by 23 October. It was noted that some properties had been missed out in error; these would receive their boxes as soon as possible. Members expressed concern that this target had been missed and that the Council still did not have a signed contract with the refuse and recycling contractor 'Sita'.

BV8: Percentage of invoices paid on time

The Corporate Director – Economy advised Members that it was the Housing and Street Scene services, who dealt with the largest number of contractors, that had failed to hit the target. A spot check of invoices paid in July found that 167 invoices had failed to meet the target but less than 5% of these were late by more than 5 days. Efforts were being made to increase awareness of the target and improve performance in this area.

**RECOMMENDED** that Members receive an update on the Refuse and Recycling Contract.

\*25 **Rural deprivation**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director – Communities that gave an over-view of the issues of rural deprivation and summarised the 'Carnegie' commission's findings as set out in their interim report.

Members were taken through the main elements of the report. Adrian Marsden, GIS Specialist, displayed a selection of maps based on national and local findings. These included:

- Population density people per hectare (2001 figures) – this showed that a large percentage of East Devon had less than one person per hectare.
- Rural and urban classification 2004 – this map used the classification of the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and showed that the district had just three urban areas, namely Exmouth, Honiton and Sidmouth, and a lot of isolated villages.
- Deprivation in terms of housing and services – England rating – on this map almost all of the District was coloured red, the colour used to represent the most deprived areas in the Country.
- Distance from Post Offices
- Distance from community halls
- Distance from primary and secondary schools
- Distance from pharmacies
- Distance from doctors
- Distance from dentists
- Percentage of properties more than 0.5km and more than 2km from a bus stop

Members thanked Adrian Marsden for his work in producing the maps, which were very informative and asked that these be made available on the web pages.

Consideration was given to the key issues surrounding rural deprivation.

**\*25 Rural deprivation (Cont.)**Accessible services

Members referred back to the map that showed that in terms of access to services East Devon was one of the most deprived areas in the Country. It was noted that small rural communities were very dependent socially on their local services, for example local shops and Post Offices. Discussion took place on the news that the Government was considering closing 4,000 Sub Post Offices and ending its subsidy paid to the network of rural Post Offices. Members reported that Post Offices would no longer be able to sell road tax or television licences or operate the Post Office Card Account.

- It was suggested that the closure of rural Post Offices be opposed and that no services be withdrawn from Post Offices
- It was also suggested that the successful community shops should be encouraged and those based at Talaton, Dalwood and Offwell be looked at to see if their success could be repeated in other villages

Members were advised that the Council had provided support for small businesses for years in the form of rate relief and had helped organisations access grants available to them.

- It was suggested that the Government be asked to lower the business rates paid by rural business and recognise that rural deprivation was as bad as urban deprivation with this recognition being shown through a change in the funding formula

Consideration was given to the level of support given to local services. It was noted that there was a possibility that community hospitals could close which would be detrimental to their local communities.

- It was suggested that the way forward would be to bring more services into community hospitals rather than close them.

In addition Members were advised that Devon County Council had drawn up one contract for all the meals on wheels provided across the District. Previously meals on wheels were supplied on a more local basis, for example by the kitchens of the local hospital or care home, and involved more local ingredients.

- It was suggested that the single meals on wheels contract drawn up by Devon County Council be opposed

Members considered the planning issues relating to rural services.

- It was suggested that planning conditions be imposed on new supermarkets to provide for local distribution centres and to ensure that they sold a certain percentage of local produce.
- In addition it was also suggested that increased pressure be put on developers to ensure that they invested more in local communities

Rural transport / mobility deprivation

Work previously undertaken by the Travel and Transport Task and Finish Forum showed that the availability of transport was a very significant problem in rural areas, particularly for elderly and young residents. Members noted that large areas of the District were not served by regular bus services which in turn affected residents access to other services such as shops, doctors and schools.

- It was suggested that use of community transport should be more widely encouraged and promoted
- It was suggested that more action should be taken to ensure that young people, particularly in rural areas, have access to leisure activities

**\*25 Rural deprivation (Cont.)**Accommodation and planning

- It was suggested that pressure might be put on Members of Parliament to persuade the Government to permit the Planning Authority to restrict new developments in villages to rented accommodation only
- It was suggested that consideration might be given to banning the establishment of new supermarkets in towns in order to support local small businesses
- It was suggested that further pressure be put on the Government to enable all the capital generated from Council house sales to remain in East Devon in recognition that the district was one of the most unaffordable areas in the country

Consideration was given to Section 106 agreements and the benefits that could be negotiated and obtained through them. Members noted the importance of drawing up Section 106 agreements as early as possible in the planning process.

- Members expressed their support for the addition to the establishment of a Section 106 Officer

Rural Services Standard

Members considered the Rural Services Standard that was drawn up each year and revised by Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) in consultation with relevant Government departments and the Commission for Rural Communities. The purpose of the Standard was to give rural people a clear understanding of the sort of access to services they could expect. It was noted that most of the areas covered by the Standard did not significantly impact on how this Council delivered its services.

Point 4 of the Standard referred to supporting elderly people to enable them to live in their own homes.

- It was suggested that it was not always in the best interests of an elderly person to enable them to remain in their own home

Point 1 of the Standard referred to an extension in the hours during which schools looked after their pupils.

- It was suggested that extending school hours in rural areas was not feasible and would add to the level of local deprivation
- It was suggested that the Standard should include a point on the provision of affordable housing in rural areas as this was a key area of concern for many people

Discussion took place on point 6 regarding the network of rural Post Offices. It was noted that the wording of the point needed to be updated.

**RESOLVED** that the suggestions made throughout the meeting be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee for prioritising.

**RECOMMENDED** that in view of the essential and core community facility provided by Sub Post Offices, that the Council make representation to the appropriate Government department, the Local Government Association and to local Members of Parliament, to ensure that

- i) a satisfactory and substantial network of Sub Post Offices is maintained, and
- ii) that the services provided by Post Offices, such as the Card Account facility, be maintained with services offered being improved and not reduced.

**\*25 Rural deprivation (Cont.)**

(Councillor Miss J M Elson as a provider of community transport, declared a personal interest when community transport was mentioned.  
Councillor P W Burrows as an employee of a care home, declared a personal interest when discussion took place on helping elderly people stay in their own homes.  
Councillor P A Diviani declared a personal interest as the owner of a public house, when the issue of business rates for rural enterprises was discussed)

**\*26 Task and Finish Forum Status Report**

Consideration was given to the Task and Finish Forum Status Report. Members were advised that the 'Member Involvement in the political, advisory and decision making arrangements of the Council Task and Finish Forum', to be referred to as the Member Involvement TaFF, would comprise the following Councillors:

- T A Cope
- A R Giles
- Mrs A E Liverton
- G K Liverton
- R Mudge
- R C Peachey
- Dr H W Waterworth

Members requested that first meeting be arranged as soon as possible.

**\*27 Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan 2006/07**

Members were advised that the Manor House Trust had approached the Council with a view to acquiring its interest in Poltimore House. It was agreed that this proposal should be scrutinised.

Members noted that at the meeting of Council held on 11 October 2006 it had been agreed that the Scrutiny Committee should review the charges for use of Council land by small community groups and the principle of charging for planning advice. In addition, one Member suggested that it would be appropriate to consider the methodology used to determine whether the Council sells an asset and the price charged.

The Committee noted that the possible use of former East Devon railway lines as cycle routes would be considered in outline by the Corporate Overview Committee as part of their wider consideration of transport.

- RESOLVED**
1. that the Committee scrutinise the Poltimore House Trust and the proposal received from the Manor House Trust at the February 2007 meeting;
  2. that the Chairman and Vice Chairman review the items for consideration at the next meeting to ensure that the agenda is not over loaded.

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