

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 26 July 2006

Present:

Councillors:

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

R W Boote
Mrs C E Drew
H J Jeffery
Mrs A E Liverton
Mrs F I Newth
Mrs L A Roden
Mrs M A Rogers
B J Toyne
Dr H W Waterworth
Mrs E E Wragg

Also present:

Councillors:

Mrs M Boote
T A Cope
P A Diviani
Miss J M Elson
M J L Green
Ms S M Merritt
B Nicholson
Mrs P A Stott

Apologies:

Councillors:

D J Cox
A T Moulding
S C Wragg

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 9.45 pm

***8 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 28 June 2006, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

9 Quarterly monitoring of performance – first quarter 2006/07

Members noted the report of the Policy Manager on the quarterly monitoring of performance against Performance Indicators (PI) for the first quarter 2006/07. Members raised issues concerning a number of indicators. The main points were as follows:

- it was felt that progress could be made on indicator L61 Councillors accessing electronic information, by getting together those Councillors who preferred not to be e-enabled to offer them individual support from other Members and Officers and to encourage them to embrace the technology;

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Quarterly monitoring of performance – first quarter 2006/07 (Cont.)

- the importance of encouraging SMART targets, meaning specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based targets which challenged and motivated employees;
- indicator BV183 –‘the length of stay in temporary accommodation’ had been distorted by the fire in a property in Exmouth. This indicator was now improving as families had been rehoused;
- it was accepted that the level of performance on indicator L12 – ‘average void period for council homes’ was unacceptable and the Housing Needs Team was doing all it could to improve performance. It was particularly important to improve performance as there was a significant loss of rental income and over 4,000 people on the Council’s Housing Register;
- the Committee accepted that there were some ‘harder to let’ properties in the sheltered housing sector which distorted indicator L12 ;
- it was also recognised that the policy of undertaking modernisation work in void properties had an impact on void periods. Members questioned whether this policy should be reviewed again;
- when an indicator was red then there should always be a comment in the officer notes column to explain the situation;
- that indicator BV8 ‘percentage of undisputed invoices paid on time’ should be improved and invoices actioned faster than they currently were;
- it was hoped that indicator BV78a – ‘average time for processing new claims (Housing and Council Tax benefit)’ would be improved and the annual target would be met as performance has been much better during April and May;
- Members questioned indicator BV204 and how many of the planning appeals allowed were from decisions made by delegation and how many made by the Development Control Committee;
- that all PI descriptions should be easily understood and jargon free;
- Members questioned the number of Members who had received training on planning matters;
- Members questioned the method for calculating BVPI 2b.

RECOMMENDED

- 1) that all Members be trained in planning issues and that holding training sessions after Council meetings would be a good opportunity;
- 2) that the Committee continues to closely monitor Performance Indicator L12 - average void period for council homes;
- 3) that the Corporate Director – Central Services investigate Indicator BV204 - planning appeals allowed, to find out how many appeals allowed were from delegated decisions and how many on decisions made by Committee;
- 4) that the Corporate Director – Central Services review the Performance Indicator descriptions for clarity;
- 5) that the Corporate Director – Central Services circulate the Audit Commission description of the collection method for BVPI 2b.

(Councillor Miss J M Elson declared a personal interest in the licensing indicators as a holder of a taxi licence)

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Older people’s access to services

Members considered a discussion document from the Corporate Director – Communities on older people’s access to services and the issues that may cause some limitations in older people accessing services.

10 **Older people's access to services** (Cont.)

It was noted that 27% of East Devon's population was over the age of 65 and that 20% of all households in East Devon were occupied by people of pensionable age living alone. Many of the issues in the report affected the whole population of East Devon, not just older people.

It was noted that transport issues were due to be considered by the Corporate Overview Committee later in the current year.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Director – Communities produce more written information for older people about the services available.

RESOLVED that the issue of older people's access to services be discussed at meeting to be held on 25 October 2006 to consider rural deprivation, which would include issues for both younger and older people.

(Councillor Miss J M Elson declared a personal interest in Community Transport)
 (Councillor Mrs P A Stott declared a personal interest as Community Care Worker)
 (Councillor P Burrows declared a personal interest as a Care Worker)

11 **Report from the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Forum**

Members considered the final report of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Forum presented by Councillor Dr H W Waterworth. The report gave recommendations arising from the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Forum.

During discussions the following points were noted:

- the detailed and comprehensive nature of the report as presented;
- the Task and Finish Forum's intention to bring charges more into line with costs;
- it would be helpful to have a planning officer at meetings to explain items related to planning;
- the importance of consistency throughout the report, the Council and the District;
- that items 23, 26, 34, 38 and 64 in the summary report required further information;
- the Head of Street Scene Services was investigating a system to record more accurately income and expenditure for the various sports grounds and playing fields;
- the contract for the Dog Warden Service (which contained other enforcement roles) would be put to out tender in October and the Anti Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum would look into the letting of the contract before this date;
- landlords of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) would be breaking the law if they did not apply for a HMO licence and it was noted that one of the methods for investigating whether a property was a HMO was through the electoral roll;
- that only 15% of council tax payers might use electronic communication and consideration should be given to this when the Council communicated with the people of East Devon about changes in charges;
- the Housing Review Board could not review entirely the Home Safeguard Service as the service partly provided a service for North Devon District Council as well as customers in East Devon;
- that the Head of Legal and Member Services should clarify issues around the publicising of changes to charges.

11 **Report from the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Forum (Cont.)**

RECOMMENDED that the recommendations of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Forum attached as appendix A to these minutes be accepted subject to the following changes:

- (a) that use of slipways be not charged for as they were public rights of way (and that this needed to be made clear to users);
- (b) charges for commercial events to be at the discretion of the relevant Portfolio Holder in consultation with the Head of Economic Development and Property;
- (c) that the Head of Legal and Member Services be asked what item 60 of the summary document regarding the advertisement of charges related to;
- (d) that in item 68 of the summary document, the Corporate Overview Committee be requested to consider drawing up a new Marketing/Business Plan for the Home Safeguard Service and not the Housing Review Board.

(Councillors T A Cope, A R Giles and B J Toye declared prejudicial interests in the blue badge scheme as they had relatives who were blue badge holders)

*12 **Draft Forward Plan**

Consideration was given to the Draft Forward Plan for the Scrutiny Committee that had been included on the agenda. Members were keen for the item on the effectiveness of Member involvement be dealt with sooner in the timetable and suggested that it be discussed at the meeting on 20 September, with a view to establishing a Task and Finish Forum. At this meeting the national guidance for effective Member involvement would also be considered.

Members also noted that the Concessionary Fares Scheme would be considered at an appropriate date.

RESOLVED that the draft forward programme for the Scrutiny Committee be agreed, subject to the item on Effectiveness of Member Involvement being dealt with at the meeting on 20 September 2006.

Chairman Date.....