

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 28 June 2006

Present:

Councillors:

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

R W Boote
D J Cox
Mrs A E Liverton
Mrs F I Newth
Mrs L A Roden
Mrs M A Rogers
Dr H W Waterworth

Also present:

Councillors:

Mrs M J Boote
P A Diviani
S Hughes
G K Liverton
A T Moulding

Apologies:

Councillors:

Mrs C E Drew
H J Jeffery
B J Toye
Mrs E E Wragg

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.00pm

***1 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 18 April 2006, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***2 Performance Indicators**

Following a request received on behalf of the Corporate Director – Central Services in advance of the meeting consideration was given to the Performance Indicators that had been put before the Executive Board. Four Indicators in particular were discussed, namely BV8, BV64, BV78a and BV78b.

BV8 monitored the percentage of invoices paid on time. Actual performance fell below the target figure by approximately 4%. Members were advised that although this figure showed an improvement on the previous year, Officers were still keen to see a further improvement and had drawn up an action plan. The action plan involved increased awareness of staff with regard to the target and to querying disputed invoices. Members were advised that Officers disputing invoices had to give a reason and that such invoices were inspected on a random basis by the Audit Commission.

***2 Performance Indicators (Cont.)**

BV64 monitored performance with regard to vacant dwellings returned to occupation or demolished. The Council had failed to achieve its target of 8 dwellings due to the suspension of the Private Sector Leasing Scheme. This had limited the options available for bringing vacant properties back into use. An action plan, to bring performance above the national average, had been drawn up and was agreed by the Executive Board at its last meeting.

BV78a and BV78b monitored the speed of processing housing benefit claims, both indicators showed a lower than target performance for April and May 2006. Members were advised that this followed the trend that could be identified in previous years. In March every year the computer system was unavailable due to the issuing of new council tax bills and the re-calculation of benefit entitlement. This resulted in a significant increase in correspondence. The backlog of work and the additional correspondence caused a delay each year in the time taken to process claims. Staff frequently worked evenings and weekends during the busy period and agency staff were taken on. Additional temporary staff could not be employed as they would only be required for a relatively short time and had to be highly skilled. An action plan had been drawn up to address the problem and research would be carried out to see how other authorities dealt with this issue. Members were reminded of the significant improvement over previous years of these and other Housing Benefit performance indicators. The two indicators under review were annual targets, the first two months were expected to be worse than target with improved performance to be achieved for the remainder of the year.

***3 The Quality Town and Parish Council Scheme**

Members considered a report by the Chief Executive that explained what the Quality Town and Parish Council Scheme involved and the current position within East Devon. In November 2000 the Government published a Rural White Paper titled "Our Countryside; The future. A fair deal for rural England". The paper set out a number of measures to give local people increased opportunity to become more involved in the development of their local communities. The setting up of the Quality Council Scheme was central to these measures.

By the date of the meeting there were four Quality Councils in East Devon. These were the Dunkeswell and Talaton Parish Councils and the Exmouth and Sidmouth Town Councils. Members considered whether to invite representatives of these Councils to the next meeting to enable them to put forward their aspirations and/or proposals for closer working with the District Council. In addition discussion took place on whether to invite Councils considering Quality status, whether this topic should be the subject of a joint meeting with the Corporate Overview Committee and on the role of the Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that representatives of Dunkeswell Parish Council, Exmouth Town Council, Sidmouth Town Council, Talaton Parish Council and the Devon Association of Parish Councils be invited to the next meeting, to present to the Committee their aspirations and/or proposals for closer working with the District Council, with the intention of the Scrutiny Committee being able to recommend to the Executive Board the completion of appropriate partnership charters.

(Councillor Mrs A E Liverton declared a personal interest as Chairman of Sidmouth Town Council)

4 **Revenue and Capital Outturn Report 2005/06**

Members considered the report of the Financial Services Manager with regard to the outturn figures for Revenue and Capital against the original and revised budgets for the financial year 2005/06. An additional sheet was circulated at the meeting concerning a planning delivery grant which had been accidentally omitted from the original figures.

Members were advised that the outturn was closer to the estimates than in previous years. The capital balance stood at £12.191m which was consistent with previous years. Action had been taken to replenish the General Fund balance and address the trend. The situation had significantly improved as a result of the prioritisation programme. Although the Council's balances were now believed to be appropriate for the size of its budget Officers were aware that financial problems would continue to face this and every other Council.

Questions were asked with regard to the amount of agency staff used and the costs for toilet demolition/renovation.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive Board approve the 2005/06 outturn position and agree to "reserve" the committed sums of £0.944m, shown in paragraph 5.3 of the report.

*5 **Effective Action on Anti-Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum**

Members noted the membership and remit of the Forum.

RESOLVED that the remit of the Effective Action on Anti-Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum be extended to include consideration of the work of the Community Safety Officer.

*6 **Corporate Overview Committee draft forward plan**

Consideration was given to the draft forward plan for the Corporate Overview Committee that had been included on the agenda. Members considered that it would be useful for the Scrutiny Committee to draw up a forward plan.

*7 **Items for consideration at future meetings**

Members considered what topics they would like to discuss at future meetings.

It was suggested that the Committee could look at existing provision of public toilets, evaluate their on going cost, location and refurbishing plans.

The relative importance of different topics and their timings was discussed.

*7

Items for consideration at future meetings (Cont.)

RESOLVED

that a draft forward programme for the Scrutiny Committee be drawn up, with assistance from Officers, to include:

- public toilets – to consider Street Scene’s proposals for refurbishment/improvement in 2006/07
- rural deprivation – including rural transport and the difference between how we treat towns and rural areas
- the Concessionary Fares Scheme
- elderly population’s access to services
- the effectiveness of Member involvement in the political, advisory and decision making arrangements of the Council

Chairman

Date.....