

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview/Scrutiny – Communities Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Wednesday 16 September 2009

Present:

Councillors:

Helen Parr (Chairman)
Graham Troman (Vice Chairman)
Vivienne Ash
Christine Drew
Roger Giles
Marion Olive
Margaret Rogers
Philip Skinner

Officers:

Jamie Buckley – Engagement and Funding Officer
Matt Dickins – Principal Planning Officer
John Golding – Head of Housing and Social Inclusion
Peter Jeffs – Corporate Director
Kate Little – Head of Planning and Countryside Services
Rachel Perram – Democratic Services Officer
Simon Smale – Head of Environmental Health and Health Equalities

Also Present

Councillors:

Iain Chubb
Paul Diviani
Jill Elson
Graham Godbeer
Ann Liverton
Graham Liverton
Andrew Moulding

Mike Hooper – Leisure East Devon

Apologies:

Ray Bloxham
Bob Peachey
Pauline Stott
Mark Williamson

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.50pm.

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Public question time

Mr Percy, a developer of a private affordable housing scheme addressed the Committee on the subject of sustainability for rural housing. His proposal was that new houses should be heated using wood - available locally and a sustainable fuel source.

Mr Percy asked Councillors to consider setting up a working party that could support this issue and examine the technology that was available for new house building.

Councillors were supportive of Mr Percy's suggestion, citing other examples of 'green' power, such as photo-volvic roofing materials, hydroelectric systems and bio-mass boilers. The Committee also recognised that much of this technology had been available

for a number of years, but that installation costs were often prohibitive for developers. The financial benefits of these systems were seen by the future occupiers of houses.

RECOMMENDED: that the Sustainability Champion, Cllr Mrs Frances Newth be asked to set up a working party to examine sustainability in new build housing for East Devon.

8 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview/Scrutiny – Communities Committee held on 24 June 2009 were confirmed and signed as a true record subject to amendments made to the recommendations of Minute 4, as follows:

- RECOMMENDED:**
1. that it be recommended to the Development Management Committee that pending the Local Development Framework (LDF) being developed, EDDC work with Parishes and Town Councils to identify acceptable 'departure sites' (allowing modest cross subsidy) on a site by site basis,
 2. that EDDC enter into discussion with County Highways in respect of its ambitions for affordable housing and to recognise the impact of highways objections upon these,
 3. that a summit be arranged with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), the Communities Agency, the Government Office for the South West (GOSW) and Council Members with the aim to move forward affordable housing development in East Devon,
 4. that privately developed affordable housing be accepted but with the equivalent requirements to those expected of RSLs,
 5. that the Council continue to lobby Government on the subsidy paid to them from the Housing Revenue Account,
 6. that the Development Management Committee review each site as to its overall capacity and consider whether the affordable housing threshold applies, irrespective of how the site is to be developed or the phasing of it.
 7. that the Council seeks to find new funding options for undertaking Housing Needs Surveys in rural locations,
 8. that where site viability is a genuine issue, the Council to consider reducing the affordable housing percentage (along with other planning gain).

9 **Place Survey – Comparison of results**

Members considered a report produced by the Engagement and Funding Officer that examined results gained for East Devon from a national 'Place Survey'. Residents were asked to respond against 18 National Indicators. This survey was important to EDDC as these National Indicators, along with the action the Council might take to improve any poor results gained in the survey, would be assessed by the Audit Commission through the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

With regard to results for Theatres and Concert Halls, members made a number of observations:

- That poor results in the Honiton area were due to a lack of facilities in the town.
- Respondents in Exmouth were noticeably less happy than those in Sidmouth.
- Mike Hooper from Leisure East Devon (LED) advised Members that they felt that target audiences in Exmouth were very different from those of the Manor Pavilion in Sidmouth, but that LED would be carrying out further exploratory research of their customers.

With regard to doorstep recycling it was clear that residents in areas receiving the new refuse and recycling service had much higher levels of satisfaction.

RECOMMENDED: that the Committee thank the Recycling and Refuse Partnership Board for their work and that the Board be encouraged to promote their good work more widely.

Members were dismayed with results that showed that only 25% of residents felt they could influence decisions made in their local area by public service providers. To some degree Members agreed that residents were most vocal only when dissatisfied or when they did not agree with decisions made that would directly affect them. Members did recognise that the Council consulted with many groups of residents, However, on many occasions the consultation period came late in the decision making process, giving residents limited options to consider.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- 1) that the Council re-examine the way in which it consults with residents – particularly focusing upon giving a range of options to consider,
 - 2) that the Council ensure that consultation documents are readable and of a manageable size for residents to consider in a given timescale,
 - 3) that the Council consult more with respondents of the survey in order to determine particular issues,
 - 4) that the Council maximise the opportunities presented by the Sustainable Communities Act to give real decision making power to local people,
 - 5) that the Council remembers that Ward Members are also Champions for the Council's strategies and for residents' needs.

10 **Neighbourhood Assessments**

Members considered a report prepared by the Environmental Health Manager that provided an overview of the recent work carried out on neighbourhood assessments. This initiative gave the Council and other outside bodies the opportunity to consult and engage with residents, looking to deliver positive outcomes that might otherwise not have arisen.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities gave a vote of thanks to the work of the Environmental Health team, adding that this had been one of the Council's recent success stories and that this work should continue.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- 1) that the Committee recommend the actions highlighted in the report,
 - 2) that the Environmental Health team ensure that Councillors are kept informed of impending Assessments in their wards.

*11 **Virtual Affordable Housing Team & interim affordable housing policy proposal**

The Committee received a report that had been prepared by the Housing and Planning departments, that provided further information on the work of the Virtual Affordable Housing Team. The report also proposed an interim affordable housing planning policy with the aim being to encourage more affordable housing in rural areas of East Devon.

Members of the Committee were interested in the proposal and in the potential opportunity that it gave to fulfil an urgent requirement for housing for local people in the short term.

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) that the word 'launch' (para. 9.1 refers) be changed to 'preview' – to enable further debate on this matter to take place between officers, landowners and social landlords.
 - 2) that the Committee support ongoing work of the Virtual Affordable Housing Team.
 - 3) that this report be added as an Urgent Agenda Item to the forthcoming meeting of the Development Management Committee on 22 September 2009.

12 **Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2013 – review of progress**

The Committee gave consideration to a report presented by the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion, giving an update on the progress so far on the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy as well as looking at other significant issues with homeless people in East Devon.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- 1) that the progress made on the implementation of the EDDC Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2013 be noted,
 - 2) that officers be congratulated on their work with the homeless in East Devon.

*13 **Forward Plan for Scrutiny and Overview – Communities Committee**

Members of the Committee discussed various topics proposed for discussion at future meetings. Members agreed that they would like to receive presentations from Member Champions, in order to gain an overview of their roles, with a view to developing their roles further.

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) that Member Champions be invited to future meetings of the Committee to present a report giving further information on their role.
 - 2) that the Committee discuss Mental Health Issues (focusing debate around the 'New Horizons' document) at the next meeting on 28 October 2009 and that the Equalities Champion, Cllr Mrs Vivien Duval Steer be invited to join this discussion and talk about her role.

*14 **Former Gas Works, Exmouth**

Members noted the contents of a report that provided an update on the progress of an affordable housing development on the former Gas Works site in Exmouth. This development was linked to the Docks development in Exmouth and resulted from a Section 106 agreement.

Chairman Date.....