

# EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

## Minutes of a Meeting of the Environment Overview Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Thursday, 20 January 2005.

### **Present:**

Councillors:

G K Liverton (Chairman)	A S Pascoe
N J Spence (Vice Chairman)	A W J Reed
G P Chamberlain	Mrs L A Roden
A E J Dinnis	N Rogers
B O Ingham	Dr H W Waterworth
R Mudge	S C Wragg
Mrs H E Parr	

### **Also Present:**

Councillors:

P A Diviani  
A E Liverton  
A J Wilkinson

### **Apologies:**

Councillors:

D G Button  
A T Moulding

The meeting started at 6.33pm and finished at 9.06pm.

### \*56 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview Committee held on 9 December 2004, were confirmed and signed as a true record. It was noted that a report on dog bins (minute 50(b) refers) would be presented to the February meeting of the Environment Overview Committee and that a report on Council policy on PVC windows (minute 54 refers) would be presented to the March meeting of the Environment Overview Committee.

### 57 **Service Plans 2005/08**

Consideration was given to a report of the Policy Manager on Service Plans which looked back on performance during the financial year ending on 31 March and set out plans for the next three years. Members considered Service Plans for Planning, Building Control and Land Charges, Street Scene Services and Countryside Services for 2008/05. These had been prepared by the Heads of Service, at the same time as establishing financial estimates for the following year.

The Head of Planning and Countryside Services reported that it had been a successful year for the Countryside Service. A Green Flag Award had been gained for Seaton Marshes at the first attempt, the AONB management plan been produced and adopted by EDDC and DEFRA, the Education Ranger had registered his 2000<sup>th</sup> school child to visit one of EDDC's Local Nature Reserves, and performance of the arboricultural service had significantly improved.

57 **Service Plans 2005/08** (Cont'd)

The key issues to be faced by the service in 2005/08 would follow on from the Haskins Review which would change emphasis of rural delivery and present new opportunities for local authorities and the AONB and Countryside Service in land management. A biodiversity action plan would be delivered. County based initiatives set out a clear line of activity. The role of the Education Ranger would be widened and the arboricultural service would be maintained and developed so that it would continue to meet its statutory targets and provide advice/support more effectively for planning officers, as well as the monitoring of the Council's own tree stock.

On behalf of the Committee the Chairman thanked the Countryside team for their work, especially in achieving the Green Flag Award for Seaton Marshes at their first attempt.

The Head of Street Scene Services outlined the main points of the Street Scene Service Plan. The service had developed a complex nature of stakeholders and partners, and this list was growing all the time. The service had been working with the Police and voluntary groups to tackle crime and disorder and anti social behaviour. It was still developing the customer contact centre and it was noted that the majority of the Street Scene vehicles now ran on a dual fuel system, LPG/petrol. A key strategy was the Municipal Waste Strategy for East Devon which had been approved in October 2004.

The Head of Street Scene informed Members that the omitted finance figures (excluding capital charges) were gross expenditure £6,435,660, income £1,587,000 and net expenditure £4,848,660. The key strengths of the service included the good level of public satisfaction, the Green Flag Award for Connaught Gardens and the Britain in Bloom success. It was noted that the results from the General User Satisfaction Survey 2003/04 demonstrated that two of the services operated by Street Scene were in the top 25 per cent of Councils in the country, with another almost in the top quartile. Many compliments had been received from town and parish councils and positive feedback had resulted from the introduction of rigid bins in the Colony area of Exmouth.

Over the last 18 months the service had been undergoing development following its restructuring. Staff vacancies still remained however all staff had worked hard and persevered. The split of service deliveries into East and West across the district was working successfully. The Comprehensive Performance Assessment recognised that the Council maintained public open spaces to a high standard and that its efforts to keep the locality clean were good. There were a number of key issues to be faced in 2005/08 for the service. The new refuse and recycling contracts would be a challenge, as well as addressing recycling performance. There was a need to address the lack of current ICT systems and programmes in order to improve performance. There would be continuing restructuring to ensure efficiencies in the service. There were many capital schemes planned which were all in the capital programme. There was need to develop and update strategies, policies and procedures to determine service delivery.

Another challenge would be the continual growth in the services as new roads, amenity areas etc were delivered, which Street Scene would be expected to maintain. Street Scene would be working closely with the Planning team to secure funding through agreements in order to receive money from developers to meet some of the increase in work as the area grew. Major financial implications would flow as a consequence of the new refuse collection and recycling contracts. There was a need to investigate a strategy for the continued replacement of plant and vehicles. It was noted that many of the key outcomes planned required capital programme funding and some were dependant on DEFRA approval prior to receiving part funding.

57 **Service Plans 2005/08** (Cont'd)

The work that Street Scene did with the community was important, and it was felt that one of the most important services the Council provided was street cleansing. On behalf of the Committee the Chairman congratulated and gave his grateful thanks to the Street Scene team and hoped that its good work continued.

The Head of Planning and Countryside Services reported that the Planning Service Plan covered all the parts of the service, which included planning, building control, and land charges. She informed Members that the omitted finance figures from the Planning Service plan were gross expenditure £3,093,320, income £2,132,200 and net expenditure £961,120. Members felt that a breakdown of the finances related to the individual parts of the service would be helpful.

The Policy and Conservation team prepared and reviewed the Local Plan, which had reached inquiry stage and was programmed for adoption in spring 2006. They also produced planning briefs, supplementary planning guidance, assisted local communities with community planning initiatives and were involved with policy issues relating to the new community. Development Control still dealt with enormous numbers of planning applications. It was noted that EDDC was no longer a Standards Council on minor category applications and therefore no longer 'on watch' by the Government. However, as the department had not met national targets across the board, this had resulted in a lower planning delivery grant for the following financial year. The department was very successful at appeals, with figures well above the national average. Building Control had been through a Best Value Review and were now implementing the changes and restructuring. Building Control had an increasing workload. The planning administration team had successfully implanted a new database which allowed greater public access to information, and less demand on officer time. The Land Charges team completed 98 per cent of searches within 3 days (the target was 10 days) and was the fastest in Devon at turning around searches.

The biggest single challenge for the service in the future would be managing the delivery of the new community and the large employment projects east of Exeter, as well as the regeneration projects at Exmouth and Seaton. These would have significant resource implications and a profound impact on workload.

The theme across all the Planning services was a drop in income, and this was related to the housing market. There was a disproportionate gap between the funds brought in by and the cost of large applications/projects. There was a need to improve speed of performance, however the loss of income led to a pressure on the ability of the service to cope. Land Charges and Building Control were having to compete with external competition.

Working in partnership for the Planning Service was very important, especially regarding the new community. This took up a lot of time, but was worthwhile. It was important for the service to be proactive. There was a need to do more work with town and parish councils and a co-ordinated approach was required.

Members were invited to spend a day in the planning department to observe the activity and workload of the staff. The Head of Planning and Countryside Services was thanked for a clearly presented plan and the Chairman gave the Committee's grateful thanks to all the departments in the service.

It was noted that it was a key factor that the Service Plans had been prepared by Heads of Service in light of current policy and in conjunction with the establishment of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2005/08. It was requested that in the Service Plans under section 'resources' and 'staff', FTEs be stated as well as an explanation on how the staff of the service were structured, such as a management chart demonstrating responsibilities.

57 **Service Plans 2005/08** (Cont'd)

It was felt that there was a gap between the key issues to be faced in 2005/08 and resources required to implement and achieve the service plan. Members requested information on whether it was possible to meet the key issues to be faced in 2005/08 without additional resources and wanted a clear statement to be added to the resources required to implement and achieve the service plan section indicating how the key issues identified would be tackled. The Corporate Director – Environment agreed to take this point back to the Strategic Management Team as a discussion point for all Service Plans.

It was noted that there were no figures included in the performance indicators sections in any of the Service Plans and Members requested figures for 2003/04. The Corporate Director – Environment reported that it had been a corporate decision not to include these figures and the Chairman requested that a full explanation be sent to all members of the Environment Overview Committee from the Policy team.

**RECOMMENDED** (1) that the Service Plans for Planning, Building Control and Land Charges, Street Scene Services and Countryside Services for 2005/08 be approved, subject to the comments made by the Committee during its discussions.

58 **Draft Revenue and Capital Estimates 2005/06**

Consideration was given to a report of the Corporate Director – Economy concerning the draft revenue and capital estimates for 2005/06. It was noted that the Service Plans were linked to the budget proposals. The Executive Board at its meeting on 17 January 2005 had agreed the estimates. The Finance Manager explained the procedure and the cuts/savings. He also outlined the major changes in the Environment budget. There had been a reduction in expenditure and an increase in charges. It was noted that there was a £1.7million funding gap in the capital bids received and the funds available. Suggestions were welcomed over how this could be altered to deliver a balanced budget.

The Corporate Director – Environment reported that the Executive Board had recommended that the Exmouth Sea Wall strengthening works be fast tracked to September 2005, however there was a need to consider where the capital funding gap could be filled.

Members felt that the overall increase in Environment portfolio employee costs was very reasonable. Concern was expressed over increased employee costs in services where there had been reductions in income and it was questioned how long the current staff levels could be sustained.

It was felt that the proposed figure under Coast Protection supplies and services was insufficient and it was noted that the Liberal Democrats would be taking their financial recommendations to the February meeting of the full council. At present the Liberal Democrat members wished to reserve their judgement on financial matters until they presented their case and overall view at full council.

It was noted that incorrect information had been sent to town and parish councils regarding the possible closure of public conveniences. This had generated much criticism and negative reaction and the Chairman requested that the Chief Executive issue a public statement to clarify the situation.

**RECOMMENDED** (1) that the draft revenue and capital estimates for 2005/06 relevant to the Environment Overview Committee be approved.

(Councillor N Rogers wished for his abstention from voting be recorded).

Chairman .....

Date.....