

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 1 July 2009

Present:

Councillors:

Ray Bloxham (Chairman)
Bob Peachey (Vice-Chairman)

David Atkins
Iain Chubb
Trevor Cope
Christine Drew
Chris Gibbings
Roger Giles
Graham Godbeer
Steve Hall

David Key
Frances Newth
Marion Olive
Helen Parr
Graham Troman
Eileen Wragg
Steve Wragg

Officers:

Peter Jeffs – Corporate Director
Karime Hassan – Corporate Director
Diccon Pearse – Corporate Director
Debbie Meakin – Democratic Services Officer

Also Present

Councillors:

Vivienne Ash
Graham Brown
Geoff Chamberlain
Paul Diviani
J Elson
Stuart Hughes

Andrew Moulding
Sara Randall Johnson
Margaret Rogers
Phillip Skinner
Pauline Stott
Tim Wood

Apologies:

Jim Knight
Stephanie Jones
Peter Halse
Bob Buxton

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.20pm.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee.

***1 Public question time**

There were no questions from the public raised at this point of the meeting.

***2 Remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee**

The Chairman reminded Members present of the remit of the new Committee, covering the role of co-ordinating the work of the other three Overview and Scrutiny Committees as well as undertaking its own work including:

***2 Remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee (continued)**

- Developing partnership working, helping to achieve integrated Devon service delivery;
- Achieving savings through remote working with neighbouring authorities;
- Working with parish councils, Police, Fire and the Primary Care Trust;
- Comprehensive Area Assessment issues;
- Local Strategic Partnership commissioning;
- Crime and Disorder.

Members accepted that there would be some overlapping of work within the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and that this would be closely monitored by the regular communication between the four Chairman and Vice Chairman of those committees. Additional meetings could be called if necessary, and the Portfolio Holders and Member Champions would be extensively involved. The role was clarified as a combination of the previous civic year's Scrutiny and Corporate Overview Committees.

***3 Resolutions from the former Scrutiny Committee on improvement to the Scrutiny function**

The Chairman outlined his brief discussions with officers on the resolutions listed. The role of Scrutiny Officer had been raised at other meetings and recommendations made; however the Executive Board had made its decision previously not to appoint a dedicated officer.

Poltimore House would also be monitored as had been previously undertaken by the former Scrutiny Committee.

***4 Minutes from the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Iain Chubb shared with Members the general direction this Committee would be taking, outlining focus on business growth and development, business infrastructure and support services, recession impact on market towns (including reviewing the Town Manager role) and information technology development.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

***5 Minutes from the Service Delivery and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Steve Hall reported to Members the work undertaken at his first meeting of this Committee, including reports presented on the improvements to the Planning and Benefits services following the implementation of systems thinking. He congratulated the teams on their progress. There had also been discussion around communication of the positive work of the Council.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Service Delivery and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

***6 Minutes from the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Helen Parr advised Members that her Committee had prioritised affordable housing on which a number of recommendations had been made. The Committee had also supported a proposal under the Sustainable Communities Act on retaining Housing Revenue Account subsidy for affordable housing; a proposal also supported by the Housing Review Board.

*6 **Minutes from the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (continued)**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

7 **Land Supply for Housing**

Councillor Phillip Skinner updated Members on the work of the Land Supply for Housing Task and Finish Forum, originally set up by the former Scrutiny Committee to validate the Council's five year supply figure and to ensure that this was robust. This was undertaken in light of the decision of the Secretary of State approving permission on appeal for 300 dwellings at Exminster. This appeal followed Teignbridge District Council's refusal of an outline planning application. The view was taken that TDC had inadequate land supply, and as a result this outweighed planning policy considerations.

Extensive work had been carried out by the Forum in both discussion with officers on the figures provided, and on the deliverability of the sites listed; the Forum had also undertaken site visits as another means of validation. Four recommendations were presented to the Committee for consideration.

Members sought clarification on how the work of the Forum fitted with the Local Development Framework Panel, and the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.

The remit of the Forum covered the five year supply figure calculated on 1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008 site listing; it did not cover identifying new land. The LDF Panel had the role of looking at the 15 year requirements and review forthcoming sites; the SHLAA fed into the LDF work looking at all possible sites for the long term. The Forum had formed the view that the five year supply figure was valid but there was still a risk; and that even to meet that five year requirement, the Council was still falling far short of meeting the corporate priority of affordable housing in the District.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities voiced her concern on the lack of homes built for the rental market; and the need not only to build homes for young people of the District, but to support them with the necessary matching in social and health services.

The Chairman of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee outlined to Members the virtual Affordable Housing Delivery Team now operating, consisting of officers from Housing and Planning services, and their plans to present a policy for the consideration of her Committee.

Members also debated the pros and cons to any departure from planning policy as recommended by the Forum. Members were in general agreement that the Council could not afford to wait until the local plan was replaced in 2-3 years, and action was needed promptly.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee endorse the view of the Forum that there was barely a five year supply of housing land for the District, and therefore the Council could be vulnerable on appeal (depending on the interpretation of the Planning Inspector) and therefore work must begin on bringing forward more potential sites.

7 **Land Supply for Housing (continued)**

RECOMMENDED

1. that the Development Management Committee consider the five year land supply on a District basis, acknowledge that the figure is close to the threshold, and take urgent action as set out in recommendations 2 and 3 below;
2. that the Development Management Committee take urgent action to have sites reviewed for potential urban extension of Pinhoe following the report of the LDF Panel in September;
3. that urgent action be taken by the Development Management Committee to help secure appropriate affordable housing, especially for rural communities, and that the Development Management Committee be responsive to innovative ways of making the building of affordable homes viable, and liaises with the work of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

*8 **Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee Forward Plan**

The Chairman suggested that the focus for the next few meetings should be around the Comprehensive Area Assessment, looking at the impact it will have on the Council and on partnership working. Members agreed with this in principle.

RESOLVED

that a report on Comprehensive Area Assessment be referred to the next meeting for discussion and for the information to include the likely impact this assessment would have on the Council and on partnership working.

Chairman

Date.....