

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 18 November 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

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

Officers:

Donna Best - Principal Estates Surveyor
Karime Hassan – Corporate Director
Peter Jeffs – Corporate Director
Kate Little – Head of Planning and Countryside
Denise Lyon – Corporate Director
Diccon Pearse – Corporate Director
Debbie Meakin – Democratic Services Officer
Mark Williams – Chief Executive

Martin Green – CAA Lead, Audit Commission

Also Present

Councillors:

Vivienne Ash
Graham Brown
Geoff Chamberlain
David Cox
Andrew Dinnis
Paul Diviani

Jill Elson
Mike Green
Peter Halse
Ann Liverton
Phillip Skinner
Pauline Stott
Tim Wood

Apologies:

Jim Knight
Barry Nicholson
Eileen Wragg

Andrew Moulding

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.55pm.

***18 Public question time**

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

*19 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on 23 September 2009 were confirmed as a true record.

*20 **Comprehensive Area Assessment**

The Chairman welcomed Martin Green, CAA Lead from the Audit Commission.

Martin Green outlined the change from the previous Comprehensive Performance Assessment to the current Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). The assessment still covered the elements of the use of resources and managing performance, combined under the title of the organisational assessment. In addition, there was an area element, which examined the County as a whole, and how agencies and public bodies worked in partnership for the benefit of the communities they served.

The assessment for this year will be published online at "One Place", along with all other assessments carried out nationally, on 10 December 2009. The website would become a valuable source for examples of good practice.

In undertaking the assessment, the Audit Commission no longer required a large team of inspectors to visit the District Council in person. Mr Green advised that he had access to the published minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and therefore could gauge what action those Committees were taking. He advised the Members continue to have a pro-active role, using assessment results to drive their forward plan in both learning from positive aspects, as well as driving improvements for negative factors.

Members were advised to look particularly to:

- Improving provision of affordable housing
- Increasing the pace of the roll out of the new recycling and refuse service
- Look at the success of the Community Safety Partnership as good practice
- Focus on "hard to reach" residents of the District
- Consider, on each review, how it would improve the quality of life for local communities
- Keep value for money in mind, in light of the current economic climate and looking to save money by partnership working.

The organisational assessment was undertaken and reported on an annual basis. The area assessment would be reviewed more often, perhaps on a six monthly or even quarterly basis.

Members highlighted some points of good practice by the District Council, including the recent award of a Charter mark to the Licensing Service; the work of the Housing Review Board in pushing to retain housing subsidy; and the high satisfaction rate of housing tenants.

Future plans for service improvement would now be taken into account in the area assessment, but would not help towards a high score; merely prevent a bad score. There would be minimal consideration of the town and parish councils because of the resource required to look directly at their operations; however, the area assessment would consider all of the partnership working undertaken by the District council.

The Chairman thanked Martin Green for discussing the new assessment process with Members and looked forward to working with him as an ongoing process in striving for improvement.

21 **Charging for Pre-application advice**

Kate Little, Head of Planning and Countryside, reminded Members of the work undertaken with the systems thinking review of the Planning service. As a result of the review, capacity had been built to open up a pre-application advice service, which had since received a high number of requests. In order to maintain that provision, and further enhance the service, introducing a fee scheme for pre-application advice would fund the provision and free up other areas of the service, required for forthcoming major applications which were resource intensive.

Members were also informed of a recent meeting held with agents on the topic of charging for pre-application advice and the views of the agents at that meeting.

Members raised a number of concerns about the principle of charging for pre-application advice, including:

- Clarity to applicants and agents that the advice in no way prejudiced the decision on the application – this would be clear in written advice to the applicant;
- Whether there was a need for pre-application advice for large developers, who obtained services of agents and solicitors to work through what was required in an application – Mrs Little responded that experience of major applications submitted showed that errors did occur in around half of those submitted; and that although national policy was taken into account, local needs were not – therefore the service would provide local added value;
- The need to present clearly to the applicant what the expectation is on providing details of the application, and the expectation of what the quality of the advice would be – this would be clearly set out in the operational details of the scheme;
- Time was needed to publicise the scheme and therefore a start date should be aimed at February 2010;
- Members were keen to monitor how successful charging for applications categories 1 – 3 (large scale majors to small major) before considering if charging for categories 4 – 5 (minor and householder) was appropriate.

RECOMMENDED

1. that the Development Management Committee endorse the proposed charging regime for pre-application advice for “major” category (shown as 1 – 3 in the report) planning applications, with effect from early February 2010;
2. that the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee be consulted before implementation of a charging regime for pre-application advice for “minor” category (shown as 4 – 5 in the report) planning applications;
3. that the Development Management Committee agrees that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee comment on the draft operational details of the scheme, being offered at ‘pre-application’ stage, once drafted by the Head of Planning and Countryside. That the draft also be sent by e-mail to all Members of the committee. Members to have the option to bring it to the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee if they have serious concerns about the detail..

22 **Asset Management**

Donna Best, Principal Estates Surveyor, briefed Members on the Asset Management Plan and the role of the Asset Management Forum. Members were asked to consider what their role would be in monitoring the delivery of the plan and the line of reporting in relation to final decisions made by the Executive Board.

A booklet on asset management aimed at senior decision makers was circulated. Further background information on asset management can be found at <http://www.publicsectorassetmanagement.com/index.php>. Clarity was provided on the Asset Management Forum, which was not a decision making body and worked at a strategic level in terms of managing assets, rather than operational aspects.

Some members debated the merits of additional elected members on the Asset Management Forum to help towards more customer focus on the use of assets. Peter Halse, Portfolio Holder for Economy and member of the Asset Management Forum, reiterated to Members that the Forum acted at a strategic level and any decisions had to be made by the Executive Board.

RESOLVED

1. that on completion of a task as defined in the Asset Management Plan, the task is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee before going before the Executive Board;
2. that the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee will monitor the Asset management Plan on a regular basis.

RECOMMENDED

3. that the Executive Board considers appointment of a Member Champion for Asset Management.

23 **Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009**

The Chairman outlined to Members recent changes in legislation, which provides powers to the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, as the designated Crime and Disorder Committee.

Guidance from the Home Office advised joint scrutiny arrangements for those authorities already operating a joint Community Safety Partnership. East Devon has been working with Mid Devon for some time, along with other statutory bodies, as the East and Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership.

The Chairman informed Members of a recent meeting with the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee of Mid Devon District Council and other officers to discuss a joint working arrangement. A protocol for the operation of the new committee is being drafted.

Chris Gibbings, Member Champion for Community Safety, endorsed the recommendation of a joint committee to comply with the legislation. He also recommended that Members consider a recent publication entitled "CRIMEWATCH - effective scrutiny of police and crime", available at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/4484435>.

Several Members put themselves forward for this new committee and the Chairman agreed to resolve the final membership.

23 **Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009 (cont.)**

RESOLVED that localised issues requiring reviewing by the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee be presented to the Committee through regular reports from the Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator; and by Ward Members as permitted under the Police and Justice Act 2006;

RECOMMENDED that two Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee members sit, along with the Chairman, on the The East and Mid Devon Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee

*24 **Local Area Agreement**

The Chairman advised Members that this item is closely linked with the item on the Forward Plans of the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the four Committees would be discussing a programme of work to scrutinise the LAA, along with other related work, at their next meeting on the 2 December 2009.

Peter Jeffs, Corporate Director, put into context the 14 LAA priorities for East Devon set out in the agenda, drawn from 34 priorities for Devon as a whole, which in turn were drawn from over 100 government priorities. The Council agreed to the 14 priorities in February 2008 as did the Local Strategic Partnership. Members were asked to consider the "in what way" column and creative suggestions were welcomed.

*25 **Update from the Chairman of Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Chubb informed Members of a presentation from Flybe at the last meeting; and of an extensive tour of the Business Centre. He confirmed that a programme of consulting with the Chambers of Commerce was being finalised.

*26 **Update from the Chairman of Service Delivery and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Hall advised Members of increased Member engagement at the Committee; however there was still an issue of low attendance.

*27 **Update from the Chairman of Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Mrs Parr advised Members of her successful meeting centering on Mental Health. She did feel, however, further honing of scrutiny skills would be beneficial.

*28 **Overview and Scrutiny Committees Forward Plans**

The Chairman advised Members of the scheduled meeting of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees on 2 December 2009 to discuss the future workload of the Committees in depth.

Chairman Date.....