

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 2 April 2008

Present:

Councillors:

Roger Giles (Chairman)
Jim Knight (Vice Chairman)

David Chapman
Christine Drew
Vivien Duval Steer
John Jeffery
Frances Newth

Barry Nicholson
Margaret Rogers
Graham Troman

Officers:

Simon Davey – Head of Finance
Karime Hassan – Corporate Director
Denise Lyon – Corporate Director
Rachel Pocock – Head of Legal, Licensing and Democratic Services
Debbie Meakin – Democratic Services Officer

Also Present

Councillors:

Miss V Ash
P Bowden
T A Cope
Miss J Elson
M L J Green
A T Moulding

Mrs P Stott
C T Tratt

Apologies:

Councillors:

Douglas Hull
Darryl Nicholas
Philip Skinner
Eileen Wragg

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.35pm

*66

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 5 March 2008, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

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Urgent items: Questions to Dr Snee, Chief Executive of the Primary Care Trust

The Chairman had attended Executive Board on the 26 March 2008, to ask questions of Dr Snee of the Primary Care Trust (PCT) as agreed by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 6 February 2008. The Chairman and some of the Members expressed their disappointment that the Chairman had been asked to send his questions to Dr Snee in writing.

*67 **Urgent items: Questions to Dr Snee, Chief Executive of the Primary Care Trust (continued)**

- RESOLVED**
1. that a letter containing the agreed Scrutiny questions be sent to Dr Snee of the PCT; and the reply circulated amongst Members as soon as received;
 2. that the Chairman meets with the Leader to discuss how to alert the Executive Board to Scrutiny Committee's requests.

68 **The Role of Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the Community Call for Action**

The Head of Legal, Licensing and Democratic Services took Members through her report on the increased statutory functions of Overview and Scrutiny, as set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement Act 2007, Section 119, which amends the Local Government Act 2000. Once in force, and the detailed regulations are made, a further report will be made to Scrutiny.

Reference to digital advances was explained, including examples such as the use of blogs, and social networking sites. The report of the Councillors Commission was recommended for reading, as it contained some useful ideas for Members in helping to engage the public.

The 2007 Act would also give more power to the Committee in encouraging the Council's partners, such as the PCT, to work to achieve joint targets.

Members fully supported face to face engagement with the public, as encouraged by the report of the Councillors Commission. Safety issues in dealing face to face with members of the public in particular situations were discussed, concerning possible risks both with inviting a constituent to a Member's home, and to an arranged surgery in a local community hall.

- RESOLVED**
1. that the report be noted;
 2. that a further report be made to the Scrutiny Committee once the regulations on Community Call for Action are available, to include guidelines on Member safety when dealing with aggressive members of the public.

RECOMMENDED that Scrutiny Committee be designated as the committee responsible for the statutory function under Community Call for Action.

69 **Review of Service and Budget Planning Process**

Members received a presentation from the Head of Finance on the current process adopted for service and budget planning. Members were reminded of the extensive work undertaken by both Members and officers, starting in June of the previous financial year. In September, both Scrutiny and Corporate Overview Members consider the Financial Strategy and recommend a steer on the service plans and budgets.

In turn this helped inform each service's Service Planning Day where the details of the service plan were refined; and fed into the Joint Task and Finish Forum. The Forum's constructive work on the service plan detail and budgets is then fed into the Joint Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which made recommendation to the Executive Board.

Review of Service and Budget Planning Process (continued)

The Portfolio Holder for Resources reminded Members of the greatly improved process, which arose out of the service prioritisation work carried out a few years before. He commended the detailed examination process, which was now embedded in the service plan and budget framework, and involved both Members and officers extensively.

Members commented favourably on the previous year's Visioning exercise. It was suggested that the Town and Parish Councils could be consulted on a yearly basis to discuss the vision for their area.

The integration of the climate change strategy into the service planning and budget process was also discussed. Every aspect of the Council's work would require some form of methodology to calculate any carbon aspect. It was agreed that the Corporate Overview Committee had extensive work planned for the forthcoming year on climate change, and Members were keen not to duplicate any work undertaken by that committee.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the format of the one-day Task and Finish Forum for considering Service Planning and Budgets be reviewed;
 2. that Members be fully briefed and receive necessary training, in order to be able to make informed decisions during the one-day Task and Finish Forum and joint meetings of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committees on Service Planning and Budgets; including an explanation of the methodology set out in the Capital Strategy;
 3. that the timetable for the Service Planning and Budget be reviewed, to assess if Members can be involved at an earlier stage of the process.

Asset Management Forum update

Councillor Andrew Moulding, Portfolio Holder for Resources, was welcomed to address this item. He explained to Members the recent review of the Asset Management Forum. The review had started from scratch and included updating the terms of reference (still in draft stage at that time) and considering the assets of the Council in a corporate sense. The aim was to meet the needs of the Corporate Strategy, rather than the previous approach of a service piecemeal setup.

Karime Hassan, Corporate Director, gave the Members an overview of the role of the Forum:

- The Asset Management was different from Property Management, where the consideration was not about achieving best price, but how to deliver to the community in line with the Corporate Strategy, such as delivering affordable housing or assisting regeneration;
- Bringing together assets from different services to consider best use in line with corporate requirements;
- Carrying out option appraisals when considering each asset;
- Taking into account whole life costs; for example, taking on more land for use as "open space" needed to include consideration of costs to bring land up to requirements and ongoing maintenance;
- Making customer satisfaction integral to how assets are managed;
- Involving the third sector (voluntary sector) with management of assets;
- Early involvement of Ward Members to discuss options on assets.

70 **Asset Management Forum update (continued)**

The Head of Legal, Licensing and Democratic Services explained to Members the advisory function of the Forum. The Forum recommendations would go before Executive Board or the relevant Portfolio Holder for a decision, or be dealt with under existing officer delegations as appropriate.

Members were in agreement that the Forum was working well but had some reservations as set out in the recommendations below.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the notes from the Asset Management Forum of 25 February 2008, item 5 Land at Harepath Road, Seaton be amended to show that the existing employment site referred to is designated as both employment and recreational land equally in the East Devon Local Plan;
 2. that the notes from the Asset Management Forum of 25 February 2008 , item 4 Discussion on the future of the Asset Management Forum, point 3 be amended to show that Ward Members should be involved from the beginning in all matters affecting their ward;
 3. that future notes of the Asset Management Forum contain reference to recommendations, and not decisions, to help avoid confusion.

RESOLVED that, following the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on the 2 April 2008, a task and finish forum on Use of Assets be no longer required.

71 **Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

Members considered the Forward Plan for the Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive Board writes to the Poltimore House Trust to ask them to provide the Council with their ten year business plan and risk assessment promptly.

- RESOLVED**
1. that the report on Anti-Social Behaviour, to include reference to vandalism to EDDC properties, is referred to the Scrutiny Committee, in light of the committee's recent Anti-Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum;
 2. that standard items such as performance and service plan monitoring, and service planning and budgets, be added to the Forward Plan for Scrutiny;
 3. that the future planned meeting on engaging young people be held at an alternative venue, more suited to aid their attendance.
 4. that Poltimore House representatives be invited back to Scrutiny Committee for the July meeting, to give an update on the production of their ten year business plan and risk assessment

*72 **Task and Finish Forum Status Report**

Members noted the Task and Finish Forum Status report which presented details of the current Task and Finish Forums. Members agreed that future TaFFs could be set up following completion of reviews, such as the current system thinking reviews for planning and housing benefits, giving the service six to twelve months for the new procedures and systems to bed in.

RESOLVED

1. that the Forum on Use of Assets be removed;
2. that the Beach Concessions Forum be included as the Forum was continuing, now considering the risk assessments for Exmouth and Beer.

Chairman Date.....