

# **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 5 March 2008**

**Present:**

Councillors:

A R Giles (Chairman)  
J A Knight (Vice Chairman)

Mrs C E Drew  
Ms V Duval Steer  
D R H Hull  
K D Nicholas

B Nicholson  
P J Skinner  
G M Troman  
Mrs E E Wragg

Officers:

Simon Davey – Head of Finance  
Andrew Jarrett – Financial Services Manager  
Peter Jeffs – Corporate Director  
Denise Lyon – Corporate Director  
Debbie Meakin – Democratic Services Officer  
Steve Rippin – Streetscene Manager  
Mark Williams – Chief Executive  
Len Wright – Senior Car Park Inspector

**Also Present**

Councillors:

Miss V Ash  
D J Cox  
G Brown  
Miss J Elson  
P Halse  
A T Moulding

Mrs H Parr  
Mrs P Stott  
C T Tratt

**Apologies:**

Councillors:

Mrs F I Newth  
Mrs M A Rogers  
H J Jeffery  
S C Luxton

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.40pm

\*59

**Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 6 February 2008, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

At Executive Board on 27 February 2008 the recommendation to Full Council was that Minute 53 recommendation 13 be amended to “that the minimum level of competency for all employees and Councillors be agreed”

## 60 **Civil Parking Enforcement**

The Finance Manager gave a brief update to the report presented to Members. The live date for the switch from Police responsibility to County and District remained as the 5 May 2008, and key tasks required before this deadline remained.

A welcome meeting of the transferring traffic wardens was successful, and negotiations were taking place to procure the information management software necessary to carry out the issue and management of the penalty tickets.

The Chairman welcomed Lester Willmington, Head of Highway Management at Devon County Council. Mr Willmington explained to Members the County Council's involvement with all the District authorities, working to gain efficiencies in on-street parking and working towards improved highway management.

Members robustly challenged the financial aspects of the new arrangements. The aspects were explained as set out below:

- On-street parking revenue is ring-fenced as per Section 55 of the Traffic Management Act 2004, the revenue returning to the County Council to be used for the benefit of motorists in the County;
- Off-street parking revenue from Penalty Charge Notices is used for the benefit of motorists, specifically in the East Devon area.
- Two separate accounts would operate; one for the revenue from on-street parking, and one for off-street.
- The County Council would cover any reasonable expenses for the setting up and costs incurred once operating, provided that the District authority provided an efficiently run service.
- Any surplus collected will go to Devon County Council in response to the outlay by the County for the setting up of the enforcement arrangements. The Head of Finance reassured Members that the provision made by the County, for the set up and ongoing cost of civil parking enforcement, is generous, and that any deficit, should they occur under the new arrangements, will be picked up by the County.
- There was inconsistency between charges in certain areas and the necessary changes have been made.
- The cost of the appeal process to the National Parking Adjudication Scheme (NPAS) was covered by an element of the cost of the parking fine. The NPAS is an independent body and their decision on the issue of a parking fine is final.

Members moved onto the subject of staffing numbers, debating if the number was sufficient to cover the District. The main points discussed were:

- A drop in staffing levels recently had meant that traffic wardens or Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) have not been at full strength – therefore only 3.5 full time equivalent posts were transferring over to the District Council under Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE).
- Six additional staff for the on-street enforcement duties would be operating in addition to the four full time and five seasonal car park attendants currently in place. Recruitment was necessary to fill the posts, and training would be required to enable each post to monitor both on-street and off-street parking. All posts are referred to as Civil Enforcement Officers (CEO) and in future could be expanded to take on other powers.
- Mr Willmington gave assurances that consideration will be given to additional staff if a need is clearly identified, once the new operations are in place.

Discussion took place on the level of tolerance towards offenders once the new arrangements were in place; some Members were keen for a more robust approach to parking offences than has been in operation in recent months.

## 60 **Civil Parking Enforcement (continued)**

Mr Willmington explained that, due to the current public perception of little if any enforcement, to enforce all offences from the 5 May 2008 would be likely to cause strong protest from the public. He recommended that an approach of using warnings was the best option, described as a “grace period”, along with media coverage to explain that enforcement would be much more stringent after that period.

Steve Rippin explained to Members that, with the need to recruit and train the CEOs, it was likely that the operations would need 3 to 4 months to bed in and therefore this was likely to be the period of grace. Members were in agreement that following the grace period, enforcement should be undertaken rigorously.

The consistency of charges and enforcement in relation to seasonal usage for on-street parking and increasing charges for off-street parking was debated, as there appeared to be no convergence of charging in relation to the charges normally put in place on Maunday Thursday. The possibility of charging for on-street parking was also briefly discussed and identified as an area that needed careful consideration in the future.

Officers were thanked for their clear responses to the Members’ questions.

[Cllrs A R Giles and B Nicholson declared a personal interest as they were both Members of the Environment, Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee at Devon County Council]

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the tasks set out in the report on Civil Parking Enforcement under paragraph 3 be endorsed;
  2. that consideration be given by Officers to review the inconsistencies between seasonal charging and use, with a view to producing a consistent scheme to avoid public confusion.

## 61 **Review of Leisure East Devon**

Members both from Scrutiny Committee and other interested Members had attended a presentation and tour on the 4 March 2008, of the East Devon Tennis Centre and later of the Exmouth Sports Centre.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive of Leisure East Devon (LED), Mr David Pagett, for his warm welcome and hospitality on the 4 March 2008. Members agreed that the tour had been a useful exercise to gain an idea of the level of facilities available and the number of patrons at the Exmouth facilities, especially the number of younger patrons.

Members questioned Mr Pagett on a number of issues in relation to the level of service being provided by LED on behalf of the District Council, as set out below:

### a) Outreach work in the District

- Mr Pagett enlightened Members on the success of the Walk This Way campaign, aimed at those wanting low-impact activity. In 2006, Walk This Way attracted 4,511 participants; increasing to 5,577 in 2007.
- LED were looking at options, through their marketing plan, to make use of local community and village halls to extend leisure out from the Centres and into local communities.

61 **Review of Leisure East Devon (continued)**

- Five of the Centres are of dual use with local schools and those connections were being used to promote leisure activities at assemblies.
- Some outreach work has been done in respect of developing future tennis facilities in Honiton and Seaton.
- Mr Pagett agreed to liaise with the Youth Member Champion for future youth outreach work.

## b) Sourcing other funding and increasing revenue

- Subscription members currently stood at 3,000 of the 10,000 registered members and LED was actively trying to increase that proportion.
- LED are actively working with their partners to increase funding.
- LED had asked the Primary Care Trust (PCT) previously for funding towards the PULSE project, the cardiac rehabilitation scheme, which continues to be actively used. The referral scheme was expensive to run and manage but had to be provided, and at a reasonable cost per session, currently at £3.20. No funding had been forthcoming. Members were in agreement that both LED and the Council should approach the PCT again to help fund this valuable service.
- Recent expenditure on upgrading gym facilities at Exmouth had resulted in more patrons.
- LED was exploring the opportunity for bike hire for use on the new cycle paths due to the location of the Exmouth Centre being at the start of the route.

## c) Maintaining and new facilities

- Members were keen for the existing buildings to be maintained to a high standard.
- The District Council undertakes building maintenance; the supply of equipment falls to LED to undertake. Work had just started on extending and improving the gym at Honiton.
- LED was keen to be involved in any plans for leisure provision in the regeneration of Exmouth and Seaton. Peter Jeffs, Corporate Director reminded Members that LED was not the sole provider of leisure in East Devon, and therefore both the Council could not assume that LED would provide services in all cases.

## d) Sustainability Issues

- Patrons of the centres had previously been encouraged to walk or cycle to the centres rather than drive, in the interests both of health and reducing carbon emissions. Take up had been poor even though facilities, including some sheltered sites, for storing bikes are available at the centres.
- LED are working with the Carbon Trust to reduce the large energy use for running the swimming pools.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented on the excellent work undertaken by the Trustees of LED, and urged all Members to attend the user and advisory groups linked to LED to help ensure continued value for money from the service.

Negotiations are due to start in the summer in relation to the service level agreement and continued funding from 2010. Peter Jeffs explained that as this negotiation had not taken place yet, it was too early to discuss the detail of the level and mechanism of funding with Members at this time.

61 **Review of Leisure East Devon (continued)**

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the popularity of the PULSE scheme be recognised and that funding be again requested from the PCT towards this valuable service;
  2. that through the monitoring of the service level agreement, the LED continue to pursue other areas of funding and revenue to maximise financial contributions outside of the Council's funding;
  3. that the continued positive work undertaken by the LED be noted.

\*62 **Reporting poorly performing BVPIs to Members and improving performance on planning applications and benefit claims**

Denise Lyon, Corporate Director, explained to Members that the report from the Policy Manager, had been overtaken by events. The research detailed in the report was commissioned by Scrutiny Committee in November 2007 to find out how authorities in the Council's "family" group had tackled the reduction of processing time for planning and benefit applications.

The systems thinking review of the Planning service had already begun, and Members of the Planning TaFF, along with Portfolio Holders, had received a presentation on the progress to date. The finding of the report under paragraph 5.3 supports the Council's decision to adopt the systems thinking approach.

Members of the Planning TaFF were in agreement that the systems thinking review would be beneficial to the service.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

\*63 **Quarterly Monitoring of Service Plans – Third Quarter 2007/08**

Members considered the service plan monitoring for the period of 1 October to 31 December 2007.

The areas discussed by Members were:

- Housing – The Portfolio Holder for Communities updated Members on the review of Home SafeGuard, following comparison with other similar service providers.
- Streetscene – the Officer notes on the pilot scheme need amending to reflect the decision to change the scheme. The Portfolio Holder for Streetscene informed Members that the bins had been ordered and that the recommendations made by Scrutiny had been taken on board.
- Economic Development and Property Services – the Head of Service notation needed amending.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted

\*64 **Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

Members considered the Forward Plan for the Scrutiny Committee.

**RESOLVED** that a report from the Planning TaFF be added to the 7 May 2008 meeting.

**\*65 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.

Denise Lyon, Corporate Director, explained to Members about recent changes to the now revitalised Asset Management Forum. She recommended that the Portfolio Holder for Resources be invited to attend the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in April to update Members on the Forum's activities, which would then enable Members to decide how the Use of Assets TaFF would best operate.

Cllr Knight raised the issue of the Exmouth and Seaton Gateway Visitors Centre TaFF, which was reconvening after a long break, on the 13 March 2008. Due to the break, the membership of the TaFF needed to be reviewed.

The Cultural Services TaFF was now completed.

The Capital Programme TaFF would report directly to Executive Board because of the need to report on the capital programme shortfall as quickly as possible.

**RESOLVED**

1. that a report be made to the next Scrutiny Committee on 2 April 2008 to update Members on the Asset Management Forum;
2. that the Chairman of Corporate Overview be consulted on the membership of the Exmouth and Seaton Gateway Visitors Centres TaFF.

Chairman ..... Date.....