

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 7 May 2008

Present:

Councillors:

Roger Giles (Chairman)

David Chapman
Vivien Duval Steer
Douglas Hull
John Jeffery

Frances Newth
Darryl Nicholas
Barry Nicholson
Eileen Wragg

Officers:

Bob Darbourne – Communications and Improvement Manager
Peter Jeffs – Corporate Director
Denise Lyon – Corporate Director
Debbie Meakin – Democratic Services Officer

Also Present

Councillors:

Vivienne Ash
Ray Bloxham
Trevor Cope
David Cox
Jill Elson
Stuart Hughes
Steph Jones

Ann Liverton
Graham Liverton
Andrew Moulding
Helen Parr
Tony Reed
Pauline Stott
Christopher Tratt

Apologies:

Councillors:

Christine Drew
Jim Knight (Vice Chairman)
Stuart Luxton

Margaret Rogers
Philip Skinner
Graham Troman

**Apologies from
non-Scrutiny
Members:**

Ray Franklin
Chris Gibbings
Steve Wragg

The meeting started at 6.45pm and ended at 8.01pm.

*73

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 2 April 2008, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

The Chairman informed Members that the Executive Board had not approved all of the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations at its meeting on the 30 April 2008:

- Recommendation 2 of Minute 70 was not supported as, following a vote, the Executive Board agreed that the current working arrangements of the Asset Management Forum matched its purpose, with Ward Members already being included in the decision-making process at the appropriate time.
- Recommendation 3 of Minute 69 was not supported as the Executive Board felt that the service and budget process worked well, starting as early as practical during the year and involving all Councillors.

***73 Minutes (continued)**

Members expressed their disappointment with the Executive Board's decision on Recommendation 2 of Minute 70.

RESOLVED

1. that Recommendation 2 of Minute 70 which states "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;" be referred back to the Executive Board for reconsideration;
2. that Executive Board's decision not to support Recommendation 3 of Minute 69 be noted.

74 Anti-Social Behaviour

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Ray Bloxham, Member Champion – Risk Management to the meeting. He spoke briefly on his work in developing the policy, with Councillor Chris Gibbings, Member Champion – Community Safety and Councillor Margaret Rogers, who had raised concerns re the reporting of vandalism against Council property at the Council's meeting in February. The draft policy was designed to deal with those incidents that were outside criminal law. Councillor Bloxham explained that such incidents were not crime, as such but could be anti-social and therefore the policy provided officers and Members with guidelines to deal with these incidents. He also expressed his thanks to Councillors Gibbings and Rogers; and to Peter Jeffs, Corporate Director, and the Chief Executive for their efforts in bringing the many elements of the policy together.

Scrutiny Committee had previously set up an Anti-Social Behaviour Task and Finish Forum, which made several recommendations, including taking a robust attitude to anti-social behaviour incidents.

The Chairman read out a statement from Councillor Gibbings, who was unable to attend the Committee due to another engagement. The statement read "This draft was put together by Peter Jeffs (who I would like to thank for all his hard work, understanding and advice). It was obvious that the Council Policy on this matter was fragmented, out of date and needed revising. Cllr Bloxham and I were working on this in line with the TAFF recommendations when it was raised by Cllr Rogers at full Council. What you now have before you is a good example of joint working so I also thank Cllr Rogers for her input and recommend the paper to the Committee."

The Chairman added his thanks for the work undertaken in developing the policy.

Members discussed how there had been improvements in recent years to the methods of dealing with anti-social behaviour. The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Councillor Jill Elson, briefly explained two recent evictions undertaken by the Council on grounds of anti-social behaviour; and that the Tenants Handbook now made it clear that anti-social behaviour was a breach of tenancy.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Councillor Graham Liverton, expressed his concern about enforcement of the policy; in particular he considered that the Scrutiny Committee could review byelaws. He considered that there were too many and that some consolidation could be achieved, to enable them to be more readily enforced. Byelaws relevant to the Exe Estuary were considered a special case for consideration, which could be undertaken by a Task and Finish Forum.

74 Anti-Social Behaviour (continued)

Members discussed inconsistencies with Streetscene Grumble Walks across the District, in particular involvement with partners such as Devon County Council. Peter Jeffs, Corporate Director explained to Members that there had been a number of successful grumble walks and estate walks, and that continual improvements would be made in joining up services.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the Policy to deal with allegations or discovery of Anti-Social Behaviour be agreed;
 2. that a Forum be set up to review the byelaws in existence in the Exmouth area including the Exe Estuary.

RESOLVED that the contact details for the Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator, Gerry Moore, be circulated to Members for information.

***75 Public Engagement for Scrutiny – Citizen’s Day**

Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer, spoke briefly to the item. Members had expressed the desire for more public participation in Scrutiny work, and the report explained a possible means of encouraging the public to take part in the form of a Citizen’s Day. The Citizenship Foundation had released a framework in January 2008 on how a successful day might take shape, based on their pilot events in 2005. Members were asked to consider if such an event would achieve their aim of increasing public participation.

Members discussed a number of concerns and possibilities for increasing public participation, as set out below:

- Important that any event should include hard to reach groups;
- Build on successful work undertaken in Local Democracy Week to involve more schools, and adapt the formats to be used with adults as well as children and students;
- Community Day at Littleham in Exmouth could be built on to include a citizen event;
- Expanding Neighbourhood Assessments to other areas not previously covered, such as areas of Exmouth other than Littleham;
- Possible venue for a citizenship event could include the Honiton and Devon County Shows;
- Replace an event with a road show to inform the public on the services provided by the different authorities, with any resulting issues identified going forward to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration;
- Open days at the main Council Offices, giving the public the opportunity to meet both officers and Members;
- Key issue to include the town and parish councils;
- Important to include rural areas;
- Important to encourage children to participate
- Use Members’ local knowledge as a resource in planning any event;
- Link with others such as Devon County Council’s Community Roadshow (DORIS) and the District Association of Parish Councils.

RESOLVED that the ideas suggested by Members be further considered and a revised report on public participation be presented to a future meeting of Scrutiny Committee.

76 Planning Task and Finish Forum

The Chairman welcomed the Chairman of Development Control Committee, Councillor Tony Reed. The Forum had had two useful meetings and a number of challenging questions had been put to the officers involved with the systems thinking review.

The Chairman of Development Committee commented on the enthusiasm of the officers in the Planning service, in embracing the review. Currently the review was in the re-design stage, with testing being carried out on new procedures using live applications from the Western Area.

The issue of a Ward Member being consulted on an application was discussed. The theme of the systems thinking review was to gather views and information at a very early stage to then reach a more informed view. This would make the process easier for both applicants and for objectors.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the new “Bespoke Operating Principles for Planning Applications” be endorsed;
 2. that Parish/Town Councils be actively encouraged to fully engage with and embrace the new planning systems and technology available to them via the EDDC website;
 3. that Parish/Town Councils be fully informed about any changes to the planning system at an appropriate time before they take effect;
 4. that the re-introduction of pre-application discussions with applicants be welcomed;
 5. that the Scrutiny Committee review the new planning application system after 6 months of full operation;
 6. that the reviewed system allowing Members to make observations on applications at an early stage be supported.

***77 Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

Members considered the Forward Plan for the Scrutiny Committee. Members were asked to pass on any suggestions for future topics to the Chairman, Denise Lyon, Corporate Director, or to Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer.

RESOLVED that a visit to the East Devon Volunteer Agency be planned for a future meeting.

***78 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.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Chairman Date.....