

# **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Minutes of a Meeting of the Service Delivery and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Wednesday 13 January 2010**

**Present:**

Councillors:

Steve Hall (Chairman)  
Frances Newth (Vice Chairman)

Roger Boote  
Christine Drew  
Vivien Duval Steer  
Douglas Hull  
Tony Reed  
Brenda Taylor

**Officers:**

Steve Belli – Development Management Manager  
Simon Davey – Head of Finance  
John Golding – Head of Housing and Social Inclusion  
Karime Hassan - Corporate Director  
Christopher Holland – Democratic Services Officer  
Mark Reilly – Head of Streetscene  
Denise Lyon– Corporate Director and Deputy Chief Executive  
Mark Williams – Chief Executive

**Also Present**

Councillors:

Vivienne Ash  
Graham Brown  
Andrew Dinnis  
Paul Diviani  
Jill Elson  
Ray Franklin  
Pat Graham  
Stuart Hughes  
Ann Liverton  
Graham Liverton  
Andrew Moulding  
Eileen Wragg

Ted Brown - Chairman of Housing Review Board

**Apologies:**

Councillors:

David Chapman  
Iain Chubb  
Stephanie Jones  
David Key

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 9.05 pm.

**\*26 Public question time**

There were no questions from the public.

**\*27 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2009 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

\*28 **Customer Service Centre (CSC) & Refuse Collections**

The Chairman announced that the CSC had just been awarded the Customer Service Excellence Award (previously known as Charter Mark). The Chairman and Members congratulated the CSC employees and commented that the service they provided was vital to the functioning of the Council.

Members also offered their thanks and admiration for the way the Street Scene service and in particular the refuse collection teams had coped during the recent wintry weather. The Teams had continued to provide an excellent service where possible and had taken steps to try and make refuse collections as soon as possible after service interruptions due to the weather.

\*29 **Ward Member Involvement and Communication**

Members considered the report of Karime Hassan, Corporate Director which set out a detailed complaint from Exmouth Ward Members regarding the handling of a specific issue, namely, the erecting of signs to prevent kiting activities at the Imperial Recreation Ground.

Members noted that the purpose of presenting the issue was for the Committee to consider the wider issues raised by the ward members about communication and ward member involvement. The Chairman asked Members to concentrate on devising an operating protocol and convention which could be agreed between Officers and Members and used for future Council Communication. Members agreed that in many cases, communication between Officers and Members was excellent but there were occasions such as those highlighted in the report where members were felt to have been left out of the process.

The question about whether to send emailed communication only was discussed along with the issue of members not responding being accepted as the Member not opposing a view, particularly with planning applications. The appropriateness of Members being involved with third party meetings with particular reference to planning was also debated. It was noted that in some cases, developers spent many months getting a planning application into an acceptable state before permission was requested formally. Some Members felt that they should be involved or be made aware of such meetings while others felt that Officers needed time to get on with their job and discuss plans more freely before informing Members.

After a lengthy debate it was suggested that the issue would be better discussed at a separate meeting and that a TaFF be formed to be headed by the Member Champion for Member Development to examine the issues highlighted in the report.

**RESOLVED:** that a Task and Finish Forum be convened to discuss and agree a protocol for Officer – Ward Member Communication. Membership to include:

Ann Liverton (Member Champion for Member Development)  
Roger Boote  
Douglas Hull  
Tony Reed

The TaFF is to examine the following areas:

- the practice and convention of communicating by e-mail
- the length of time given for comments to be made
- the appropriateness of inviting ward members to meetings convened by third parties
- the appropriateness of relying on press statements to inform Councillors

**\*30 Garden User Satisfaction Survey**

Members considered the report of Jamie Buckley, Engagement and Funding Officer, about a bi-annual user satisfaction questionnaire which the Council takes for Manor Gardens in Exmouth and Connaught Gardens in Sidmouth. The surveys were completed in the Summer 2009. The results were very positive, with only a few areas of concern.

Members commented that the Manor gardens and Connaught gardens were vital to the tourism of the district. They thanked the Streetscene staff for their excellent work in maintaining the gardens. Members suggested that Town Councils could look to encourage voluntary help with a view to help in maintaining the gardens in the future if budgetary restricts affected the Streetscene service.

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) that the report be noted.
  - 2) that Streetscene be congratulated on the success shown in the questionnaire results .

**\*31 Housing Service – Performance Measures Report**

Members considered the report of John Golding, Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which monitored the impact of the redesigned parts of the Service following the Systems Thinking review for May to September 2009. The report provided members with information to help understand what was happening within the service as it went through the Systems Thinking review.

Members noted that the review was in the early stages and that the biggest challenge for staff was to change the mindset from previous ways of working. Members commented that the idea of Systems Thinking was already working in the Housing Service and was helping to provide a better, more efficient service whilst helping to cut costs.

It was noted that there was now a greater overview of all the work streams in the housing teams at any one time and the passage of the work through the system was regularly tested to ensure that no unnecessary delays were occurring. The performance for the end to end times of our keys (leaving tenant) to keys (new tenant) was monitored closely for example.

Members noted that although the review had delivered a number of transformational improvements there remained a number of areas for further improvement which would be monitored and reported to Members in the future. Members congratulated the staff of the Housing Service for working well during the review period so far.

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) that the report be noted.
  - 2) that the Housing Service teams be congratulated on their work to date with the Systems Thinking Review.

**\*32 Housing Benefits Service – Performance Measures Report**

Members considered the report of Simon Davey, Head of Finance which monitored the impact of the redesigned service from April to December 2009 following the systems-thinking review. It was noted that the Benefits Service went live with new processes in January 2009, the key features being highlighted as:

- Use of telephone preferred over correspondence to collect missing information
- The offer of a home visit to customers making benefit claims
- The completion of claims by phone where possible, for signature and return by the customer
- More claim processing to be done at reception with customer present

**\*32 Housing Benefits Service – Performance Measures Report (cont'd)**

Members noted that prior to the systems thinking review the average new claim would take 50 days to process within a system that would predictably take up to 141 days. For the second quarter of 2009/10 the average new claim took 17 days (1<sup>st</sup> quarter 27 days) to process within a system that predictably took up to 58 days (1<sup>st</sup> quarter 86 days).

Members congratulated the staff of the Housing Benefits Service teams for the success of the new way of working.

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) that the report be noted.
  - 2) that the Housing Benefits Service teams be congratulated on their work to date in embedding the principles and redesign introduced with the Systems Thinking Review.

**\*33 Development Management Performance Measures Report**

The Development Control Manager, Steve Belli, presented the Development Management Measures report, which monitored the impact of the redesigned parts of the Service following the Systems Thinking review for July to September 2009.

Members noted that during the timescale of the report, the customer satisfaction levels had got even higher, scoring 97% compared to 95% in the last period. It was also noted that the refusal rate had gone down from 14.7 % to 6.7% which meant that the Council had only received 28 free resubmission applications during the last year compared to 265 in the same period in 2008. The drop in resubmissions represented a significant reduction in preventable demand on the system and meant that the service did not carry the cost of the resubmitted applications.

Members noted that the number of applications was beginning to increase for the first time since the economic downturn. It was not yet at pre-recession levels but higher numbers of applications would have an implication for performance and resources.

Members congratulated the staff of the Development Management teams for their achievements to date and for working well during the review period.

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) that the report be noted.
  - 2) that the Development Management teams be congratulated on their work to date in embedding the principles and redesign introduced with the Systems Thinking Review.

**\*34 Service Delivery and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

Members considered the Service Delivery Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan for 2010.

- RESOLVED:**
1. that Forward Plan be noted;
  2. that the item on exploring local issues with towns and parishes be removed from the forward plan until the result of Local Government Reorganisation was known.