

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Service Delivery and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Wednesday 17 February 2010

Present:

Councillors:

Steve Hall (Chairman)
Frances Newth (Vice Chairman)

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

Officers:

John Golding – Head of Housing and Social Inclusion
Kate Little – Head of Planning
Denise Lyon – Corporate Director and Deputy Chief Executive
Debbie Meakin – Democratic Services Officer

Also Present

Councillors:

Ray Bloxham
Iain Chubb
Andrew Dinnis
Jill Elson
Andrew Moulding
Helen Parr
Pauline Stott

Apologies:

Councillors:

David Chapman
Graham Godbeer

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.05 pm.

***35 Public question time**

There were no questions from the public.

***35 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2010 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***36 Quarterly Monitoring of Performance – 3rd Quarter 2009/10**

The Chairman outlined to Members recent discussions on the presentation style of the quarterly monitoring reports.

Denise Lyon, Corporate Director, explained the changes to the report style, which were intended to make the information clear to understand, and easy to establish quickly where there were areas of performance concern.

*36 **Quarterly Monitoring of Performance – 3rd Quarter 2009/10 (cont.)**

Pie charts with a simple green, yellow and red traffic light system had been introduced to give a quick overview on each of the corporate priorities. Explanations for those areas identified as “red” were included from the relevant Head of Service or officer.

The Chairman also outlined further improvement for the report, giving a further budget column to the detailed report currently provided to Members. This concept would be considered further on how best to apply a budget figure approximated per quarter before being presented to Members at future meetings.

Members discussed the new format of the report, commenting in detail on:

- Improved format of pie charts was helpful to quickly identify where there was an issue for further exploration;
- Colour version should continue – only a colour version was provided to the Members on the Committee in order to help keep costs down, with other Members encouraged to view the data online;
- Any budget column would have to reflect budget monitoring approximated over that quarter; or if outside funding (for example from other government grant) was received and spent;
- Font size should be consistent throughout the report for ease of reading, as the text presented with the pie charts was considerably smaller;
- Explanation on actions planned for “red” indicators was extremely helpful, and gave the Committee a basis to monitor that this action had been undertaken.

Considering the content of the report itself, Councillor Helen Parr requested some clarification over the key objective “Produce at least one rural affordable housing scheme per annum”. The objective was highlighted as “red”, i.e. showing concern. She explained that the scheme at Colyton, set out in the report as not meeting a completion date in the financial current year, was not due to be completed until September 2010, and therefore the report comment was not correct.

John Golding, Head of Housing and Social Inclusion, outlined his understanding that some of the units would be available in this financial year, dependent on the Housing Association being satisfied that the completed units are not affected by the continued build on the site. Councillor Parr outlined the health and safety concerns identified that an ongoing building site posed for new families moving into the units, hence why she had been informed that no units would be occupied until the building work had been completed.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Parr for giving the Committee clarification on the scheme. The Committee identified no other specific areas of concern for further discussion.

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) that the report be noted;
 - 2) that the Committee expresses its thanks to Tessa Adkins for her work in improving the report style.

*37 **Housing Service – Performance Measures Report for October to December 2009**

John Golding highlighted some areas of concern from his report on the third quarter for performance measures. End to end times (described as the time it took from keys being given back to the Council by the old tenant to keys being given to the new tenant) were still not short enough and the service was working on measures to reduce the time further.

*37 **Housing Service – Performance Measures Report for October to December 2009 (continued)**

Homelessness cases had decreased in that quarter and the number of people in temporary accommodation had reduced. This was a result of the prevention work carried out by the service.

The introduction of the Devon Home Choice service had meant that preventable demand had increased while customers got used to the new service; however in comparison to the original figure at the check stage, this percentage had reduced dramatically.

There had also been more success in collection of rent, with less chasing of arrears, and an improvement in the payment arrangements being undertaken before the tenant took occupation.

A telephone survey was carried out in January 2010 of tenants that were either new in October 2009 or moved within that month. The results gave high scores and constructive feedback on those questions that scored less than ten.

The Chairman commented on the report reference to the staff, and how they had responded well to the systems thinking process. He was particularly encouraged to see that the staff brought forward their own ideas to solve problems.

Councillor Christine Drew asked what steps the service was taking to explain to customers on the Housing Register the change in banding, following the switch to the Devon Home Choice Service. She illustrated her point with two cases in her ward where the customer had previously been on a “gold” band and informed that, under the new criteria, they were now banded as “silver”.

John Golding agreed that the statistics on preventable demand reflected that people had been telephoning the service because of changed classification. The service had looked at ways of communicating in both a sensitive and realistic way that only those on the “gold” band were likely to be offered accommodation. He explained the difference between customers that had an identified need for housing, and those that wanted housing.

Members also debated other factors contained within the performance measures report:

- Future analysis of telephone surveys should contain the raw data such as the number of customers contacted, so that the percentages could be put into perspective;
- What impact contractor times had on the end to end times – John Golding explained that times were extended where tenant and contractor were brought together for projects, like a new kitchen, which the Tenant valued in having some choice but could extend the time to completion. In future, technical staff will push the contractors for completion to the Council’s deadline, rather than let the contractor dictate what the deadline should be;
- Issues with rent arrears of long term tenants, where a large rent arrear had amassed – John Golding confirmed that for those tenants in receipt of benefit, the rent could be charged at source. Cases went to the court, but often the case would be dismissed. As a result the Council would not win back possession of the property because the legal system was reluctant to make individuals homeless;
- Many tenants paid rent on time and early intervention was undertaken for missed payments – this process would be reviewed under the systems thinking approach;
- Positive steps have resulted from the change to the Devon Home Choice scheme because it included registered social housing and housing associations, and therefore a few more allocations were being made as a result.

*37 **Housing Service – Performance Measures Report for October to December 2009 (continued)**

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) that the report be noted;
 - 2) that work continues to improve the end to end times for the housing service;
 - 3) that consideration is given to improving communication to customers about any change in banding following the introduction of Devon Home Choice.

The Chairman thanked John Golding and his team for their continued work on improving the housing service.

*38 **Development Management – Performance Measures Report for Oct to Dec 2009**

Kate Little, Head of Planning, highlighted some areas of her quarterly monitoring report to the Committee, including:

- Impact of the Christmas break on the end to end times for an application, and the tendency for agents to clear their desks of application just before that break;
- Working with agents to prevent them submitting unsolicited amendments, a side effect of their being better informed of each consultation response received;
- Late calls for applications to Development Management Committee impacting on workload;
- Impact of the introduction of pre-application fees would be reported for the following quarter;
- Staff morale still positive despite less staff and demand to add support to the Local Development Framework process;
- Changes to business card left on site to make clear that the site owner does not have to telephone as a result; the card is a requirement to explain that the site has been visited;
- Reception desk survey had revealed that there was a significant reduction in demand compared with the check stage.

The Chairman commented that he was confident, because systems thinking was clearly embedded in the service, that any problems highlighted in the report would be tackled effectively and solutions found.

Councillor Bloxham recounted two examples from his own ward of customers who had approached the pre-application service for more minor applications but been refused that service. He was concerned that there was a communication issue within the service where it had not been made clear that the “free” element of the service, for more minor applications, was still available. Kate Little agreed to check this with her team to ensure a consistent approach was being undertaken.

Members discussed the difficulties in responding to planning applications as Ward Member within the 21 days allocated. Some Members preferred to listen to local opinion first, sometimes by sitting in on a local parish meeting on the application, before making up their mind how to respond. Members did understand that, if they had not responded by the 21 days, it should be assumed that they had no comment to make on the application.

Councillor Brenda Taylor raised questions relating to the compliance with a section 106 agreement for a development within her ward. Kate Little agreed to provide her with summary information on the application outside of the meeting to show that the developer was not in breach of the agreement.

***38 Development Management – Performance Measures Report for Oct to Dec 2009 (continued)**

The future setup of the Planning Enforcement Team was also explained to Members in response to a question about their caseload. The backlog of cases had been cleared and more data on the cases would be provided to the Committee for the next quarter. The value of both the Parish Councils and local Ward Members feeding information to the Enforcement Team was also debated.

In response to a question, Kate Little confirmed that a protocol for the Development Management Committee had been completed and work had started on a protocol for the planning service.

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) that the report be noted;
 - 2) that a review of how the pre-application service is being applied in practice is undertaken by the Head of Planning;
 - 3) that data on the Enforcement service and related data to the Arboricultural service is presented in the next performance measures report.

***39 Annual Report of the Service Delivery and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Chairman outlined the work undertaken by the Committee in reviewing systems thinking and on-target delivery. Now that local government review had reached an outcome, he envisaged work on the right sized establishment being on the Committee's agenda for the forthcoming civic year, linking in with the rationalisation panel agreed at Executive Board.

Members agreed that the Committee was slow to start but had now built focus, assisted by improved reporting, the value of questioning officers at meetings, and the lead by the Chairman.

Councillor Ray Bloxham suggested that, if Members agreed, a joint report on the year from all four of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be presented to Annual Council. He praised the work of each of the Committees in undertaking a new remit and the work by each of the Chairman both at the meetings and behind the scenes.

- RESOLVED:**
- 1) that the report be combined in a joint report covering the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees for presentation to Annual Council.

***40 Member Involvement TaFF Update**

The Member Involvement task and finish forum had yet to meet; three dates had been circulated but the final date not yet confirmed.

*41 **Service Delivery and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Forward Plan**

Members considered the Service Delivery Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan for 2011.

RESOLVED:

1. that Forward Plan be noted;
2. that a report on all preventable demand for the Customer Service Centre be presented to the June meeting;
3. that Quarterly Monitoring of Service Plans and Performance Indicators – 4th Quarter 2009/10 be added to the June meeting.

The time of the pre-meeting before the Committee meeting would revert back to 5.45pm for discussion about questioning.

The Chairman, in summing up the first year of the Committee, thanked the Members for their participation. He also thanked Denise Lyon for her assistance and work in improving the information provided to the Committee.

Chairman Date.....