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To: Members of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee
(Councillors: Helen Parr (Chairman), Darryl Nicholas (Vice Chairman), Peter Burrows, Vivien Duval-Steer, Roger Giles, Marion Olive, Philip Skinner, Pauline Stott, Graham Troman, Mark Williamson)

Portfolio Holders
Other Members of the Council for information
Chief Executive; Corporate Directors
Martin Woods, Assistant Director – Communities, SSDC

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Meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 30 June 2010 – 6.30pm. Council Chamber, Knowle, Sidmouth

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting.

- A period of 15 minutes has been provided at the beginning of the meeting to allow members of the public to raise questions.
- In addition, the public may speak on items listed on the agenda. After a report has been introduced, the Chairman (Leader of the Council) will ask if any member of the public wishes to speak and/or ask questions.
- All individual contributions will be limited to a period of 3 minutes – where there is an interest group of objectors or supporters, a spokesperson should be appointed to speak on behalf of group.
- The public is advised that the Chairman has the right and discretion to control questions to avoid disruption, repetition and to make best use of the meeting time.

A hearing loop system will be in operation in the Council Chamber.

AGENDA

Page/s

1. **Public question time – standard agenda item (15 minutes)**
Members of the public are invited to put questions to the Committee through the Chairman.

Councillors also have the opportunity to ask questions of the Chairman and/or Portfolio Holders during this time slot whilst giving priority at this part of the agenda to members of the public.
2. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 March 2010. 4 - 11
3. To receive any apologies for absence.
4. To receive any declarations of interests relating to items on the agenda.
5. To consider any items which, in the opinion of the Chairman, should be dealt

with as matters of urgency because of special circumstances.

(Note: such circumstances need to be clearly identified in the minutes; Councillors please notify the Chief Executive in advance of the meeting if you wish to raise a matter under this item. The Chief Executive will then consult with the Chairman).

- | | | |
|----|--|------------------|
| 6. | To agree any items to be dealt with after the public (including the press) have been excluded. There are no items that the officers recommend should be dealt with in this way. | |
| 7. | 2010 Equalities Assessment
The Diversity Officer will give Members an update on the progress with this year's Equalities Assessment. | Verbal
Report |
| 8. | Place Survey – Residents Influencing Decisions
The Communications and Improvements Manager will update Members on the findings of the further engagement that was explored by senior officers at EDDC, who identified potential improvements for consideration by the Committee.
Martin Woods, Assistant Director for Communities at SSDC will describe their Council's approach to community engagement. | 12 - 16 |
| 9. | Forward Plan 2010/11
Members to agree and propose items for consideration at future meetings of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. | 17 |

Members remember!

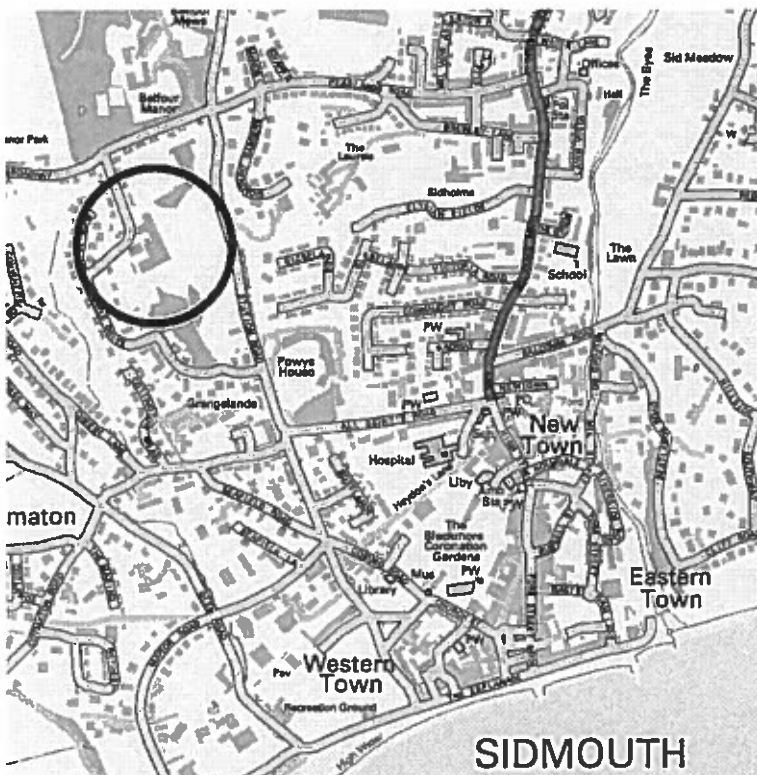
- You must declare the nature of any personal or prejudicial interests in an item whenever it becomes apparent that you have an interest in the business being considered.
- Where you have a personal interest because the business relates to or is likely to affect a body of which you are a member or manager as an EDDC nominee or appointee, then you need only disclose that interest when (and if) you speak on the item. The same rule applies if you have a personal interest in relation to a body exercising functions of a public nature.
- Make sure you say the reason for your interest as this has to be included in the minutes.
- If your interest is prejudicial you must leave the room unless you have obtained a dispensation from the Council's Standards Committee or where Para 12(2) of the Code can be applied. Para 12(2) allows a Member with a prejudicial interest to stay for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence relating to the business but only at meetings where the public are also allowed to make representations. If you do remain, you must not exercise decision-making functions or seek to improperly influence the decision; you must leave the meeting room once you have made your representation.
- You also need to declare when you are subject to the party whip before the matter is discussed.

Suggestions for questioning during an Overview and Scrutiny meeting

Below are some prompts which may help you to form your own questions to ask at an Overview and Scrutiny meeting. Your questioning technique is crucial in creating an atmosphere conducive to open answers. Avoid excessive interrogation and treat those being questioned with courtesy and respect; however don't be afraid to ask supplementary questions if you feel that you haven't been given a clear answer.

- IS IT REQUIRED? (do we have this, does it make sense to tackle it, do we really need it).
- IS IT SYSTEMS THINKING? (is it evidence based and designed around the customer demands)
- IS THE INTENTION CLEAR? (what are we actually trying to achieve)
- ANY REAL OUTCOMES? (are we actually, and measurably, achieving things for our customers).
- WHAT IS THE COST? (both time and money)
- DOES IT COMPLY? (have we checked that it meets our obligations, the law, any formal guidance, and any Council policy or resolutions).
- OTHERS DO WHAT? (how do other organisations tackle this, best practice)
- EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT? (how do we know we're doing things well, in a timely fashion, and at "best value")
- WHAT IS THE RISK? (any areas of risk for the Council)
- ANYONE LOSE OUT? (are there sections of the community who might be disadvantaged by this approach, or be less able to take advantage, than others)
- DOES IT LINK? (have we linked this to other, similar, pieces of work within or outside the Council)

Getting to the Meeting – for the benefit of visitors



The entrance to the Council Offices is located on Station Road, Sidmouth. Parking is limited during normal working hours but normally easily available for evening meetings.

The following bus service stops outside the Council Offices on Station Road:
From Exmouth, Budleigh, Otterton and Newton Popleford – 157

The following buses all terminate at the Triangle in Sidmouth. From the Triangle, walk up Station Road until you reach the Council Offices (approximately ½ mile).
From Exeter – 52A, 52B
From Honiton – 52B
From Seaton – 52A
From Ottery St Mary – 379, 387

Please check your local timetable for times.

The Committee Suite has a separate entrance to the main building, located at the end of the visitor and Councillor car park. The rooms are at ground level and easily accessible; there is also a toilet for disabled users.

Visitors please note that the doors to the civic suite (meeting rooms) will be opened ¼ hour before the start time of the meeting. Councillors are reminded to bring their key fobs if they wish to access the area prior to that time.

For a copy of this agenda in large print, please contact the Democratic Services Team on 01395 517546

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Wednesday 10 March 2010

Present:

Councillors:

Helen Parr (Chairman)
Graham Troman (Vice Chairman)
Christine Drew
Roger Giles
Darryl Nicholas
Marion Olive
Mark Williamson

Officers:

Jamie Buckley – Engagement and Funding Officer
Francesco Ferrari – Systems Analyst
Peter Jeffs – Corporate Director
Chris Powell – Head of ICT
Rachel Perram – Democratic Services Officer
Nick Stephen – Communications Officer

Also Present:

Councillors:

Vivienne Ash
Ray Bloxham
Iain Chubb – Member Champion Young People
Jill Elson
Graham Godbeer
Mike Green
Steve Hall
Ann Liverton
Graham Liverton
Frances Newth

Adam Ward – Member of UK Youth Parliament, Mid and East Devon
Colleen Harris – Senior Area Youth Worker – East Devon. CYPS – Devon Youth Service. Devon County Council
Laura Gould – EDDC Youth Press Officer

Apologies:

Councillors:

Paul Diviani
Vivien Duval-Steer
Margaret Rogers
Philip Skinner

Mr Thimbleby – Member of Influencing Decisions Discussion Group

The meeting started at 6.32pm and ended at 9.20pm.

***29 Public question time**

There were no questions from members of the public.

***30 Introductions and Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed Adam Ward, Member for East Devon, UK Youth Parliament; Colleen Harris, Senior Area Youth Worker, Devon County Council; Laura Gould, newly appointed EDDC Youth Press Officer and Iain Chubb, Member Champion, Young People, to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

***31 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 January 2010 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

32 Presentation by Cllr Iain Chubb – Member Champion for Young People

Members of the Committee heard an informative talk by Councillor Iain Chubb the Member Champion for Young People. Members heard that events such as the 11 Million Takeover Day, Local Democracy Week and Political Speed dating were all good mechanisms to engage with young people and helped them to understand the democratic process in local government. The Member Champion also acted as a spokesperson for the Council on matters relating to young people and was involved with a number of outside bodies and initiatives in the district.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Chubb for his presentation, asking Members whether they had any questions for the Member Champion.

Members heard that there were no links in place with the Youth Parliament team in East Devon. Adam Ward agreed to send copies of their group's meetings to EDDC, which Members agreed would be very informative.

Adam Ward explained to Members that it was the aim of the UK Youth Parliament to give a voice to youth throughout the UK, particularly targeting the 11-18 age range. Over the past year his team had been concentrating on improving the image of young people and also improving access to sport facilities for young people. Members helped to judge the Devon Youth Achievement Awards and had also had successful discussions with Leisure East Devon (LED) to introduce affordable sports provision for young people. This resulted in the introduction of free swimming sessions one day per month and in Honiton, gym sessions had been arranged for 14-16 year olds. Improving transport for young people in Devon was another key project. A campaign called "Get On Board" hoped to ensure that young people pay fairer priced fares on public buses. A project with ITV Fixers to create a collage of a bus made out of old transportation tickets had seen great success in Exeter city centre.

Members discussed the cross over with Devon County Council's work with Young People. Colleen Harris, Senior Area Youth Worker for Devon County Council, reminded Members that DCC facilitate youth workers and have 5 major youth centres.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- 1 that in order to maximise links with Young People, the Member Champion collate a list of all Outside Bodies that Councillors work with in East Devon, that involve Young People.
 - 2 that the Member Champion for Young People and the Member Champion for Culture explore crossovers in their roles for sport and leisure activities.
 - 3 that the Member Champion consider meeting with officers on a regular basis to discuss issues affecting Young People in East Devon.

33 Social Zest – new youth website

Francesco Ferrari, Systems Analyst described the new website to Members, explaining that the idea for the new site had come from a young resident in East Devon. The site will act as a hub for many social sites, making it possible for young people to post a message on the website that could be relayed to their accounts on Twitter and Facebook, for example. It would also be possible for the Council and other organisations to have access to the site to publicise events or post information relevant to users.

Users on the website will go through a registration process that will ask them for their postcode details. This information will be used to provide targeted information to young people – in the case of advertisements for events in Exmouth for example.

Members were assured that the site would be monitored and assessed for inappropriate content, as well as being registered with the Police authority. It was clear that in order for the site to be successful that it was to have an individual look and that this was not a vehicle to provide information on democratic matters to young people. The EDDC website could be exploited further for this.

Members were impressed with the concept of the site and invited Francesco to a future meeting of the Committee once the site was ready for a visual presentation.

Colleen Harris was impressed with the concept of the site and would be happy to discuss this further with EDDC.

RECOMMENDED: that Francesco Ferrari attend a future meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to give a visual presentation of Social Zest to Members.

34 Play Facilities for Children and Young People across East Devon

Peter Jeffs advised Members that this item had been proposed for consideration by Cllr Mike Green. Members had received a copy of the Council's 'Play Strategy for East Devon' prepared in 2007, and were in receipt of further updates on progress on Action Points and information from Sulina Tallack on work being carried out on a new open space assessment – these were tabled at the meeting as additional information.

Mike Green asked Members to consider a number of issues that surrounded the provision of play facilities throughout East Devon:

- Is the way in which the Council has historically provided play facilities fair and equal for each town and parish?
- It was apparent that ¼ of all parishes as well as some towns in the district did not have sufficient facilities available.
- It would be good to have feedback from Parish Councils on this matter.
- When play facilities were proposed, Councillors should be consulted automatically and then residents consulted about their specific needs and wants.
- It was clear that people needed to drive policies and schemes ahead in order for them to come to fruition.

Members discussed the concept of 'play value' to young people. It was important to consider that sometimes a piece of land with permission to create bumps for a cycle track, could give just as much enjoyment as a purpose-built skate park or costly play equipment.

Members heard that it was apparent that there were sums of money available to some towns and parishes that had been obtained through Section 106 building arrangements. Roadshows were on-going with parishes throughout the district, with Councils being notified of any monies available. The opportunity to consult on the community's needs would follow on from this process.

The Chairman advised Members that South Somerset District Council had an excellent section on their website that provided residents (and visitors to the area) with plenty of information on play facilities – regardless of who owned the sites. It was clear that a comprehensive list of play, sport and leisure facilities in the East Devon district was needed. Many open spaces were owned and managed by Parish Councils, these were not included in the data presented for discussion.

Members also requested data that drew meaningful comparison with other districts. It was hard to make sense of the information in isolation and it was questionable that data based upon provision by head of population was a helpful measurement criteria.

Members were advised that Budleigh Salterton Town Council had carried out extensive consultation with young people, which had resulted in the provision of facilities that were exactly as required by the community.

It was noted that it was very hard for Parish Councils to raise enough money from their precept to maintain/replace play equipment, which was extremely expensive to purchase. Many play areas were installed when council house developments were built. In most cases this equipment did not comply with modern safety standards. In addition to this, the Housing Revenue Account did not apply to these sites, as many council houses had been sold to the private sector.

Members heard that schools in the district had good sports facility provision, which could potentially be opened in school holiday periods to offer low cost sessions for young people. One school in the district was exploring this idea in conjunction with a sub-contractor who could manage these activities.

It was noted that there was very little play provision on offer for girls. Older facilities tended to offer skate parks and Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) that were much more suited (and populated) by boys.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- 1 that issues regarding equality and play be referred to the Rationalisation Committee
 - 2 that the Council need to ensure that the LDF properly recognise the importance of a robust PPG17 analysis and that feedback be given to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the future strategy for the provision of play and recreation space
 - 3 that a comparative study be undertaken on the number and nature of the District's play facilities with other similar Authorities
 - 4 that Members scrutinise LED on the provision of affordable sporting and leisure facilities for young people in the District
 - 5 that the Council engage with Town and Parish Councils to understand what facilities they have, what may be lacking and to encourage them to carry out consultation with their communities and young people
 - 6 that a section be included on the EDDC website to list all sports, play and leisure facilities in the District
 - 7 that Section 106 money be maximised for the provision of play

and recreation space throughout the District

8 that EDDC engage with other Authorities, such as Health, to promote the importance of play and sports provision in East Devon

9 that the Council create a mechanism to support rural locations with advice and help with funding applications for Town and Parish Councils so that they may purchase and maintain their own equipment

10 that in addition to skate parks, other sporting activities for young people exist, such as badminton in village halls and tennis

35 **Scene and Heard Youth Panel and update on Youth Press Officer**

Press Officer

The Communications Officer advised Members that the communications strategy supported all 7 corporate priority areas – including engagement with young people.

In 2009, the team had collaborated with Peter Jeffs on the idea of forming a small network of Youth Press Officers. The Council wanted these officers to write about issues that interest young people. They would be supported in their role by the Communications Team.

Members heard that a nominal sum of £10 would be paid to these press officers for each press release published.

Laura Gould was introduced to Members as the first Youth Press Officer for EDDC. Laura explained that she was excited by the challenge of the role and also with the opportunity to increase communication, promote and engage with young people. She was looking forward to creating a 'journey' about the lives of young people in East Devon.

Members welcomed Laura, hoping that the new Youth Press Officers would serve as the voice for young people and that they may find ways of engaging with organisations, businesses, government organisations and outside bodies.

Scene and Heard Youth Panel

Jamie Buckley advised Members that in the past the East Devon Voluntary Support Agency (EDVSA) used to host a panel of 30 people. This panel had been disbanded and EDDC had tried to encourage Members to join a panel for the Council. This had been unsuccessful, with feedback being received that young people struggled to understand about the work of the Council. In response to this, a leaflet had been produced giving further information. The Council continued to engage with young people and events such as the 11 Million Takeover Day and Local Democracy Week had been very popular.

Members felt that the introduction of the Youth Press Officers would help to bridge the gap between the work of the Council and its connection with young people. Members were keen to communicate the message that they worked to help everyone in the community.

RECOMMENDED: that an easily accessible 'Youth' section be created on the EDDC website.

***36 Place Survey – Residents Influencing Decisions**

Jamie Buckley presented a report giving members more information on the results of the government led Place Survey, which had been discussed at a previous meeting. Members had requested in depth analysis of the findings and were asked to consider a number of proposals designed to improve the way residents feel about the council and in particular the elected Council members.

In response to a request from the Committee, two discussion groups were held to conduct more exploratory research, which aimed to provide insight into resident dissatisfaction. 43 Residents across East Devon, who had been unable to attend sessions were surveyed by post. Research had been designed to gain honest and open feedback from residents. Residents felt relaxed and able to discuss matters without intervention from officers or other outside parties.

Findings from this work had been reported to Heads of Service, with the Councillors being invited to give feedback to the report at the meeting. Much work had already been carried out within the Council to address the most serious areas of dissatisfaction among residents.

Members discussed this matter in some depth, making the following observations:

- That in matters relating to planning, Members were at their most visible and could therefore be criticised for their involvement in the process – especially with contentious matters.
- Councillors may be unable to improve matters for residents – and may only have the power to act as a conduit, for example for example, extra dog bins are available but the Council makes a charge of x for purchase and y to have it emptied per year.
- that councillors could improve the public perception of them by giving residents feedback.
- That when members of the public have spoken, or asked a question of the Council at meetings, they be given clear guidance as to the Council's response procedure.
- That Knowle Open Day be held, so that residents could see what happens at the Council.
- That Councillors and Officers should communicate clearly with the public, and explain what they are doing to help them/respond to a request.

The Chairman stated that it was important that Members and Officers heard and understood what residents thought of the Council. The better the information and feedback, the more focussed the Council could be in resolving these matters to meet public need.

RESOLVED: that a special meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee be arranged to invite all Councillors to find a way forward in creating positive resident perception of the District's Councillors and the Council.

37 Council's Core Aspirations for Rural Communities

Members noted the report from Peter Jeffs, Corporate Director and thanked him for his concise document.

RECOMMENDED: that the contents of the report outlining the Council's core aspirations

for rural communities be noted.



38 Update on progress following the Affordable Housing Summit

Members noted the actions agreed following the Communities Think Tank held 17 February 2010 (attached).

RECOMMENDED: that the contents of the report outlining the actions agreed following a Communities Think Tank held on 17 February 2010 be noted.

***39 Forward Plan 2009/10**

Members had agreed to a Special Meeting of the Committee, to be held in advance of the next meeting in June 2010 (Minute #36 refers). Members discussed topics proposed for the next meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June would focus on Home Safeguard and a presentation from Community Groups part-funded EDDC.

Chairman

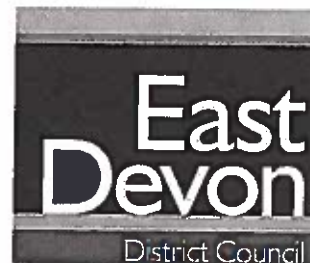
Date

Agenda Item 8

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

30 June 2010

Inflencing Decisions June 2010



Place Survey – Residents Influencing Decisions

Summary

The results of the 2008 Place Survey were considered by the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 September 2009 and members requested that further investigation be undertaken with the respondents to the survey to find out why they felt they could not influence local decisions. This was the worst result for the Council for the 18 National Indicators measured by the Place Survey and the only one for which we featured amongst the worst 25% performing district councils in England. Officers conducted a follow-up survey of the respondents to this question and ran two discussion groups during November and December 2009 to tease out the issues behind the low score. The findings of the further engagement were explored by senior officers who have identified some potential improvements for the Committee to consider.

Recommendation

That the Committee recommends to the Executive Board actions that would bring about improvements in residents' perceptions that they can influence decisions in their locality which will be measured by the next Place Survey in Autumn 2010.

a) Reasons for Recommendation

The Place Survey is a very important Government survey, carried out by every local authority in England. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) expect that the results will be used by all local public service providers, including EDDC, to understand and improve the area they serve. They expect action to be taken on any issues arising from the results of the survey, particularly any poor results. It is very important that these follow up actions are implemented for the benefit of residents and the Council's reputation, and also for the developing Engagement and Empowerment Agenda.

b) Alternative Options

None.

c) Risk Considerations

It is expected that the Council will consider and act upon the Place Survey results and that doing so will avoid the Council being criticised in a future inspection and prevent any compromising of the Council's reputation and budgets.

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

The recommendation calls for consideration of improvements to the way residents feel that they can influence decisions in the local area as far as the District Council is concerned. The improvements that the Committee selects are likely to have an impact on current practice and possibly on policy but are not expected to have significant budgetary implications.

Positive Impact Overall

Young People.

Excellent Customer Service.

Inspirational Council.

Meeting our Diversity and Equality duties.

Providing more service at less cost.

Providing more service at same cost.

e) Date for Review of Decision

The Place Survey is due to be carried out every two years with the next one scheduled for the autumn of 2010 when it is expected residents will be asked the same questions, including whether they feel that they can influence decisions in the local area. Confirmation that the Place Survey will go ahead in the autumn is still awaited from the new Government and, if it is forthcoming, the results of that survey will be reported to members in the spring of 2011.

1 Main Body of the Report

1. Place Survey

East Devon District Council sent out the Place Survey to a selection of residents in the autumn of 2008 on behalf of national government. The Place Survey involves the use of a questionnaire to capture residents' views, experiences and perceptions, so that public bodies can use the results to decide upon their priorities and solutions for their area.

2. Influencing decisions in the local area

One of the questions in the Place Survey was: 'Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions in the local area?'

Only 24.8% of East Devon residents felt that they can influence decisions in their local area. This compared unfavourably with the average results for several groups of councils:

- The average result for English Councils was 28.9%.
- The average result for Devon Districts was 27.9%.
- The average result for South West Councils was 27.4%.

Our result was comparatively poor and placed us in the position of 168th amongst the 201 District Councils in England and 81st of 89 SPARSE (sparsely populated) councils.

3. What can EDDC do to improve this?

This result, amongst others, was reported to Communities Overview and Scrutiny on 16 September 2009. At this meeting Elected Members requested that further investigation be undertaken with the respondents to the survey to find out why they felt they could not influence decisions. This investigation has now been completed and a summary of the method and results are set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 below.

4. Methodology

We went back to the respondents from the Place Survey and asked them to tell us why they felt unable to influence decisions, either by completing the short questionnaire we sent out to them or attending one of two discussion groups.

5. The findings of further engagement

The same issues arose in the follow-up survey and both of the discussion groups. The three main findings are set out below.

5.1 Planning Decisions

By far the main reason that residents did not feel they could influence decisions in their local area was due to planning decisions being made with apparent disregard to what the residents and Town and Parish Councils want or recommend. 27 of the 43 residents (63%) who commented in the

follow-up survey, talked about not being able to have any influence on Planning, as did very nearly all the people attending the focus groups.

In the focus groups it was by far the most commonly mentioned issue taking up at least half the time spent in discussions in each focus group, and most people had several examples of where they and their Town/ Parish Councils had not been able to influence Planning decisions in their local area. Residents also wanted information and feedback on planning decisions and more regular enforcement of planning restrictions.

5.2 Councillors

Residents felt that most Councillors do not listen to or act upon the views of their electorate. They also felt Councillors did not give enough information or feedback to their residents.

In the focus groups nearly all participants mentioned Councillors. Two stated that they had very good Councillors and this made them feel much more able to influence decisions. The others felt that Councillors did not appear to listen to or act upon the views of their electorate and did not feel they give their electorate feedback or information.

10 of the 43 residents (23%) who commented in the follow-up survey, indicated that Councillors made them unable to influence decisions. Their perception was that Councillors acted in their own self-interests or the interests of their Party, and not the interests of their own electorate. They felt Councillors needed to get back in touch with and act upon the views of their residents and Town and Parish Councils.

5.3 Other non-Planning issues

Residents also felt that when they gave views on issues other than Planning, their views were not acted upon.

In the focus groups residents felt that when they gave their views on, complained about or requested various services and suggested plans for the future of their areas, what they said was often ignored. There was also a feeling that even if there were valid reasons as to why what they said could not be acted upon, this was never fed back to the people that commented or complained. Several of the participants felt that there was no point in trying to influence decisions as the decisions had already been made.

13 of the 43 residents (30%) who commented on the follow-up survey, felt that in general what they say is ignored by the Council, and in some cases not even responded to. They felt that the Council has a disregard for what people want and, even if residents are consulted, their views are not acted upon.

6. Potential Improvements

Meetings were held with Directors and Senior Officers to discuss how we could improve on the top two findings as set out in paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2. These meetings were held so that we could report back to Members with the key issues raised and some ideas for their consideration.

6.1 Planning Decisions

Key issues raised:

- Planning is a balancing act, many issues need to be taken into account including a wide variety of often conflicting local views.
- Planning is quasi-judicial and EDDC has to take into account national and regional Planning Law and Guidance.
- The Planning process allows everyone to have their say but the decision making process is more constrained. Decisions are bound up with policies dictated by the Local Plan/ Local Development Framework (LDF) which is where the true engagement process lies, along with Village Design Documents and Parish Plans.

- Planning decisions are not taken dependent upon the volume of objections, there have to be specific material planning objections for the comments to be taken into account. It is not simply a matter of counting the number of objections or supporters.
- There is a need to appreciate local distinctiveness when Planning decisions are made but it is dependent upon whether this is possible under national Planning legislation/guidance.

Potential improvements:

- More information to local people on how Planning works explaining how people can get involved and to what level, including:
 - A structured interview between the media and the Head of Planning and Development Control Manager.
 - Publicise the LDF further, showing its importance as this is the stage where people really can have some influence.
 - Publicise all future Planning Policy consultations much more widely and make them more inclusive as this is where the public and Town and Parish Councils can make a difference.
 - Publicise the Planning Committee and Planning Process leaflets widely and send to all Town and Parish Councils.
 - Make the online 'Planning Guide to Objectors' easier to find on the website and promote it.
- Have a dedicated conclusion section on Planning reports written in Plain English detailing Planning Officers' comments on objections.

6.2 Councillors

Key issues raised:

- There is a public perception that Councillors do not listen to or act upon the views of their electorate.
- 'Meet Your Councillors' surgeries have been trialled nationally and generally do not work unless in response to a key local (particularly controversial) issue or are part of a wider event.
- There could be a sharing of Best Practise amongst Elected Members of what works and what doesn't.
- Councillors have to balance the wants and needs of their community with all sorts of other issues e.g. legislation.

Potential improvements:

- Members raise their profile in their wards to help address the concerns of local people who say that they do not know who their Councillor is or how to contact them.
- Members attend community or Council organised events to meet and engage with local people e.g. Countryside's Wet and Wild Weekend.
- Members share good practice examples of where they have been able to address issues raised by their constituents and where they have actively sought and acted on feedback.

7. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee considers the potential improvements to the way residents feel that they can influence decisions in the local area as far as the District Council is concerned and selects those improvements most likely to bring about positive change.

Legal Implications

The statutory, case law and government guidance regime means that planning decisions must be made on planning grounds and not on the basis of the level of local opposition or support. Councillors must reach their own view on the merits of individual planning applications. Information made available to potential objectors helps them state their concerns in planning terms.

Part of the regulatory framework involves reasons being given for the grant of a planning application on the face of every planning consent. Public speaking and attendance at Development Management Committee and Site Inspections does give the opportunity for an interested person to put their point of view in person and hear the debate. However, good practice in efficient turn round of planning applications means the majority of applications are dealt with under officer delegations in consultation with the Chairman or Vice Chairman - the position across the country. It may be worth considering placing copies of delegated decisions on line [or reviewing ease of public access to them].

Financial Implications

No direct financial implications.

Background Papers

This matter was discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Communities Committee on 10 March 2010 when Members recommended that it be further discussed at a Special Meeting with all Members invited.

Jamie Buckley Ext 2769
Engagement and Funding Officer

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee
30 June 2010

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Proposed Forward Plan 2010/11

Month	Topic	Lead
30 June 2010	2010 Equalities Assessment Place Survey – Residents Influencing Decisions Community Engagement - SSDC	
8 September 2010	Health New PCT Chief Executive (NHS Devon) to speak about future direction under Government's new approach & encourage feedback from Members (also invite 2 Chairs of local GP consortia) Childhood and Adolescent Obesity Joint Engagement Strategy to involve the people of Devon Presentation from Member Champion for Culture	
20 October 2010	Community Groups in East Devon Members to receive a presentation from Groups funded by EDDC Children and Young Peoples' Facilities Continued debate Update from Member Champion for Equality	
12 January 2011	Affordable Housing Review of Home Safeguard Charges	
16 February 2011		

Suggestions for Future topics:

- Parish Plans
- Presentations from Member Champions – what work is being done for communities and how can the Council assist further?:
 - Post Offices Champion
 - Community Safety Champion
 - Sustainability Champion



