

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 4 October 2018

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 8.11pm.

***22 Public speaking**

There were no members of the public present.

***23 Minutes**

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on the 6 September 2018 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***24 Declarations of interest**

No interests were declared.

***25 Electoral Services Update**

Mark Williams was unable to attend the meeting since he was representing EDDC, at an event convened by South West Councils. Henry Gordon-Lennox was present to address any issues arising from the report.

At the meeting on 19 April 2018, the Scrutiny Committee requested an update on progress made on the recommendations of the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) in their report of February 2018.

This report was to update members on progress made following the recommendations received.

Comments and questions raised by members included the following;

A question was asked in relation to use of the Council Chamber which will be smaller in the new building at Honiton, and whether a confirmed booking had been made for the 2019 elections if required. The response to this was that Exmouth Pavilion has been provisionally booked and Westpoint has also been considered, so that adequate contingencies are in place. Until Blackdown House is in operation, it will remain difficult to assess fully its appropriateness for election purposes, but other options are available as indicated.

A question about whether the Electoral services staff have the right sort of space to work within at the new building, received the response that they will have a dedicated space solely for their purposes, which includes a secure office within the building and lockable rooms with high security measures in place. Secure off site storage facilities are also being investigated.

A question was asked relating to issues raised by the Electoral Commission about proofing and checking procedures for printed materials to ensure accuracy of information, and to prevent undue pressure on staff involved in elections if errors occur. Henry Gordon-Lennox confirmed that he had had discussions with Mark Williams about the need for such procedures, and this would be progressed.

A question about printing was raised further to discussion at previous meetings, and the current decision in place. Henry Gordon-Lennox confirmed that as far as he was aware there had been no change to the previously stated intention to outsource the printing of election information. He would seek an update from Mark Williams in relation to printing and bundling.

The Chairman asked about print providers and received the response that different providers offered different services in relation to canvassing and registration and the elections process.

A question was asked about the cost of elections. Officers explained that the cost of the Electoral Services team is a cost to the Council, while the cost of an Election is separate to that and can be charged back to the respective authority, such as the Government in the case of a General Election. If additional staff are required whose time is connected directly to the work of an election, this could also be charged back.

The Chairman referred to the recommendation made to increase the establishment to four full – time members of staff. Henry Gordon-Lennox stated that a fourth member of staff had been appointed on a part-time basis, with the option of it becoming full-time should work volumes require it. The recommendation was a reflection of the situation at the time, and if all the other measures in response to recommendations which have been put in place have a positive effect, it may not be necessary to make this a full-time post, but the option is available if circumstances deem it appropriate.

The question was asked about whether the Council would be fully prepared if there was a snap decision to hold an election. The response was that it would be. Having a General Election in May 2019 alongside District and other elections would increase the pressure of work, but it is a requirement upon all officers to assist with an election as a priority if the Returning Officer requires assistance.

Members pointed out that whilst there has been discussion about technical issues relating to elections, there was also a need to consider the conduct of political parties at elections, and issues such as voter intimidation and problems outside polling stations. That all parties should behave in a fit and proper manner as outlined in the guidance from the Electoral Commission, and be aware of the expectations required of them. Officers confirmed that guidance would be issued to agents and that there would be briefings sessions for them prior to the elections and to provide clarity for all those involved.

In response to questions about availability during the evening of the elections, it was confirmed that the Returning Officer and Elections Services team would be available throughout the election, and all presiding officers should have mobile phones with them or access to a phone. Presiding Officers would have had a comprehensive briefing from the Returning Officer and a set of Electoral Commission guidance papers to guide them.

It was pointed out that mobile phone coverage in Devon at times can be unreliable, but that there should be network coverage near polling stations and other means for getting in contact during an election, and that there will be someone to contact at all times.

In relation to emergencies or anomalies, such as checking where someone is registered to votes or proxy votes, the central contact point would be the Elections Services team.

In response to questions about whether a public address (PA) system will be available and checks on the door where the counts occur, it was confirmed that a PA system will be available and that only authorised people will be allowed to be present at the count and a process put in place at various venues to ensure that this is the case as happens currently. Further comments were made about staffing and it was acknowledged that it is the duty of the Returning Officer to provide for the delivery of an election and all the processes required to do so, including ensuring adequate staffing is in place and that the Council has an obligation to provide the necessary resources. The option for increasing the current complement of staff as outlined in the recommendations of the AEA is fully budgeted for.

RECOMMENDED to the Returning Officer;

This Committee recognises the report of the AEA and this report of the Returning Officer to update members on progress made in relation to all of the recommendations received, including the responsibility of the Returning Officer to have sufficient staff in place. Further;

1. That consideration be given to offering training to agents and candidates of political parties in line with Electoral Commission guidelines on the requirements and expectations for the smooth running of an election process including conduct of those involved to ensure any election is conducted in a positive manner.

2. That the Committee endorse the increase in staffing resource when necessary to secure the effective running of elections.
3. That a documented proofing procedure for the printing of election materials is developed.

***26 Review of Economy & Regeneration Services, and the Growth Point Team service plans 2018/19**

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Philip Skinner as Portfolio Holder for Economy; Richard Cohen as Deputy Chief Executive who leads on Development, Regeneration & Partnerships; Robert Murray, as Economic Development Manager; Tim Child, as Senior Manager for Property & Estates; Andrew Wood, as East of Exeter Projects Director, Growth Point Team and Alison Hayward, as Senior Manager for Regeneration & Economic Development.

Also attending are Karen Jenkins, Strategic Lead for Organisational Development & Transformation, and Simon Davey, Strategic Lead for Finance.

This item is the second of a series of reviews of existing Service Plans at Scrutiny Committee meetings which may result in recommendations from members related to service planning and budget setting in the future.

Update on Enforcement issues in relation to trees;

Before considering the Service Plans for [Economy & Regeneration Services](#) and the [Growth Point](#) service plan, the Chairman outlined to members that following the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, there had been a meeting on 10th September between himself and the Vice Chair with Karen Jenkins, who has the overall responsibility for ensuring that the Service Plans are produced and that performance monitoring against them takes place on a regular basis, by Scrutiny.

Following that meeting, the Chairman formally made a request on behalf of members that Karen raise an issue at the next Senior Management Team (SMT) meeting on 19th September, in relation to issues raised by Scrutiny members.

In order to have more detail on the volumes of prosecutions relating to TPO breaches which are considered by the Development Management team, and facilitate a better understanding of the numbers of potential breaches which are not considered to warrant further action, SMT were asked to consider the introduction of a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) relating to damage/removal of trees and initiation of legal proceedings.

Karen Jenkins confirmed that this was discussed and considered a good idea, and Service Leads are currently considering the wording of a KPI which the Committee will be made aware of.

The Chairman introduced this review by reiterating that service planning for 2019/20 is underway and Service Leads have been asked to draft their preliminary future service plans by early December. Accordingly, it is good timing for the Committee to do this work.

Committee trialled this approach at its last meeting in order to become better informed and be able to influence at an earlier stage of the Service Planning and budget setting process. Discussion included the following points and questions;

- Members asked Richard Cohen whether we would know that stated aims had been met without having many PIs, for example in relation to the delivery of infrastructure at Cranbrook. Officers referred to a number of PIs, such as the volume of Floor space for employment use being delivered, and a number of other trigger points for delivery which would need to be monitored variously by teams engaged in growth and regeneration work, and in line with the Planning framework.
- Members referred to the Growth Point Development Prospectus and noted the comments about how to improve the infrastructure, including work with Devon County Council (DCC) in relation to connectivity. Officers outlined that the Council

had agreed to extend the borrowing for infrastructure, including an extension of the Bus service in order to get people to the Met Office, the Science Park and Airport. Opportunities for new enterprise development was very important and connecting local people to local jobs matters, so the development of the Construction Academy is significant in this context.

- There were comments about the mismatch between local demand and growth projected, and the need for local jobs which does not transpire. Officers confirmed that they were aware of the opportunities for developers to seek more value out of land by change of use, and defended sites for employment purposes against housing developments as part of the commitment to balanced communities by delivering employment alongside housing.
- Reference was made to a recent survey in Axminster Business Park where businesses were asked about their future aspirations. The majority confirmed that there was currently no land to expand their businesses into. The next Service Plan will be taking this into account and preventing loss of land suitable for employment purposes as much as possible.
- Comments were made about the opportunities for farmers to state they are diversifying and then use land for non-agricultural use. Officers outlined that they were supportive of agricultural businesses and communities if they wished to diversify, but not to use land associated with agricultural purposes for building large factories or similar. Many lie within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in which specific criteria apply. There will be close liaison with planning colleagues on these issues.
- Questions were asked about the challenge of delivering bigger projects in an area where both large and small scale projects were required in rural areas. Officers confirmed that it was not plain sailing but the Enterprise Zone Designation assisted with this. This was a five year programme and potentially very powerful in accelerating the delivery of increased commercial activity, through mechanisms such as the Business Rate incentivisation period aimed at encouraging new business development.
- A number of members referred to staffing and resourcing issues within the Council to address issues identified within the Service Plans. Richard Cohen confirmed that communications between the Growth Point and Economic Development Teams are strong and resourcing is kept under constant review. The relationship with Greater Exeter requires the Council to ensure adequate resourcing is available and appropriate to the task.
- Questions about whether heavy discounts in the growth area will be skewing the market received the response that that was the intention, in terms of encouraging businesses to expand and/or relocate.
- With reference to the Economy & Regeneration service plan, it was indicated that several Regional Development Funds (RDF) bids would be made. It was confirmed that a bid had been made in relation to the East Devon Business Centre which was unsuccessful. In the light of BREXIT, no further bids will be made.
- The Chairman asked what impact BREXIT will have on Service Plans. Officers replied by confirming that whatever the outcomes were, EDDC would be seeking to strengthen resilience and employment opportunities within East Devon. This could be done at key sites in the Enterprise Zone and supporting local businesses. Considering the availability of workforce skills and capability so that the area is able to deal with a range of external variables. There are already staffing difficulties in the construction industry with the flight of workers who came from the EU, so that EDDC will be promoting local skills development. A National Review of skills called 'The Burning Platform' outlined difficulties ahead. EDDC are working with Exeter College

and looking at Construction Industry training in order to train local people on site and retain them for the future.

- The Chairman asked what gaps there were in services for the future. Officers responded that local Businesses indicated they needed places to grow, so EDDC were trying to encourage indigenous investment, through mechanisms such as the Enterprise Zone and a Commercial Investment Fund to create investors, allocate land and generate interest.
- Members asked why there was no reference to medical centres or hospitals in the Growth Point Service Plan. Officers said that there were references to healthy lifestyles and what infrastructure is required in places like Cranbrook. These issues are being actively addressed with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital Trust, acknowledging that infrastructure is required.
- In relation to questions about regeneration in Honiton, officers confirmed that the Council have a number of current and ongoing commitments within resources available to undertake regeneration activities, including at Exmouth, Seaton and east of Axminster.
- Officers outlined that almost £100m had been invested in infrastructure, including the DCC Phased Access Strategy which had contributed £50m and been put towards Cranbrook Railway Station. There was a deliberate focus in the Service Plans to look at what is required in future and see how it can be delivered in advance of need, for example, routes to schools, stations and other facilities.
- In relation to transport infrastructure, this was a key element of the plans, working closely with Exeter City Council and encouraging employment opportunities closer to where people live to minimise the need for commuting.
- There are ongoing negotiations with GWR and Network Rail about the possibility of doubling the number of trains along some routes, including running trains through Cranbrook with a ten-minute journey time into Exeter Central.
- The Chairman asked if the PIs are adequate in telling members what the service is trying to achieve. Officers responded that they do reflect the key aims of the Council and the opportunities to promote economic growth and local prosperity. There are targeted outputs which can help monitor the range of support for local businesses, job creation, new activity and key infrastructure projects and the PIs will be reviewed.
- A question was asked about how decisions are made in terms of determining the need for space for local micro and SME businesses. Officers responded with reference to the survey in Axminster Business Park where all businesses were approached about growth aspirations, whether they employed more than 280 people or were single person businesses. This was a proactive initiative and yielded important evidence of demand outstripping supply as a result of there being no vacant premises. What was currently lacking was a District-wide understanding of where demand lies and more comprehensive work was required to address this.
- In terms of promoting the work and achievements of the Growth Point, Regeneration and Economic Development teams, more could probably be done to publicise their work. For example, through publicity at local events such as 'Gate to Plate' and the use of dedicated Public Relations expertise available in the Growth Point Team

Recommended to Cabinet

1. that this committee acknowledges the risk identified in the Growth Point Service Plan that housing and employment development should not be out of kilter and will be monitored closely by the Growth point Team.
2. that this Council should aim to boost resilience of the local economy and develop a self-sufficient economy as much as possible, whilst maintaining an international focus.

Recommended to the Economy & Regeneration Service

that the Economy & Regeneration Service explores a mechanism for the coming year to examine Neighbourhood Plans to establish what local need is identified for local business support and to enable the Council to take a proactive approach.

Resolved;

that the Scrutiny Committee request that the Planning Service consider land use associated with infrastructure requirements and specifically the provision of appropriate health care services, in line with NHS recommendations for future hospital growth, within the Growth Point area.

***27 Item for information – Broadband in rural areas**

At its meeting on 22nd March 2018, the Scrutiny Committee discussed Broadband issues in rural areas (Minute 37, Broadband update refers) and made three recommendations to Cabinet. When it met next on 2nd May, Cabinet considered the recommendations and resolved that all of the recommendations be agreed.

One of the recommendations was to ask the Diocese for their continued support using church premises in providing the infrastructure necessary for a broadband solution for rural parishes.

This was followed up the Economic Development Manager, Robert Murray, who contacted Louise Bartlett (Senior Church Buildings Adviser) to discuss Diocese support for broadband provision in rural parishes.

The main updates were that:

- The Diocese are already actively engaged in enabling rural broadband provision via approving use of church buildings to host equipment.
- The principle of support is well established. They have so far permitted the use of 9 churches (including in Talaton) to host antennas.
- Applications from companies representing rural community beneficiaries are sent to Louise for her team to carry out the initial assessment.
- These have primarily been with Airband via the CDS programme rollout to date.
- Each application received is assessed on its own merit with the condition, setting and listed status of each relevant church building being taken into consideration.
- Once approved, the application then goes to 'Faculty' for 2nd stage/final approval.
- Louise has provided assurance that they remain actively engaged and look forward to receiving and considering new applications for church use.

The Chairman considered this to be a very positive response by the church authorities to an approach from EDDC, and suggested that information be provided to the Press Office to enable them to send out a press release. This was agreed.

***28 Scrutiny forward plan**

Members agreed that at the forthcoming meeting in November they would consider the Service Plans for the Planning & Planning Policy Service, and Streetscene.

The next review of service plans would be in February and consider the Countryside & Arts Service Plans.

In relation to fly tipping, Cllr Rylance stated that she would need to progress this with Cllr Tom Wright, since he was waiting for information not yet available. He had requested that all fly tipping incidents were logged since January this year and was awaiting an update on this.

Broadband had been covered in the last item and would be reviewed again in about six months' time.

The issues relating to lack of hospital provision raised by Cllr Bailey, and Enforcement Policy raised by Cllr De Saram could be put to Ed Freeman at the next meeting when he attends to discuss the Service Plan.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.11pm.

Attendance list (present for all or part of the meeting):

Scrutiny Members present:

Brian Bailey
Bruce De Saram
Cathy Gardner
Roger Giles
Graham Godbeer
Simon Grundy
Cherry Nicholas
Val Ranger
Marianne Rixson
Eleanor Rylance

Other Members

Mike Allen
David Barratt
Susie Bond
John Dyson
Peter Faithfull
Ben Ingham
Geoff Jung
Philip Skinner

Officers present:

Richard Cohen - Deputy Chief Executive, Development, Regeneration & Partnerships.
Andrew Wood - East of Exeter Projects Director, Growth Point Team
Robert Murray - Economic Development Manager.
Alison Hayward – Senior Manager, Regeneration & Economic Development
Tim Child - Senior Manager, Property & Estates
Steve Pratten – Relocation Manager
Henry Gordon – Lennox – Strategic Lead – Governance & Licensing
Simon Davey – Strategic Lead - Finance
Karen Jenkins – Strategic Lead – Organisational Development & Transformation
Anita Williams - Principal Solicitor & Deputy Monitoring Officer
Sue Howl - Democratic Services Manager

Apologies from Scrutiny Members:

Maddy Chapman
Stuart Hughes
Bill Nash
Darryl Nicholas
Eileen Wragg

Apologies from Non – Scrutiny Members:

Jill Elson
Geoff Pook
Ian Thomas

Tom Wright

Apologies from officers:

Mark Williams – Chief Executive and Returning Officer

Chairman Date.....