

EAST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL

SCRUTINY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 7th October, 2009 at 7.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor M. G. Simper - Chairman

Councillor I. J. Monks - Vice-Chairman

Present: Councillors P. G. Bennett, R. E. Daw, Mrs L. M. Dedman, R. C. Dudman, Mrs J. M. Hazel, P. Holden, J. P. Holland, B. E. Mortimer, Mrs M. B. Osner, N. Smith and Mrs A. Warman.

Also in attendance: Councillors S. G. Flower (Leader of Council) and Mrs B. M. Manuel (Lead Member for Culture), Mr N. Farmer (Head of Community Services), Ms. S. Griggs (Head of Central Policy and Performance), Mr K. Mallett (Head of Legal Services), Mr D. McIntosh (Chief Executive), Mr C. Swain (Head of Benefits and Revenues) and Ms L. Ellis (Committee Officer).

297. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P. G. Cuckston, D. Morgan, T. J. Palmer (Vice-Chairman) and P. W. Richardson.

298. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

299. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17th June, 2009 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

300. Presentations by the Public

There were no questions, petitions or deputations received on this occasion.

301. Overview from the Chief Executive

An overview was provided by David McIntosh, Chief Executive of East Dorset District Council, on the future of Scrutiny and Policy Development in East Dorset.

The role of scrutiny was to act as a critical friend to the authority, reflect the voice and concerns of the local community and to drive improvements in service delivery.

A scrutiny review should be undertaken when there was:-

- a key issue which needed to be looked at;
- an issue with performance and the Policy and Resources Committee or Council needed to be held to account; or
- a need for a review into a new requirement and to shape the response.

The challenges which faced scrutiny at East Dorset included focusing on the right topics, recognising that resources were tight (both financially and the availability of staff/Members), the timing of the Scrutiny and Policy

Development Committee's contribution and whether it was proportionate to the issue.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee requested that the Chief Executive comment on the decision making process. In response the Chief Executive stated that the process could always be quicker, along with the quality of the decisions. The future would demand that the Council was more responsive, which would leave scrutiny in an interesting position, as it was sometimes viewed as slowing the process down, which was unfair. To counteract this scrutiny would need to prioritise topics and decide on the depth of scrutiny for each topic. This would enable the Council, to move ahead with a sensible timeframe. If working with other Councils went ahead, then this would become imperative.

Members raised concern that there was contradiction within the Council's constitution regarding who was setting policy at East Dorset; was it the Policy and Resources Committee or the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee? In response the Chief Executive believed that much more consideration and thought was given to scrutiny at East Dorset than in other authorities. There was clearly an opportunity for Scrutiny and other Sub-Committees to contribute to the development of policy at East Dorset. The Scrutiny Committee would need to sit back from time to time to consider what value was added to the delivery of the Council's services across the District and hold the Policy and Resources Committee to account. Audit was a different function to scrutiny as it was about making sure that the Council carried out its functions properly, in a stricter sense, whereas scrutiny was a wider function.

The Leader of Council stated that the scrutiny process was continually evolving and this could result in the Council, at some point in the future, making alterations to the process.

The Chairman reaffirmed that the Chief Executive was welcome to attend any future scrutiny meetings.

RECOMMENDATION TO POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

302. **Policies for the Council's Community Building Stock**

The Chief Executive submitted a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

Following an introduction by the Chairman of the Community and Culture Sub-Committee, an overview was provided on the proposed policies for the Council's Community Building Stock by the Head of Community Services.

The Council needed to recognise that community groups had changed over time, there were now more of them and they all had different interests, which were competing for the Council's public assets. The Council's challenge was how it balanced the competing claims and priorities for the use of its assets. Whilst the report fundamentally covered the Council's nine community facilities, also needing to be addressed were the other community facilities across the District. There was a connector between the

two which couldn't be ignored. The Council faced the challenge of getting the balance right between how community buildings were managed (on the Councils behalf, by other community organisations) and what the Council required from them.

The Council needed to make best use of its facilities for its own priorities, expectations and the services it wished to offer. At present there were no service level agreements between the Council and community groups; this needed to be addressed. The challenge for the Council would be to decide what would be a reasonable subsidy to invest in its community assets.

Previously, the Council had operated a hands-off approach to community buildings and could no longer abdicate responsibility for them. A hands-on approach was now required and community buildings needed to adapt.

Discussion then followed on the proposed policies for the Councils Community Stock and in addition, grants which were also provided annually by the Council to community groups.

It is RECOMMENDED that:-

- (a) Officers prepare a draft policy for approval to reflect concerns in Appendix A, including the rationalisation of the community building stock; and**
- (b) in the meantime, in budget setting an allocation of capital and grant finance, regard be given to the concerns and priorities reflected in Appendix A.**

Voting: Unanimous

303. Final Report into the Development of a Community Profile for East Dorset

The Chief Executive submitted a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

The Chairman of the Community and Culture Sub-Committee provided Members with an overview of the report into the Development of a Community Profile for East Dorset.

It was confirmed by the Head of Central Policy and Performance that numerous Councils had used community profiles, for some time. Community profiling was a way of making sense of the needs and aspirations of the people the Council served. The information required for this was already contained at the Council; however it was held in different places and had not been integrated for the benefit of the public. This would then enable the Council to prioritise its resources where it mattered most.

Discussion then followed and Members raised concern that additional Officer time would be required for the community profile and which areas of the community would benefit from the process.

The Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee noted the report and recommendations of the report into the development of a community profile.

RECOMMENDED that the report be forwarded to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration.

Voting: Nem. Con. (1Abstention)

304. Review by the Environment, Health and Housing SPD Sub-Committee into Flooding and Emergency Planning

The Environment, Health and Housing Scrutiny and Policy Development Sub-Committee submitted a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

Councillor P. G. Bennett provided the Committee with an overview of the report into Flooding and Emergency Planning.

Following discussion on the concerns that had been raised by the Environment, Health and Housing Sub-Committee, Members discussed the responsibility of the District Council, individual householder responsibility, Environment Agency, community profile/vulnerable people and flood wardens.

RECOMMENDED that:-

- (a) the proper updating and completion of the Major Emergency Plan should be monitored by the Audit Committee;**
- (b) the provision of support by East Dorset to the flood element in the Emergency Response Plan should be exercised and level of supplies checked;**
- (c) East Dorset should ask the Environment Agency to re-examine flood defences in the District, in the light of recent climate changes;**
- (d) East Dorset should re-issue the bulletin giving advice and help to residents to protect their families and homes; and**
- (e) the report be forwarded to the Policy and Resources Committee.**

Voting: Unanimous

305. Governance Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'D' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

An overview was provided by the Head of Legal Services on the proposed governance arrangements for shared services; benefits and revenues was an example of this. The collaboration agreement had been drawn up by the relevant Heads of Legal Services at East Dorset, North Dorset and Christchurch Councils. The agreement addressed the concerns which had been raised by the Joint Scrutiny Review Panel and it was intended to establish a single agreement of all the governance aspects. The agreement would be an overarching document which the Pathfinder cluster would use to bring services together.

It was suggested by the Chairman of the Committee and agreed by Members that Agenda Item 10 – Joint Scrutiny, should be combined with this agenda item.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee was concerned that the Dorset County Council Joint Scrutiny Committee was not a legal entity and could only operate because it came under the umbrella of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee. Due to concern regarding the scrutiny of cluster and bi-lateral arrangements it had been requested that the Performance and Resources Sub-Committee scrutinise the issues raised.

Concern was raised by Members on the details of the delegated powers of a potential Joint Scrutiny Committee. In response, the Head of Legal Services confirmed that the role of the joint committee would need to be defined, alongside what powers it would require to enable it to make decisions on behalf of the participating Councils.

The Leader of the Council stated that the collaboration agreement was a model for the future of pathfinder and joint working. In addition, it would be useful to have a milestone appendix, so as to inform Members of key milestones.

It was confirmed by the Head of Benefits and Revenues that the timetable of dates was achievable but it would necessitate the appropriate decisions being made and a mandate being given so Officers could achieve the objectives.

Members supported the principle of the governance arrangements.

It is RECOMMENDED that the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee support the principle of the governance arrangements, subject to the Policy and Resources Committee being satisfied with the arrangements for delegation to the Joint Committee.

Voting: Unanimous

DELEGATED BUSINESS

306. Joint Scrutiny

This report was combined with Minute 305 Governance Report.

307. Scrutiny and Policy Development Away Day

It was confirmed by the Committee Officer that the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee Away Day would be held on Wednesday 25th November 2009 at 2.00pm. The location would be the Hub, Verwood. Members were requested to amend their diaries accordingly.

308. Scrutiny Peer Review

The Chief Executive submitted a report for information, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'E' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

Members of the Committee were updated, by the Committee Officer, on the forthcoming Scrutiny Peer Review, to be held at the Council Offices on the 11th and 12th November, 2009.

309. Update and Work Plans of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Sub-Committees

The Chief Executive submitted a report for information, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'F' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

Members were updated on the work of each Scrutiny and Policy Development Sub-Committee. Having recently completed the review into the Community Profile the next potential inquiry for the Community and Culture Sub-Committee was regarding the structure of the Local Strategic Partnership.

The Performance and Resources Sub-Committee were continuing their review into a potential Concessionary Policy at the Council and it was envisaged that this would be completed soon. The Environment, Health and Housing Sub-Committee were about to commence a review into One-Stop shops.

The meeting ended at 9.20 p.m.

CHAIRMAN