

EAST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL
SCRUTINY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 July 2014 at 6.30 pm

Present:-

Cllr A Skeats – Chairman
Cllr S Butler – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr M C Birr, Cllr D B F Burt, Cllr A A J Clarke, Cllr R D Cook,
Cllr P J Edwards, Cllr Mrs A Holland, Cllr J P Holland, Cllr J E Little
and Cllr B E Mortimer

Apologies: Cllr Mrs S J Burns, Cllr R C Dudman and Cllr J L Wilson

101. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Cook declared a non-pecuniary interest in the proceedings due to his spouse being an employee of the Stour Valley and Poole Partnership.

102. Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 19 March and 3 June 2014 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

103. Presentations by the Public

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

104. Crime and Disorder Partnership Performance Report

The Public Health and Protection Manager 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.

An overview was provided by the Public Health and Protection Manager on the annual report on crime statistics, anti-social behaviour issues and supplementary information on the delivery of partnership initiatives.

Members felt that the overall picture was good. However, several questions were raised and the Public Health and Protection Manager agreed to email the responses to the Committee Members:-

- The table contained at Appendix '1' – Theft from Vehicles, stated that the change was minus 64. However, the calculation shown was incorrect and should say minus 36. This would subsequently impact on the overall reported increase. Could it be clarified what the correct figure was?
- Did the Council receive the figures directly from Dorset Police or did the Council collate them themselves. Did the Council receive just one set of

figures for the whole of the East Dorset area or were they broken down into smaller areas, eg Verwood, Wimborne, Ferndown, etc?

- Why weren't figures for organised crime in rural areas included? Could it be reflected in the figures in future?
- Were there any increases in crime due to an offender asking for other matters to be taken into account?
- Would it be possible to have the detection rates included?

The Chairman requested that for the next presentation of the Crime and Disorder Partnership Performance Report that a representative from Dorset Police also be present.

RESOLVED that the report was noted.

Voting: Unanimous

105. Update on Land Charges

The Head of Growth and Economy 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.

Members were provided with an overview by the Strategic Director regarding the current situation in Land Charges and the improvements that had been made to the service.

It was confirmed that the situation in Land Charges had improved and one of the reasons for this was the implementation of the Swift ICT system. The turnaround time for requests was now down to three working days and resources had been sustained within the Land Charges Team to maintain the current service standards.

In addition, Members were informed that a central government consultation would be undertaken regarding the development of a centralised, national agency. Further details were not yet known. The proposal could have financial implications for the Council and further information should be available in the Autumn. It was requested that this be added to the Work Plan and that the future report also contain information on the numbers of enquiries processed over the years.

Concern was raised by Members that they weren't aware of an issue until it had been escalated. In response, the Chairman reminded the Committee that scrutiny had identified the Local Land Charges issue and had worked with the Officers to resolve it.

Members also raised concerns regarding the processing times of planning applications. The Strategic Director confirmed that the time taken to commence processing of planning applications was now back to three

days. It was confirmed that some resources had been moved from planning policy to development control and this had improved performance.

In addition, Members raised concern regarding the new telephony system. In response, the Strategic Director confirmed that there were two reasons for the difficulties recently experienced. Firstly, staff were getting used to the new telephone system and it would take a while to settle down. Secondly, there had been issues with BT, the service provider. As a result, the BT Account Manager would be meeting with the Strategic Director to rectify the problems with their response time.

RESOLVED that the report was noted.

Voting: Nem. Con.

106. Staff Survey Action Plan Update - Q1

The Organisational Development Manager submitted a report, a copy of which was circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

An update was provided by the Organisational Development Manager and the Strategic Director on the progress of the Staff Survey Action Plan.

It was confirmed that the report would be presented to the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee on a quarterly basis. An overview was provided on the work of the Change Agents, communications and appraisals.

Members raised the following:-

Communication

- Communication was still an issue.
- Telephone lists were not up to date and still contained the names of those who no longer worked for the Partnership.
- The Members Newsletter didn't contain much news, just information. There should be a focus on meetings and what was going on in them, not just a list of dates, which were a duplication as they were contained within the Members diaries anyway.
- Members hadn't been informed of those leaving e.g. Head of Finance. This should be included in the Newsletter.
- The links in the Newsletter didn't add much value.
- There should be more scrutiny news in the Newsletter.

- Would also be nice to know what other Members were up to, for example as representatives on Outside Bodies, Partnerships, etc
- Needed a staffing structure with photographs and contact details of Managers, so Members knew who the first point of contact should be.
- Communication was a complex issue but there was still too much reliance on the use of electronic communications. People liked personal interaction, which was especially important between middle managers and employees.
- A future topic for the Work Plan should include the use of communication at the Council, to support the role of the Ward Member.
- During the staff induction employees should be reminded that if something was happening in a Member's Ward, they needed to make sure that the Member was aware of it.

The Strategic Director confirmed that they were happy to take on board the comments made and that the organisation was experiencing a vast period of change, which was challenging for everyone. It was suggested that an item on personal interaction be included at a future meeting of the Managers Forum. It was also agreed that the item be included on a future meeting of the Change Agents.

Appraisals

- Why was it that employees weren't being appraised?
- Appraisals needed to be monitored in some way, as they were related to training needs and a consistent standard was needed.
- HR should keep a copy of an employee's appraisal.
- What percentage of people weren't having appraisals and why wasn't the data contained within the report?
- Members needed data on appraisals as it was an important aspect and needed to know the percentage that had gone through reviews.
- For the November meeting of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee, Members would like an analysis of data for appraisals. If the information was not forthcoming, then the Committee would insist on a new staff survey being undertaken, immediately.

In response, the Strategic Director confirmed that there was an appraisal template which everyone was expected to use. The previous approach to appraisals hadn't been consistent and this was the first time that it had been discovered that a number of staff hadn't received an appraisal. Appraisals should be mandatory not optional. However, there was concern regarding making the process too bureaucratic or complicated.

The Organisational Development Manager confirmed that the appraisal data had not been included in the report, as it wasn't yet available. HR hadn't previously collected appraisal data. However, this year they were making a concerted effort to. HR would disagree that they should collect information on who had had appraisals, as they felt it was the Managers responsibility to keep a copy of the appraisal. HR would only record that an appraisal had happened.

The Strategic Director stated that the staff survey was usually undertaken every two years. A follow up survey hadn't yet been undertaken, as a full 12 months hadn't elapsed. A decision would need to be taken as to whether the staff survey should be undertaken every year, in future.

RESOLVED that the report was noted.

Voting: Unanimous

107. Member Training - Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Following the recent Member training on Scrutiny and Policy Development the following points were raised and discussed:-

- Scrutiny could make a difference, provided it was involved at an early stage of the process. This would have a greater impact than after the event.
- The role of the Shadow Lead Member should be promoted at an early stage and needed to be a two-way relationship between the Lead and Shadow Lead Member. Some Members felt that the word 'Shadow' wasn't appropriate and should be changed. The Shadow Lead Member role should also be included in the constitution.
- There needed to be constant, two way communication between the Lead and Shadow Lead Members.
- Changes in the Council's Governance were being considered as a way of speeding up the decision making process. This would be complemented with effective scrutiny. A report would be presented to the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee in September 2014, followed by a report to Council on the 27 October 2014, for debate. If the item was approved, consultation with chief stakeholders would be undertaken and the results would be presented to a future meeting of Council.
- A Member felt that Scrutiny should look at the Scheme of Delegation, as Councillors weren't in control.
- Members should have access to all the forward plans of Committees, Joint Boards, etc

- The Committee hadn't experienced Call-In yet and it was confirmed that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman would act as gatekeepers in those matters.
- There needed to be a change to the notification of the decisions from Resources and Community Committees, as part of the Call-In process. It was agreed that Committee Members would only receive updates on decisions where the recommendation had changed from the originally proposed one. If there were no changes at a meeting, Members would be informed that there were no changes to report.
- Needed to remind all Members that Scrutiny was a critical friend not a truncheon.
- Scrutiny was a Committee in its own right and needed to challenge, alongside being effective and strong.
- The Chairman stated:-
 - that they would like to hold one of the future Committee meetings away from the Council Offices at Furzehill.
 - needed to look into whether the Scrutiny and Policy Development cycle needed to be amended eg 6 week cycle, meetings rescheduled to before Policy Committee meetings, possible need for reserve meeting dates, etc. A report on the frequency of meetings was requested for the next meeting of the Committee.
 - a Scrutiny Officer needed to be in place, as Members needed to be supported in the scrutiny and policy development process. A report on the arrangements for a Scrutiny Officer was requested for the next meeting of the Committee.

Following the discussion, the Committee were reminded that a Member Briefing would be held on 3 September 2014, facilitated by Councillor T. Jackson (Leader of East Hertfordshire District Council), on alternative governance arrangements.

RESOLVED that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee on the Arrangements for a Scrutiny Officer and the Frequency of Future Meetings.

Voting: Nem. Con.

108. Shadow Lead Members

A verbal update was provided by the Shadow Lead Members on work that they had undertaken, since the previous meeting of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee:-

- Councillor Birr (Housing) stated that despite repeated attempts he had not been able to contact the relevant Lead Member.
- Councillor Butler (Environment) confirmed that he had contacted the relevant Lead Member and had discussed the challenges currently faced by planning. It was confirmed that the Lead Member had also invited the Shadow Lead Member to attend as many meetings as they wished.
- Councillor Clarke (Performance) had recently had an exploratory meeting with the relevant Lead Member to discuss how the shadowing arrangements may work. However, there was currently no framework and as a result had arranged to meet regularly. Meetings attended so far included the Corporate Services Property Group and the Stour Valley and Poole Partnership Joint Committee, as a substitute Member. In addition, Councillor Clarke had raised a question on the element of risk regarding the implementation of recommendations from the review of Parish and Town Councils, where approval of the Boundary Commission may be required as a consequence recommendations.
- Councillor Mortimer (Community) stated that they had also experienced problems with contacting the relevant Lead Member. Councillor Mortimer confirmed that he had attended the recent meeting of the Community Committee.
- Councillor Wilson (Economy) confirmed that there had been a discussion with the relevant Lead Member and that they would be attending the next meeting of the Growth Board, to be held on 12 August 2014. At the meeting it was hoped to hear evidence that the Council was focussing on achieving corporate objectives EC1 and EC2 in the Corporate Plan.

In response, the Leader of Council suggested that some Lead Members had recently been on leave and this could explain the issues in them responding to communications. It was agreed that an open forum be arranged between the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Lead Members and Shadow Lead Members to discuss the role of scrutiny and policy development, along with the development of the relationship between Lead and Shadow Lead Members. It was confirmed that the open forum would need to be led by scrutiny.

In addition, the Leader of Council confirmed that at the last meeting of Lead Members that they had been informed that Shadow Lead Members would be in contact with them and that Lead Members had been supportive of the Shadow Lead Member role.

RESOLVED that the update from Shadow Lead Members was noted.

Voting: Nem. Con.

109. Minutes of Scrutiny Panels and Joint Committees

The Minutes of the Stour Valley and Poole Partnership Joint Scrutiny Panel and the Stour Valley and Poole Partnership Joint Committee were submitted, copies of which had been previously circulated to each Member and copies of which appear as Appendix 'D' to these Minutes.

Members raised concern that the Minutes of the Stour Valley and Poole Partnership Joint Scrutiny Panel – Council Tax Services, had stated that previous recommendations from Internal Audit had reappeared. A Member confirmed that they had raised the same concern at the recent meeting of the Stour Valley and Poole Partnership Joint Committee and had been informed that this was due to previous disruptions and that this would not be repeated. The Chairman confirmed that the reason the recommendations had been repeated was as a result of the Stour Valley and Poole Partnership Joint Scrutiny Panel asking for them as a result of previous issues.

RESOLVED that the Minutes were noted.

Voting: Nem. Con.

110. Forward Plan

The Solicitor to the Council submitted a report, a copy of which was circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'E' to these Minutes in the Minute Book.

Following discussion Members agreed that the following items should be moved to the November 2014 meeting:-

- Organisational Development – progress on workforce Development Project
- Update and overview on Customer Services, as part of Organisational Development
- Overview of the Partnership Plan

In addition, the Chairman requested that a report also be submitted on the Arrangements for a Scrutiny Officer and the Frequency of Future Meetings to the September 2014 meeting of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee.

It was confirmed by the Democratic Services Officer that a report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget Principles would also be presented to the Committee in September 2014 and that a report on the Review of Members Allowances would be added to the Forward Plan for January 2015.

RESOLVED that Members noted the Forward Plan.

Voting: Nem. Con.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm

CHAIRMAN