

EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE TOWN MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, EXMOUTH ON MONDAY 11th JANUARY 2010 AT 7.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

19 Exmouth electors plus

Councillors: D Nicolas (Mayor)
S Sutton (Deputy Mayor)
D Chapman I Stewart
M Chapman P Stott
S Gazzard J Taylor
P Graham J Whipps
K Harper M Williamson
J Mitchell E Wragg
M Mitchell S Wragg

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: M Ackland, V Duval-Steer, L Elson, M Hardy, J Humphreys, R Turner and B Walker.

SPEAKERS: Mr Mark Williams, Chief Executive of East Devon District Council, Mark Reilly, Head of Street Scene, and Mark Pollard, Parks Development Officer.

1. Opening and Welcome by the Mayor

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave an outline of why the meeting had been called and that points raised at the meeting would be put forward to the Extraordinary Meeting that followed the Town Meeting.

Praise was given to the work of the Rolle Task and Finish Forum in particular the Community Groups.

2. Presentation by Mark Williams, Chief Executive of EDDC.

Mark Williams gave an explanation of the East Devon District Council budget process which gave the attending public and members the opportunity to give their views. The current amount of public debt had had an effect on public sector funds which EDDC was a part of.

The discussion focused on how EDDC's funding was made up. The revenue received from fees and charges made up 30% of EDDC's budget but the recession had resulted in a 10% reduction in revenue received which had created a short fall of 1.5million for 2010/11. Low interest rates had severely affected investment income returns. EDDC had on its website an online survey which was accessible to members of the public should they wish to comment on the Budget plans for 2010/11.

Mark Reilly, Head of Street Scene, stated that Street Scene was the largest provider of EDDC's services and therefore had the largest impact on Town and Parish Councils. Budget cuts would focus on areas that did not present a Health and Safety or a Duty of Care issue. Portfolio Holders had been consulted on proposals for savings in Exmouth. Some examples were given; no employment of seasonal staff, no

maintenance of town clocks and car parks, removal of the seafront festoon of lights, restriction of security lighting, no 3D displays, reduced grass cutting, no Britain in Bloom free plants, no hanging baskets or flower beds at gateways to the town.

REACT to be refocused on the main town as opposed to high footfall areas in the Colonies. Tasks that had been carried out on behalf of DCC, with no cost to DCC, would be handed back. Some budget cuts would not take effect until 2011. Other specific cuts to Exmouth would be the closure of Littleham village toilets, no deep cleaning of toilets, reduced maintenance of play parks and skate parks plus reduced street and toilet cleaning. The £34,000 grant towards Exmouth's CCTV would be reviewed. All proposals would come before Scrutiny Committee on the 2nd February.

The Mayor then invited electors to speak. The following questions and points were raised:-

- How realistic were the budget cost savings as some of the identified costs saving tasks were not currently being carried out?
- Seasonal staff had in the past been employed to carry out day to day tasks.
- How many options had been looked at?
- The festoon lighting along Exmouth seafront was a significant attraction and should be replaced with a low maintenance set powered by sustainable energy.
- Street Scene team were praised for keeping Exmouth streets clean but wished to add that there were areas untouched. There was disappointment with recent snow clearing efforts.
- There were the implications for community safety should EDDC's £34,000 CCTV funding be withdrawn.
- Concern that the proposed cuts to Exmouth would result in a less attractive town and would affect tourism.
- Would the DCC tasks undertaken currently by EDDC be withdrawn and would EDDC need to return the DCC funding transferred for those tasks?
Note – There was no payment from DCC to cover those duties.
- The proposed savings of £94,000 would have a dramatic effect on the look of the Town and would affect tourism.
- Had efficiency cuts within the internal staffing structure at EDDC been investigated as opposed to cutting direct service provision?
- Why had EDDC recruited a Communication Officer to deal with the media when front line posts were under threat?
- How much had the fight against the Boundary Committee proposals cost?

- Could some of EDDC's functions be outsourced as had been the case for some private companies?
- Would sharing of Chief Executive's posts between Local Authorities be an effective cost cutting exercise?
- Should the £50,000 set aside by EDDC for a feasibility study on the proposed multi storey car park at London Inn be postponed. Could the funds be used towards reducing direct service cuts?
- EDDC had the intention of identifying services that Exmouth Town Council could take over.
- Exmouth was too big to qualify for grants under the Coastal Towns initiative unlike Seaton and Sidmouth.
- Ceasing deep cleaning of public toilets would lead to health problems.
- Could 'Community Service' encompass upkeep of gardens, street cleaning and toilet cleaning.
- The lack of budget increase 2009/10 had created the current problem.
- Would there be 'public health' implications should some of the proposed budget cuts take place.

A motion was proposed by Ron Roberts and seconded by Geoff Morris.

'We the assembled residents and local taxpayers of Exmouth instruct the members of Exmouth Town Council that we do not agree to accept responsibility for the costs of providing for, or supporting, EDDC to retain the services that are being proposed for removal from their (EDDC's) budget, except where those services are for facilities that are legally transferred into the ownership of Exmouth Town Council (ETC) for a nominal payment (£1 each).

These would include, but not be limited to, the play areas and all of the toilets in the town.

Otherwise and until extra evidence is provided that shows that they, (EDDC), have considered all of the major cost cutting and reorganisation methods needed to ensure better management of council finances, no commitment shall be made by ETC to subsidise any services in Exmouth unless approved by a Town meeting.'

On a vote being taken the motion was **LOST**.

EDDC Officers response to questions and points above:-

- None of the proposed savings were decisions that EDDC Officers could make. Councillors had been involved in the process and had already rejected some cost cutting proposals.

- No cuts had been made in this financial year but reduced interest rates on investments would force cuts for 2010/2011.
- The festoon lights were coming to the end of their life and maintenance, electrical testing and replacement bulbs were costly.
- EDDC was always looking at more efficient and effective ways of carrying out services.
- No other town in East Devon had funding for CCTV from EDDC and the £34,000 contribution to Exmouth's CCTV had not yet been debated.
- An assessment of what services were the most important to Exmouth needed to be carried out.
- Tasks carried out by EDDC on behalf of DCC were not funded by DCC.
- Tourism was important to Coastal Towns and in particular car park generated income.
- EDDC had taken the lead to fight the Boundary Committee proposals.
- Exmouth needed to list what was important to the Town.
- Staff savings were being considered for joint funding of Director and Chief Executive posts between EDDC and other Authorities.
- EDDC front line services had been reviewed in Housing Needs & Benefits alongside Planning with reinvestment in order to produce a better and more cost effective service.
- No decisions had yet been made about cost saving and the meeting was an information gathering exercise to aid decision making. It was not a fishing trip but a factual discussion.
- Interest rates were set to stay low which would affect investment returns.
- The role of Town & Parish Councils should decide whether they could take on important assets and services of EDDC.
- Sidmouth, Seaton and Honiton savings proposals were available through contacting Exmouth Town Council.
- Coastal Town grants were given for initiatives not for revenue.
- Deep cleaning of toilets across the districts was the responsibility of the seasonal staff.

- Community service had been trialled in the past but supervision issues would prevent it taking place as a main line alternative for service delivery.

Councillors were invited to speak and raised the following points:-

- Lack of deep cleaning to public toilets would result in closure of toilets as they would not be fit for purpose
- Could the funding raised by the sale of Littleham toilets be given to Exmouth Town Council to fund all year opening of sea front toilets
- Closure threats to CAB, TIC and One Stop Shop
- Sharing of EDDC's Chief Executive would cut down time spent in East Devon
- Seasonal bedding plants for Britain in Bloom under threat
- Duty of Care must be shown at basic service levels
- Play equipment not maintained would be removed
- Seafront lights are a landmark of Exmouth
- £240,000 of tax payers money had been spent on the Boundary Committee challenge
- Section 106 funding – could this be used for provision of flower beds and upkeep of gardens
- Match funding of services between Exmouth Town Council and EDDC a possibility
- Status levels of services to Exmouth need prioritising
- Need to educate people on litter

EDDC Officers response to the above points:-

- All budget cut proposals are up for debate
- 8% of Council Tax goes to EDDC approx £3.00 per week for Band D households
- EDDC give a good standard in comparison to other districts
- If the service would not be delivered to a good standard it would be withdrawn
- Cost of Boundary Committee challenge came from EDDC Reserves using a contingency fund specifically kept for legal challenges
- New recycling and waste services would reduce vermin and litter
- Section 106 funding targets mainly affordable housing provision or education
- Match funding would be a possibility
- Somerset Parish Council's levels of precept were around £120 per Band D payer.
- A partnership could be formed between EDDC and ETC
- Service cuts need to be prioritised
- No Health & Safety issues would be neglected
- A revaluation of Street Scene Services would be carried out should manpower be reduced

Councillor John Hart, Leader of Devon County Council, would attend the Full Council meeting on Monday 18th January at 7pm with a view to explaining DCC policy in relation to Exmouth and answer questions.

The Mayor thanked all in attendance and closed the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 8.55 p.m.

Signed.....

Dated.....