

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a MEETING of the COMMUNITY WELL BEING POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on Tuesday 17 September 2013 at 2.15pm

Present

Councillors: Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs S Griggs, J D Squire (substituting for Cllr M R Lee) and Mrs N Woollatt and B Wright (substituting for Cllr P F Williams)

Apologies

Councillors: M R Lee and P F Williams

Also Present

Councillors: R M Deed and N V Davey

Also Present

Officers: A Jarrett (Head of Finance), A Tregellas (Head of Communities and Governance), L Reeves (Head of Customer First), C Fry (Housing Services Manager), D Harris (Benefits Manager), J Ryder (Community Safety and ASB Officer), J Stuckey (Member Services Officer) and S J Lees (Member Services Officer)

Also in

attendance: Phil Lloyd (Unite Carers in Mid Devon) and Debbie Westlake (Age UK)

Declaration

of Interest

Councillor:

Member	Minute No	Type of Interest
Cllr R Wright	29	Personal

23 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

24 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 July 2013 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

25 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- i. She reminded the Group that there would be a Special Meeting of the Community Well Being Policy Development Group at 2.15pm on 5 November 2013 in the Town Hall to discuss grant allocations for 2014/15;
- ii. She also informed the Group that Esther Rantzen was setting up 'Silverline', a telephone support service for older people experiencing or under the threat of experiencing abuse. This would be based upon the same principles as 'Childline'.

26 **UNITE CARERS IN MID DEVON AND AGE UK**

The Chairman informed the Group that, as well as an annual strategic grant, the Council had in the previous twelve months provided seed funding to Unite Carers in Mid Devon and Age UK to raise awareness of the services available for carers and isolated individuals requiring care in rural parts of Mid Devon. Mr Lloyd and Ms Westlake had been requested to attend the meeting to explain how the project was progressing.

It was explained that the first meeting was held in December 2012 with Bampton Town Council and four further meetings were held by the middle of March. Some of the meetings were well attended and had great discussion and ideas. Overall, the initial project ran into some problems with volunteer support due to the loss of availability of trustees within both organisations; weather problems had not helped and they confirmed that the original timescale was probably over ambitious. It was also obvious from the meetings held that the approach was not necessarily likely to be successful due to the sometimes inappropriate groupings of rural areas and the reluctance of people to come out of their own areas to attend those meetings.

A revised approach was agreed between the two charities to focus on the Crediton side of Mid Devon where there was the highest unmet need for support at the current time with a requirement to recruit new volunteers at the earliest opportunity. Both organisations had service users in those rural areas unable to receive the support they were asking for. A blanket marketing campaign would be launched with the hope that key individuals within each area could be recruited. The Community Development and Regeneration Manager within the Council would be kept informed of further developments.

The Cabinet Member for Community Well Being informed the Group that he and Cllr R Wright had attended a meeting that morning to do with 'Neighbourhood Health Watch' which was an organisation trying to mobilise local trusted community support for health. He indicated that there could be collaboration between the two initiatives and that he would be happy to pass on contact details.

The Chairman asked that a further update be provided once the project had progressed to the next stage.

27 **FINANCIAL UPDATE FOR THE THREE MONTHS TO 30 JUNE 2013**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Finance presenting a financial update in respect of the three months to 30 June 2013. The key figures within the report were explained :

- The overall forecasted position on the General Fund deficit for the current year was £128k;
- Income flows in the areas of Planning and Leisure Services were encouraging.

However, the Head of Finance was keen to stress that the monitoring report only contained data for the first three months of the financial year and as such it was very difficult to make accurate year end forecasts at this stage.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed Minutes.

28 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * of the Head of Communities and Governance providing Members with an update on performance against the corporate plan and local service targets for 2013/14 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The performance indicator entitled 'Operational Recovery' needed to have some explanation as to what it was;
- Although some risks had been identified under the Leisure Service area, the Head of Communities and Governance had every confidence these were being managed effectively.

The Head of Communities and Governance agreed to find out more information regarding the actual number of ASB complaints made. She also agreed to find out why the statistic in relation to the need for food premises to comply with food hygiene law was only 90% instead of 100%.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed Minutes.

29 **LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Benefits Manager providing an update on progress with the Local Welfare Assistance scheme. From April 2013 the Government devolved funding to upper tier authorities to create a Local Welfare Assistance scheme. This replaced elements of the Social Fund previously administered by the Department for Work and Pensions. Devon County Council (DCC) delegated the funding to the District Councils.

Given the short timescale and lack of resource within the Council, officers felt external organisations with the necessary skills and knowledge would be best placed to deliver the new scheme. The contract was awarded to 'Money£wise', who were contracted to fully administer the application process for MDDC. This included receiving applications (whether made online, by telephone or on hard copy application form), assessing the applications against eligibility criteria, scoring the applications accordingly and making a decision on whether the application was successful. They then advised the applicant and worked with them to agree an action plan and resolve debt problems. Applicants were required to demonstrate their need could not be

met by any other source. Where appropriate, the applicant may be directed to other agencies or council services with instructions on how to access any support.

The Benefits Manager explained that due to the effects of welfare reform there had been a significant increase in the numbers of people seeking assistance.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Fuel poverty and the likelihood of increased hardship as the winter approaches;
- What was contained within a food parcel and the fact that people could only apply for this once;
- Benefits officers did visit people in rural areas and often liaised with housing officers visiting the same areas.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed Minutes.

30 **MANAGEMENT OF ASB IN RELATION TO HOUSING ISSUES**

The Group had before it a briefing paper * from the Housing Services Manager regarding the policy relating to the management of Anti-Social Behaviour on housing estates by Council tenants.

It was explained that the Council was able to deal quite firmly with Council tenants displaying Anti-Social Behaviour and they were duty bound to do so by the regulatory framework. The Council also had a duty to ensure that tenants were made aware of their rights and responsibilities in relation to ASB. It was further explained that if a tenant was found guilty of ASB it could have the effect of seriously compromising their current and future housing options. The tenancy agreement was a contract between the Council and the tenant and if a part of this was breached the Council had the right to take action. The Council would always recommend mediation where appropriate and in fact provided funding to the Independent Devon Mediation Service.

A general discussion took place regarding the sharing of personal data and the need to exercise extreme caution in order to comply with relevant data protection laws.

Notes: (i)* Briefing paper previously circulated; copy attached to the signed Minutes;

(ii) Cllr R Wright declared a personal interest as he was a Trustee of Churches Houses Action Team.

31 **COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**

The Group were shown a DVD by the Community Safety and ASB Officer showing how the Council worked in partnership to resolve anti-social behaviour problems across East & Mid Devon.

The multi-agencies involved in one particular case needed to show that they had made every effort to try to intervene and stop the ASB which was having

an extreme effect upon one family. This included the use of noise recording equipment and the use of noise abatement notices.

The comment was made that Devon County Council would cease to provide supported housing for people over the age of 18 as from 1 April 2014 and that there were likely to be significant problems as a result of this.

32 CUSTOMER CARE CHARTER

A verbal update was provided by the Head of Customer Services on the Customer Care Charter. This would form a part of the Customer Care Policy which was due for review next year. It was a helpful document in enabling staff to know what the standards were when dealing with members of the public.

It was explained that the way customers wanted to contact the Council was changing in that more people were contacting the Council via digital means. Within the past year contact via smart phones had increased from 1% to 20%. Face to face contact with customers had also increased due to welfare reform. If Universal Credit was to be implemented local authorities would need to provide free computer use to customers within Phoenix House.

It was confirmed that the website had a facility called 'Language Line' to assist Mid Devon residents whose first language was not English. This was particularly used by people wanting information in relation to housing.

Discussion took place regarding the proposal to remove a lunchtime service from the offices in Crediton. This had become necessary due to a member of staff retiring and an inability to recruit a new member of staff.

33 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE ORDINARY NEXT MEETING – 3 DECEMBER 2013

In addition to the items already listed in the work programme the following items were identified for the next meeting:

- Targeted Families update from the Community Development and Regeneration Manager;
- Neighbourhood Health Watch – to invite a representative to a future meeting to provide information on this initiative.

(The meeting ended at 4.27pm)

CHAIRMAN