Quality of Living, Equalities and Public Health Portfolio

Update for Scrutiny Committee
16th December 2024

Cllr David Wulff
DWulff@middevon.gov.uk

Key functions

Cabinet

Digital Transformation
ICT Services
Information Management
(GDPR, FOI, and Security)

Licensing Committee

Licensing and Regulation

Community, People & Equalities PDG

Air quality
Anti-Social Behaviour & CCTV
Benefits
Contaminated Land
Community Safety
Equalities
Food and Water Control
Gazetteer Management
Land Charges
Local Welfare Assistance
Pollution and Noise Control
Poverty Premium/Vulnerable
Persons Strategy

Moved to Parish & Community Engagement

Community Engagement
Community Development
Emergency Plan
External Health & Safety
Grants and Funding

Moved to Service Delivery & Continuous Improvement

Leisure

Key functions

Cabinet

Digital Transformation
ICT Services
Information Management
(GDPR, FOI, and Security)

Licensing Committee

Licensing and Regulation

Community, People & Equalities PDG

Air quality
Anti-Social Behaviour & CCTV
Benefits
Contaminated Land
Community Safety
Equalities
Food and Water Control
Gazetteer Management
Land Charges
Local Welfare Assistance
Pollution and Noise Control
Poverty Premium/Vulnerable Persons Strategy

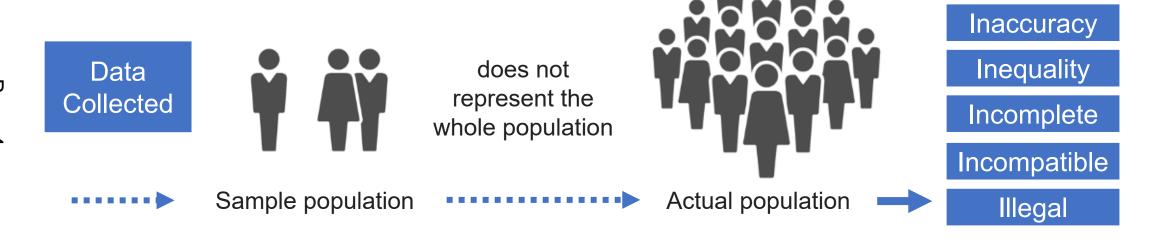**Moved to Parish & Community Engagement**

Community Engagement
Community Development
Emergency Plan
External Health & Safety
Grants and Funding

Moved to Service Delivery & Continuous Improvement

Leisure

Information Governance

Data Collected

does not represent the whole population

Inaccuracy

Inequality

Incomplete

Incompatible

Illegal

Sample population ➞ Actual population ➞

"Information governance balances the risk that information presents with the value that information provides."

Information Policies

- IM001 – Information Security Management
- IM002 – Information Security Incident
- IM003 – Data Protection
- IM004 – Records Management
- ICT005 – Acceptable Use
- ICT007 – Software Compliance & Legislation
- ICT009 – Internet Use
- Risk Management Policy

Mid Devon DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMING SOON

IM011 – Artificial Intelligence Policy

Information Governance

Information Governance
- We hold a lot of data about our residents
- We carry the responsibility to use that data correctly – **and within the law**
- There can be severe penalties if we get it wrong – for MDDC and for individuals
- The victims of a data breach
- Security is everybody's business

"Information governance balances the risk that information presents with the value that information provides."

What is Personal Data?
Both GDPR and DPA state:
- "Personal data" means any information relating to an identified or identifiable living individual. Identifiable living individual means a living individual who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to,
  a) an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data or an online identifier, or
  b) one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of the individual.

What is a Data Breach?
- A data breach is a security violation, where sensitive, protected or confidential data is **copied, transmitted, viewed, stolen, altered or used by an individual unauthorised to do so**.
- A deliberate data breach by a person who has access to the information, typically for political purposes, is more often described as a "leak".

Who is responsible for security?
- Most data breaches are not deliberate.
  - 82% of all breaches are caused by human error.
  - Common causes are mistakes with email addresses, or using Cc/Bcc.
  - Ask yourself "does this information need to be shared with this person?"
- Report all data breaches
  - dpo@middevon.gov.uk

When things go wrong
- Leicester City Council are currently recovering from a serious cyber attack over a month ago.
- They were targeted by a known ransomware group who have hit a number of government, education and health organisations around the world, and are part of a global criminal investigation.
- So far 1.3 terabytes of stolen data has been published
- All website and phones were taken offline

We have a comprehensive training package for all available through our SharePoint site

ICT are planning to deliver targeted testing

Recognised Risks

CR2	Cyber Security		Current Severity: 5	Current Likelihood: 4	Current Risk Rating:20
Risk Description: Inadequate Cyber Security could lead to breaches of confidential information, damaged or corrupted data and ultimately Denial of Service. If the Council fails to have an effective ICT security strategy in place. Risk of monetary penalties and fines, and legal action by affected parties.					
Risk Owner: Brian Trebilcock		**Latest Review:** 10/10/2024		**Risk Type:** Data Protection/Information Security	

CR5	Information Security		Current Severity: 4	Current Likelihood: 3	Current Risk Rating: 12
Risk Description: Inadequate data protection could lead to breaches of confidential information and ultimately enforcement action by the ICO.					
Risk Owner: Lisa Lewis		**Latest Review:** 28/10/2024		**Risk Type:** Data Protection/Information Security	

Digital Transformation

- Lowering the cost of providing services whilst increasing the quality and availability of services.

- Looking for opportunities to use digital technology and processes to improve functions of the council.

- Current examples:
  - Leisure IT systems
  - Waste services
  - Council Tax customer self-service

Digital Transformation

- Lowering the cost of providing services whilst increasing the quality and availability of services.

- Looking for opportunities to use digital technology and processes to improve functions of the council.

- Current examples:
    - Leisure IT systems
    - Waste services
    - Council Tax customer self-service

- Self-service from anywhere

ICT Services

- 110 servers to maintain

- Approx. 110 different pieces of software from small to major business systems, which all require maintenance, patching and replacing on a rolling basis.

- 480 IT users

- The service lost 1.5 FTE last year as part of the budget savings
  - and has gained 2 FTE during this year.

- Hardware replacement project in progress.

Licensing & Regulatory

- 406 licensable premises + 1,409 personal licenses
- Food service inspections 70.2% (target 100% pa)
- Taxi licensing changes
- Vehicle inspections at 9 (target 40 pa) of 125 licensed vehicles
- Private water supplies 38 (target 120pa)
- Air quality monitoring all under 40 µg/m3

- **Consulted by the Planning team**
- **Always changing – dependent on legislation**

Community Safety

- East & Mid Devon work together with the Police, DCC, Probation service, and the NHS Devon ICB as partners in a Community Safety Partnership

- This helps us tackle crime, anti-social behaviour and other negative behaviours in our communities

- Youth ASB Intervention Panel

- New Preventing Serious Violence Duty

- Community Protection Warnings (and Notices)
  - 9 Warnings + 3 pending
  - 6 Notices
  - Enforcement action taken

- Community Alcohol Partnership

Local Welfare Assistance

- Statutory Council Tax reductions
  - Single Person Discount, Students and Carers
    530 households totalling £6,439,151

- Care Leaver Scheme
  - 19 individuals totalling £7,253

- Local Council Tax Support
  - 1806 pensioner claimants and 2147 working age claimants totalling £4,862,579

- Discretionary Housing Payments
  - To help those claiming housing benefits with housing costs
    45 households totalling £34,385

- Exceptional Hardship Scheme
  - 36 households totalling £6,585

Household Support Fund

- HSF 5 – ended September 2024
  - Allocation £207,120
  - Spend £207,120
  - 535 households helped, including £163,289 food vouchers and £16,800 fuel vouchers
- HSF 6 – currently live
  - Allocation £254,461
  - Pensioners identified as losing winter fuel allowance: 325
  - Letters were issued inviting contact to claim fuel vouchers of either £250 (Single Pensioner) or £300 (Couples)
  - Total pensioners who have claimed vouchers: 251 totalling £66,000
  - Care leavers receiving vouchers: 3 totalling £450
  - Total households receiving vouchers at end November: 387 total of vouchers issued totalling £101,693

Online resources

- middevon.gov.uk/residents-financial-support/

Help with food and energy costs

Help with your rent

Help with the Cost of Living

Help with your council tax

Help in the Community

Help with debt

Help with children

Help with Universal Credit

Help with your home

Help with Pension Credit

Help with budgeting

Help providing furniture and white goods

Any Questions?

67 **PORTFOLIO PRESENTATION FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR QUALITY OF LIVING , EQUALITIES AND PUBLIC HEALTH**

The Committee received and **NOTED** a presentation from the Cabinet Member for Quality of Living, Equalities and Public Health.

The Quality of Living, Equalities and Public Health portfolio broadly encompassed public health and welfare, licensing, and many regulatory functions. It also included many of the Council's technology and data processing functions including information governance and digital transformation, which drove changes to the way the Council delivers both internal and external services. This was more important than ever with the Council's need to balance the increasingly difficult local government funding picture against its recognised high performance in a number of vital public services – and the need to improve where the Council may fall short of where they wanted to be. The Council also delivered a number of discretionary services that were nonetheless really important to its communities. This was where the 'Quality of Living' part of the portfolio became really important:
to check and challenge the Council's services to ensure they deliver fairly, and bring improvements to the lives of its residents to the front of the Council's decision making.

Each function is grouped into the committees where you would normally expect to find them developed and discussed. I'm also showing in green the functions where a portfolio change has occurred since my last update.
As before I'm not going to go through each of these functions today, but I am going to talk about those which I believe are of most interest to the Scrutiny Committee members.

I will update you on progress with digital transformation and some changes in ICT Services. You have discussed FOI/EIR quite extensively today so I'm not going to cover that again in detail.
I will also focus on some of the significant areas that I didn't have time to cover last time. Our local welfare assistance is particularly important to get right. We often deal with vulnerable people and our choice to go above and beyond our statutory duties to support them is a political one. Scrutiny plays an important role in checking that we have that balance set correctly, and that we are properly upholding our legal and ethical commitments to equality.

Every informed decision we make is based on information (also known as data) – often from multiple sources and sometimes without fully understanding the origin. As we, and the world in general, move towards more and more decisions made based on connected data, the need to make sure it is accurate, valid, and does not discriminate becomes harder to ensure.
Data bias is a really difficult problem to overcome, but it is vitally important to make every effort to do so. I've drawn an example here that could relate to our annual Residents Survey. I think we all understand the benefit from asking for feedback, but on the right-hand side I've included a few of the risks if we were to base our service delivery solely on that one information source.
I want to give a concrete example too:

Page 17

The company Amazon is not just an online store; it is also one of the largest IT infrastructure providers in the world. In the mid-2010s some of the brightest technical experts out there developed a data-based candidate evaluation tool to help them make fairer hiring decisions. It was designed to take the unconscious human bias out of decision making. Less than a decade later the tool was scrapped because it had learned from the data on past hiring decisions how to exclude women from the pool of qualified candidates. There are two stark things to take away from that: Firstly, the risk from basing good information processing practices on poor data, and secondly, it took eight years to recognise that their process discriminated against women because it reinforced an existing bias. (https://www.aclu.org/news/womens-rights/why-amazons-automatedhiring-tool-discriminated-against)

I put the definition of information governance at the bottom of this slide – it is all about balancing risk against value.
We will never get that balance 100% perfect – it is a human solution with human error built in. We all have implicit and explicit biases – which is why it is vital that our use of information is regularly scrutinised to make sure we could never accidentally discriminate in the way Amazon's hiring tool did.
I'm mindful not to turn this into a DEI presentation, but before I move to the next slide, has anyone noticed the data bias in the example shown above? Those population graphics are completely ableist and enforce gender stereotypes. In order to illustrate this slide I had to license those images and I could not find a suitable pair of graphics that did not contain bias.

That is why we have so many policies to manage and control information use, and these are reviewed and updated to reflect best practice and lessons learnt. The Information Security Management, and Security Incident policies are being looked at by Cabinet in January.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is widely used in commercial and daily applications, with its influence expected to grow across almost all industries including the public sector. This represents both a transformative information intelligence benefit, and a tremendously tricky task for us to manage the associated risk it poses. The organisation is developing a robust policy to manage that risk which will come forward in the new year.

I'm not going to cover the information governance policies here as I covered a lot on these back on April 15th and you can find that presentation and my covering notes alongside the minutes of that meeting, so please do refer back if you would like a refresher on what we are doing in those areas and why so much resource is dedicated to this function.

Cyber Security is our highest rated recognised corporate risk. The definition here states that inadequate Cyber Security could lead to Denial of Service. That does not just mean the website being unavailable, but our ability to deliver waste collection, collect council tax, or the inability to respond to housing tenants' needs, or even the closure of our leisure services for weeks or at the extreme end possibly months. The further risk of large penalties and fines, and legal action could also harm important service delivery – but equally shows just how serious the impact of inadequate security can be on the victims of any breach.

In the private sector these can be business-ending risks, but we provide services that must be delivered for society to function. As you would expect Mid Devon has been taking steps internally and externally, including with our vendors and partners, to mitigate and monitor these risks.

Our technical IT officers have recently worked with leadership and officers across Revenues & Benefits, Housing, and Finance, on a cyber preparedness project under the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) developed by the UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC). The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) worked with councils and cyber security experts to adapt this into a tool councils in England can

use to address the risks they face. This piece of work has unlocked a grant which will be used to further secure our cyber security activities. It also helped focus our internal business continuity and resilience work which is a constantly ongoing process. DAP worked with us on the CAF project and attended the workshops to provide assurance.

Of our 18 services, 15 have now updated their Business Continuity Plans and the remaining few are currently in the process of updating theirs. Once live we will begin a testing plan which will ensure each Business Continuity Plan is exercised at least once every two years to stay relevant, to learn and to adapt.

In November the organisation held a business continuity and recovery exercise alongside our external disaster recovery specialists. This was successful with a lot of good lessons taken away from it and our technical professionals have already adapted some processes

to make us safer. We are confident that we can bring most IT systems back online within 24-36 hours which is a tremendous feat for an organisation as complex as Mid Devon.

Our audit of IT system suppliers is currently on target to complete in the first half of 2025. This will help us to understand the risks from the third-party computer systems we use, and help our suppliers understand what we need from them to keep us safe. This is increasingly important as we are seeing more and more attacks on government supply chains as a means of compromising cyber security from inside the protective firewalls.

We don't self-certify when it comes to cyber security and undergo regular external testing of our defences. As well as being good practice this is a necessary requirement to access various central government data. All our Cyber protection processes are continually ongoing tasks that ensure we keep our systems protected against the latest threats, where the need to respond is measured in minutes and hours, not days or weeks.

I have some updates on the Digital Transformation function. We are adding two business analysts to the ICT team and one post will be focused on business transformation – looking for opportunities to use digital technology and processes to improve functions of the Council.

Work is undergoing to embed the CRM project into more areas to gain efficiencies, with early work to track customer contacts past their initial point of being recorded,

which is expected to identify further transformation work, and opportunities to improve.

Current examples of digital transformation include the new Leisure Management System and the future customer app and self-service functions. These will not only improve our internal working, freeing up staff to perform other vital work in our leisure centres, but also deliver real and measurable benefit to our leisure customers. Ultimately this saves us money through greater efficiency which can then be invested back into providing services and driving further efficiency.

Work to bring the latest technology to our waste service is early, but ongoing. Again, this should free up skilled members of staff to do their jobs more efficiently, and allow us to modernise what is in places still a paper-based process.

An automation project is looking at online Council Tax services, to allow our residents to directly manage some of the most common types of enquiry we receive. The first phase is looking at applications for Single Person Discount (SPD), downloading copy bills, and allowing residents to self-report moving home and have their bills automatically updated. The team are working hard to bring these changes before the annual billing for next year, as it is projected to bring the most benefit for us and our customers by avoiding phone calls and office visits during the busiest time of the year for customer services.

But self-service is not just from home. We have reinstalled 2 kiosk PCs in the reception area for public use and reception staff are trained to direct residents to them for many common tasks. Of course, if they need assistance we will provide it. You may have noticed that when the reception is closed during office hours the external door to the airlock now remains open and there is a direct-access telephone available. (My thanks to the then Community PDG working group for enabling this.) We are looking at signage to advertise what services can be self-serviced and how to access them if a resident wishes to. The aim is to make self-service accessible to as many people as possible in the ways they want to use it – and through monitoring and feedback make sure it is continually improved.

In ICT Services we have 110 servers to maintain, comprising physical and virtual machines, and similar number of software systems which require regular maintenance. 480 users across the organisation, all of whom need support at one time or another. After losing 1.5 FTE posts last year, compounded on post reductions in previous years, the service has gained 2 business analyst posts during this year in recognition of the need to invest in IT resources to allow all our services to take advantage of digital transformation, be information-secure, and to innovate for the future.

Over the past few months ICT have completed a procurement project to replace the aging IT hardware with new, more efficient equipment that is better able to scale with our needs. Whilst some of our IT systems are hosted directly by our vendors and bought in as a cloud-based service, that model doesn't suit all of our systems. The needs of the service and our residents sometimes requires on-premise IT solutions.

Onto a different area now with some of the Public Health regulatory functions of the Council.

Alcohol licensing is one of the most recognisable licensable activities that we have responsibility for, with over three quarters of the licensed premises in the district serving alcohol. (These figures are slightly out of date but due to resource I was not able to obtain the most recent numbers.)

With regard to Food Service inspections completed, this is a new performance indicator that replaces the simple count of the number of inspections completed. Inspections are now prioritised based on risk, with bands A to C achieving 100% targets over quarters 1 and 2.

I covered the work around the changes to Mid Devon's taxi licensing scheme in some detail back in April. I am encouraged to report that feedback from the trade is that they have appreciated the level of consultation and engagement we have provided so far. A model we should follow for future consultations.

Vehicle inspections were at 9 from a target of 40 per year at the end of quarter 2. This is due to a mixture of more vehicles being due for inspection later in the year, and vacancies in the team.

Work to review the private water supply sampling process was carried out in Q1 and Q2. The team carried out a total of 21 Private Water Supply Risk Assessments, which are more in depth than just the sampling regime and is the reason the sampling KPI has fallen behind. This will help with reviewing private water supplies of a higher risk for rolling out a new programme of water sampling in January when we have more officers accredited.

The year-to-date Air Quality data, as provided by the Nitrogen oxide and Nitrogen dioxide/NOX tubes, are all within the required parameters of under 40 µg/m3 (micrograms per cubic metre – 40 millions of a gram). It is really positive that we have not seen any exceedances and is on track to reflect well in the Annual Status Report/ASR when it is undertaken by June next year.

This year there have been a couple of high-profile planning consultations involving a lot of work from the Public Health Team. One was the Police firing range at Pondground near Holcombe Rogus, the other the Red Linhay AD plant. Both involved a lot of officer work and collaboration with Planning. There has also been a lot of work undertaken on various cases where mitigation in regards to Air Quality measures as per the Supplementary
Planning Documents have needed to be actioned, as well as applications where conditions have been recommended to manage odour, noise and environmental impacts.

Regulatory frameworks are always changing, and I want to recognise that Mid Devon has an excellent Public Health team at all officer levels adapting to these changes and keeping our residents safe.

Community safety relates to all crime, anti-social behaviour, harm and other behaviours that negatively affect the lives and local environment of communities. With the partner agencies listed, we are required to protect communities from the

threat and consequences of these issues by reducing their incidence and fear of their occurrence.

This is not an easy feat as some harms are hidden from view, such as domestic violence and human trafficking. The Community Safety Partnership brings together our partners to work together on a 'Trauma Informed Approach'.

For a good overview of what a Trauma Informed Approach is, and our Community Safety responsibilities, I will refer you back to April's update.

Today I want to focus on the bottom four items:

It is worth noting that Mid Devon's contribution for the preventing serious violence project (for which we had some funding) was to increase the use of Community Protection Warnings and Notices alongside other proactive work tackling ASB as a precursor of more serious offending. This ASB work is progressing with the new Youth Anti-Social Behaviour Intervention Panel which met for the first time in November, and dealt with referrals about three young people in Tiverton. The second meeting is scheduled for January.

We promoted National ASB Awareness Week in November by organising a briefing session for elected members on Let's Talk ASB Day. The Community Safety Officer, with representatives from the Police and Mid Devon Housing (MDH) gave presentations and answered questions on the local approach and experiences, the new Youth ASB Panel, and how MDH treat ASB affecting council housing. We also took part in an estate walkabout in Tiverton with police colleagues and ward councillors to discuss local ASB.

Public Health work closely with Mid Devon Housing Neighbourhood Officers, and they have been authorised to issue Community Protection Warnings and Notices since April 2024. To date they have issued:

- 9 Community Protection Warnings
- 6 Community Protection Notices
- There are 3 further Community Protection Warnings authorised to be issued imminently.
- One Notice has been enforced to remove waste from a property.
- One Notice has contributed to action for eviction.

Which shows there can be serious implications for residents if they do not comply with the notices, and reflects the seriousness of the community safety they seek to protect.

The Public Health team have directly issued 3 Warnings during 2024 and all were complied with.

Finally, Tiverton has joined nearly 300 communities across the UK in establishing a Community Alcohol Partnership (CAP). These are local partnerships designed to tackle alcohol-related harm among young people under 25 with a mission to create an alcohol-free childhood for all children and young people. With a focus on preventing underage drinking and reducing anti-social behaviour, CAP brings together local partners to address these challenges collaboratively. Alongside Tiverton, other active South West CAPs are running in Plymouth, Torbay, and Bournemouth, driving positive change in their communities.

The final function I want to focus on today is Local Welfare Assistance. In itself this could be an entire presentation and not fully cover everything Mid Devon does here, but I do want to focus on some specific things we have done and are doing to improve the lives of our residents.

Sometimes we have to offer specific support through law, for example the non-means tested statutory reductions to Council Tax granted to 530 households totalling nearly £6.5m of support.

But others are within our gift to offer, funded from a combination of partner councils, government, or from our own budgets.

Care leavers who are solely liable for Council Tax have their liability for Council Tax reduced to nothing. The cost of this is funded entirely by Mid Devon. The reduction is applied after other Statutory Discounts have been applied (for example Single Person Discount). To date 19 Care leavers are receiving this support saving them £7,253, and we should all be proud of that.

We administer two local Council Tax support schemes for working age and pensioner claimants.

Discretionary Housing Payments are available to those in receipt of Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit. This support is funded by the Department of Work and Pensions, and we have a total fund available of £77,202 for the financial year.

The Exceptional Hardship Scheme is funded by DCC and has a total available for this financial year of £20k. It is to help with the current year's Council Tax for residents who receive a Council Tax Rebate.

Household Support Funding has been renewed by the Government this winter to help support those who are struggling to afford food and energy bills. The scheme is in its sixth iteration now, and will last for six months or until the funding is fully allocated.

The last scheme that ended in September was fully allocated, and helped 535 households across the district.

The new government made the winter fuel payment means tested this winter, and our benefits team identified 325 local pensioners who lost the winter fuel allowance as a result. Letters were proactively issued inviting them to contact Mid Devon to claim fuel vouchers of either £250 (Single Pensioner) or £300 (Couples). 251 of those pensioners reached out and we have already issued £66k of vouchers to help support them with their winter heating bills. We also extended this support to care leavers, with 3 receiving vouchers totalling £450.

Alongside the wider support fund awards, in total we have supported 387 households already by the end of November, with £101,693 of vouchers issued.

I would like to use this opportunity to personally thank the team who work so hard to deliver these support schemes, and quite honestly go above and beyond to help some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

I'll finish now with this slide. This is a page on our website which explains and signposts all of the above assistance and more. The web address is www.middevon.gov.uk/residents-financial-support/ . Go there yourself and read through the resources to learn what is available and shout about it in our communities.

And if you have a local food pantry or support group that is missing, tell us: we want to add them.

There is sometimes a stigma attached to asking for help, even privately. It is our job to reassure residents that it is ok and normal to ask for help when we need it.