

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 24 February 2020 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

F W Letch (Chairman)
W Burke, R J Chesterton, Mrs C P Daw,
R Evans, Mrs I Hill, B A Moore, R L Stanley,
B G J Warren and A Wilce

Apologies

Councillor(s)

B Holdman

Also Present

Councillor(s)

G Barnell and R M Deed

Also Present

Officer(s):

Jill May (Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation), Jenny Clifford (Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration), Matthew Page (Group Manager for Human Resources), Clare Robathan (Scrutiny Officer) and Carole Oliphant (Member Services Officer)

123 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00.00.59)**

Apologies were received from Cllr B Holdman.

124 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (00.01.19)**

Members were reminded of the need to declare any interests when appropriate.

125 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00.01.24)**

There were no members of the public present.

126 **MEMBER FORUM (00.01.34)**

There were no issues raised under this item.

127 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (00.01.51)**

The minutes of the last meeting held on 27th January 2020 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

128 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET (00.02.10)**

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet on 13th February 2020 had been called in.

129 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00.02.16)

The Chairman informed Members that he and the Scrutiny Officer had attended a Devon County Council Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on 5G and that many interesting questions had been asked by the public present.

The Scrutiny Officer stated that the event had lasted all day and about 140 Members of the public were present to be involved in the discussion. She stated that the sessions included reference to misunderstanding of scientific evidence and that questions would now be selected and put to a panel of experts in a few months' time.

The Chairman informed the Committee that the sessions had highlighted the requirement that new masts for 5G would need to be 200 metres apart and he requested that the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration bring a report to the Scrutiny Committee in April with future implications for planning applications.

130 CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND ECONOMIC REGENERATION (00.07.21)

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a *report of the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration who gave Members an overview of the areas within his portfolio. He explained that the report detailed a large area and specific projects including:

- Town centre regeneration schemes
- Town centre masterplanning
- Garden Village at Cullompton
- Ongoing Housing Infrastructure Schemes
- Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension
- The Local Plan
- Greater Exeter Strategic Plan
- Building Control and Regulation

In response to questions about the Hydro Mills Project he informed Members that a business case was being brought before the Economy PDG and would then be presented to the Cabinet.

The Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration explained that applications have been made to the Environment Agency after long standing discussions with regards to ecology and flood issues.

There was a general discussion with regard to the use of consultants for masterplanning and Members were informed that consideration on the use of consultants was based on specialist skills available, the duration of the work required and the capacity within the Council to deal with the work internally.

In response to a question about using officers from other authorities the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration explained that the Council's planning officers regularly liaised with their counterparts and were aware of the skill sets of officers in other authorities but everyone was working at or close to capacity and there was currently no usable resource that could be utilised.

Consideration was given to:

- Crediton Town Masterplan timings
- The need for the employment of a Tiverton Town Centre Manager now that the Tiverton Town Centre Partnership had been reformed
- Garden Village Project and how this would be funded in the future
- Details of the current Housing Infrastructure Fund projects

Members expressed concerns with regard to the recent Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) that they were not being given enough time to look at the emerging policies.

It was explained to Members that the Planning Policy Advisory Group were scrutinising the policies one by one and making suggestions for changes. Members were reminded that any Member who was not a member of the Planning Policy Advisory Group was welcome to attend and contribute to the discussions.

Members questioned the benefits of MDDC being part of the GESP and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration explained that MDDC had to provide a 5 year land supply which was mandated by Government. The options available were to do this on our own or in consort with other authorities. He explained that by working alongside neighbouring authorities there would be a joined up approach to infrastructure, leisure and tourism.

The Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration explained that MDDC had a duty to co-operate with other authorities and that there were a lot of cross boundary issues that would be easier to look at strategically as a group of authorities rather than stand alone, including climate change. Planning across larger GESP area rather than within individual council boundaries would also mean greater engagement with the Government over funding and infrastructure provision.

Members discussed the need to provide social housing for larger households.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration thanked officers for producing his comprehensive report.

Note: *report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

131 **ESTABLISHMENT 6 MONTH UPDATE (01.08.17)**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a *report of the Group Manager for Human Resources informing Members of the overall structure of the Council showing the management and deployment of officers.

He provided Members with further detail on the following:

- Increase in the Establishment
- Sickness rates had improved over the past 12 months
- Increase in short term sickness
- New sickness policy introduced
- Increased support for mental health and wellbeing of staff

- Increase in staff turnover

Members discussed the current sickness rates and took some positives from the report and the new sickness policy. Concerns were raised with regard to the average 8.2 days sickness and Members felt that this was still too high compared to the private sector where rates were much lower.

Members requested that sickness rates were benchmarked against neighbouring authorities and companies within the private sector.

Members expressed disappointment that leavers tended not to give a reason for leaving the authority and did not complete a staff exit interview. Suggestions were made that an independent body or persons be used to complete staff exit interviews rather than line managers.

Note: *report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

132 **FORWARD PLAN (01.29.15)**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** the *Forward Plan.

Note: *Forward plan previously circulated and attached to the minutes

133 **SCRUTINY OFFICER UPDATE (01.29.43)**

The Scrutiny Officer provided Members with an update on the Climate Change workshop she had attended the previous week. She explained that the discussions had centred on the carbon emission targets and the shrinking budgets of local authorities. She explained that there had been a focus on the importance of the procurement process understanding the climate target and that MDDC were ahead of the curve as a Members briefing with regard to procurement had been arranged for 19th March 2020.

Members discussed Carbon Offsetting and that it was not clear if this was adding to the solution.

134 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS (01.36.05)**

The Chairman of the Customer Experience Working Group informed Members that a final report would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee and once concluded she would like to lead a new Working Group into woman's health issues within the workforce.

The Chairman requested that the Committee investigate High Street Security within the 3 main towns but this investigation could be deferred until after the Police and Crime Commissioner election and the roll out of the CCTV Policy and Guidance to the Community PDG in June 2020.

Members requested an update on timings of the 3 Rivers Governance report due to be presented to Cabinet.

(The meeting ended at 3.56 pm)

CHAIRMAN