

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **CABINET** held on 1 August 2023 at 5.15 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

L Taylor (Leader)  
J Buczkowski, S Clist, S Keable, J Lock, S Keable, D Wulff, S J Clist  
and J Buczkowski

### **Also Present**

#### **Councillors**

D Broom, E Buczkowski, P Colthorpe, R Gilmour, L Knight, S  
Robinson.

### **Also Present**

#### **Officers:**

Andrew Seaman (Member Services Manager), Maria De Leburne  
(District Solicitor and Monitoring Officer), Andrew Jarrett (Deputy  
Chief Executive (S151)), Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Dean  
Emery (Corporate Manager for Revenues, Benefits and Recovery)  
and Angie Howell (Member Services Officer)

## **20. APOLOGIES (00:03:17)**

Apologies were received from Cllr N Bradshaw

Cllrs G Czapiewski, M Farrell, M Fletcher, A Glover, F Letch, N Letch, J Wright, attended the meeting via Teams.

## **21. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00:03:32)**

Nick Quinn, a local resident submitted questions in relation to agenda Item 6 - Communication Engagement Strategy – which were read out by the Leader on behalf of the resident:

### **Question 1**

At paragraph 1.8 in the Report, on page 30 of your papers, the number of “followers” of the Council is given as 34,000 – with a breakdown by platform. How many of these ‘followers’ are based in Mid Devon, or the immediate surrounding area?

The Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure responded by stating that most followers/subscribers to our content do not need to provide addressing information so we are unable to quantify across most of the platforms. We can however identify 'claimed' addresses on the Next Door platform, and this currently stands at approx. 8000.

### **Question 2**

In the Strategy document, on page 36 of your papers, is a piece about a new online platform called Engagement HQ. I think this is already on the Internet as LetsTalkMidDevon” - which is what the public will call it. Using different names for the same thing can cause confusion. Why is the naming not consistent?

The Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure responded by stating that the Engagement HQ is the product name of the platform implemented. The website/url address is LetsTalkMidDevon which is what our residents will use to interact with us and was named subsequent to the report being written.

In relation to agenda Item 7 – Notification of Key Decisions – the following questions were read out by the Leader on behalf of the resident:

### **Question 3**

The document issued is headed “Forward Plan” and is said to contain any “*Key Decisions to be taken by Cabinet or Council*”. To be a “Key Decision”, the decision must meet certain requirements. It is not clear which of the current items listed meet these “key” requirements and which are ordinary decisions or information reports. Please can future “Notification of Key Decisions” lists indicate which items are actual “Key Decisions”?

The Leader responded by stating that the forward plan only needs to list key decisions, since these are the only ones that require ‘notice’ to be given. However, the document will also sometimes list other non-key decisions (or the part of the decision that is ‘non-key’ such as when things are going to a PDG first). The Forward plan is a useful organisational tool that aides the Council within the decision making process.

### **Question 4**

In the current “Notification of Key Decisions”, it is not clear what the decision to be taken actually is. Please can future “Notification of Key Decisions” lists specify the actual decision to be taken?

The Leader responded by stating that to publish a decision to be taken could be considered as predetermination. Recommendations on reports are only recommendations. The Forward Plan is a ‘live’ document and can change at any time in line with the priorities of the Council. Some of the decisions brought to Cabinet must have the ability to change before the next planned meeting so therefore it is not practical to detail the key decision to be made.

## **22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (00:07:55)**

No interests were declared under this item. Members were reminded of the need to make declarations of interest where appropriate.

Cllr J Lock declared a personal interest in that she was the Chair of the Corporate Parent Board at Somerset County Council.

## **23. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (00:08:10)**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 4 July 2023, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Leader.

## **24. CARE LEAVERS COUNCIL TAX EXEMPTION (00:09:30)**

The Cabinet received a report which contained the Care Leavers Discount Policy. This outlined the Council’s approach to grant discretionary reductions in liability for Council Tax under S13a (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 in respect of specified care leavers within the Council’s area. The Council has the ability to reduce liability in relation to individual cases or class(es) of cases.

Consideration was given to:

- There was no mention of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) within the report, it was highlighted that the Council should be mindful of UASCs. The Corporate Manager for Benefits, Income and Recovery reassured that when cases were received from Devon County Council (DCC), Mid Devon’s Welfare Officer would look at the wider care that might be required.

- It was good that the Council could support this scheme and that Mid Devon would be the first District Council in Devon to adopt this policy.
- Asked who would make up the shortfall for the major preceptors, the Corporate Manager for Benefits, Income and Recovery explained that the entirety of costs for this scheme came under the billing authority and was not a shared cost.
- Asked if the Council covered these costs, it was explained that the exemption applied to those within the Mid Devon District as well as the preceptors as listed. The General Fund charges the Collection Fund at the end of each year for the tax base to rectify any costs incurred.
- It was asked if this Council, alongside DCC supported young people get into College. The Corporate Manager for Benefits, Income and Recovery explained that wider support from the Welfare Officer involved would signpost individuals to what was available.
- The benefits of this scheme for the taxpayer would be seen.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. Cabinet recommend to full Council the adoption of the care leavers discount policy.
2. Delegated authority is given to the Corporate Manager for Revenues, Benefits & Corporate Recovery to make technical scheme amendments to ensure it meets the criteria set by the Council (4.0 in policy)

(Proposed by Cllr J Buczkowski, seconded by Cllr S Keable)

Reason for the decision:

Helps Mid Devon to support customers and vulnerable households, bringing the Council and community closer together by working in partnership with other councils.

Note: \* Report previously circulated.

**25. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY (00:23:29)**

The Cabinet received a report which provided members with the revised Communication and Engagement Strategy and accompanying Media and Social Media Policy. The 2023 Communications and Engagement Strategy was referred back to Community PDG following a meeting of the Cabinet in April 2023. Following the Cabinet's request this amended strategy now includes more detail about the Council's engagement plans.

Consideration was given to:

- Asked whether there would be a practical element to emergency planning, The Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement explained that exercises were operated internally and would look to perform other practical exercises in the future.
- Asked if Cllrs were covered under the Whistle Blowing Policy, it was explained by the Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement that Subject Access Requests were dealt with under the Council's Data Protection Information Security Policies and that the legislation that covered Subject Access Requests differed to the Community Engagement Strategy.

- A better understand was sought in regards to Subject Access Requests, to which the Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement that all members agreed to the Council's data protection and confidentiality policies and were expected to adhere to them.
- It was explained that all Parish Clerks, would be notified of 'Let's talk Mid Devon' and that engagement with the Council was being promoted. In addition, platforms were available to all Parishes to use and Cllrs were encouraged to share information that had been released through press releases as well as keeping residents and parishes informed of consultations.

**RESOLVED** that:

The content of the revised Communication and Engagement Strategy and the Media and Social Media Policy be approved.

(Proposed by Cllr D Wulff and seconded by Cllr J Buczkowski)

Reason for the decision:

To ensure that our customers, staff, members and stakeholders are informed about Council services, news and changes through appropriate and varied channels.

Note: \* Report previously circulated.

**26. NOTIFICATION OF KEY DECISIONS**

The Cabinet had before it, and **NOTED**, the notification of \* Key Decisions.

The following three items had been added to the Forward Plan since the publication of the draft plan attached to the agenda for the meeting:

- Housing Revenue Accounts - large sites options appraisal
- Tenant Involvement update and Action Plan
- Recharges Policy

In addition, the 'Makeup of the senior officer structure in light of posts held vacant' had been moved to October's Cabinet meeting.

Note: \* Notification of key Decisions previously circulated.

(The meeting ended at 17:49)

**CHAIRMAN**