

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 20 June 2023 at 5.30 pm

### **Present**

**Councillors** M Fletcher, B Fish, C Adcock, G Czapiewski, C Harrower, B Holdman, J Poynton and S Robinson

### **Apology**

**Councillor** M Jenkins

### **Also Present**

**Councillors** N Bradshaw, D Broom, E Buczkowski, J Buczkowski, R Gilmour, S Keable, F W Letch, J Lock, L Taylor, G Westcott, J Wright and D Wulff

### **Present**

**Officers:** Maria De Leiburne (District Solicitor and Monitoring Officer), Matthew Page (Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste), Paul Deal (Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change), Jason Ball (Climate and Sustainability Specialist), Andrew Seaman (Member Services Manager) and David Parker (Member Services & Policy Research Officer)

## **1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN (0:03:42)**

Cllr M. Fletcher was duly elected Chairman of the Environment PDG for the municipal year 2023-2024.

(Proposed by Cllr B. Holdman, Seconded by Cllr C. Adcock)  
no other nominations – Carried unanimously.

## **2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN (0:06:12)**

Cllr B. Fish was duly elected Vice Chairman of the Environment PDG for the municipal year 2023-24.

(Proposed by Cllr G. Czapiewski, Seconded by Cllr J.Poynton)  
no other nominations – carried unanimously.

## **3 MEETING MANAGEMENT**

The Chairman stated that he would take the Climate and Sustainability Update next.

## **4 CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY UPDATE (0:09:07)**

Cllr Natasha Bradshaw (Cabinet Member for Climate Change) addressed the PDG. She said that Climate Change affected all departments across the Council and all Councillors and everybody had a part to play. The Council was committed to get to Net Zero by 2030, she had been impressed at how far the Council had come already and wanted to thank the officers. There was an enormous task on the Council's hands, however, she was aware of the great enthusiasm throughout the Council. Partnership working would be a key to achieving this and the Council was looking at

Climate Action in two ways; within Council Services and also across the District. The latter was extremely challenging but progress included two extremely impressive projects to decarbonise heating and cooling systems at Exe Valley and Lords Meadow Leisure Centres.

Following this the Group was presented with, and **NOTED**, a \*report to update on the Climate Action Plan (CAP) and the wider Climate and Sustainability Programme.

Consideration was given to:

- The Corporate Project Manager had applied for funding for Culm Valley Leisure Centre for a detailed design for decarbonised heating and cooling.
- Passive House Social Housing and Affordable Housing at Post Hill.
- Working with community groups was very productive and inspirational, for example the Mural at the Pannier Market, tree planting and other various initiatives.
- The Climate and Sustainability Specialist has been running training workshops and getting officers up to date with energy use and data. The Council has cut electricity usage at some of its key buildings by about 21% since 2018/19, unfortunately gas usage had not gone down so there is still work to do there. The decarbonisation project would hit that figure very squarely.
- Officers would be running workshops on various projects and topics such as planning policy and decisions, renewable energy, Energy Champions etc.
- The Net Zero Advisory Group will be reconstituted. The Clerk observed that Member Services awaited parties to put names forward for that group.

The Officer then answered questions from Councillors:

- Carbon footprint. The Annual GHG Emissions by Category (Annexe A figure 1) – the orange dashed line was the “hoped for” trajectory i.e. what we need to achieve to hit net zero by 2030. The black line showed how we were actually doing including a rise in emissions for the year 2021/22.
- Item 3 on table 3 of Annexe A to the report – The Climate and Sustainability Specialist was arranging a project group update for the relevant Cabinet members on renewable energy e.g. the hydroelectric scheme. An update would follow that.
- Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme (3.4.1). The Council were working in partnership with other agencies such as Exeter Community Energy, the peoples path to free advice about retrofitting of insulation etc. On the Council’s Climate and Sustainability Website there were a whole range of links to places where you can get information. Of the 149 home installations, councillors asked what percentage of the properties that equated to? The Officer replied that the figure was being tracked, at the moment it was a low percentage, but they hoped to scale it up.
- Would closer dialogue with Town and Parish Councils assist?
- At Table 2 (H02) Modern Methods of Construction and Self Build Opportunities, Councillors asked if we could track how the Council was doing as a district to encourage more self-build? The officer answered that it was being tracked and the Council had run workshops (Forward Planning).
- Could the Council look for Case Studies and for good and best practice from other housing authorities so that could can learn and look to be the best it can? The Climate and Sustainability Officer said that was already being done and that they worked with developers, giving them check-lists of a whole range of things that they should / could consider and that was their preferred

- way of getting feedback on how they were addressing climate change etc. (Reference: [MDDC Climate Emergency Planning Policy Statement and resources](#)) The Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change observed that the Planning Team had been on an “Away day” to a fellow Council to learn about self-build, property and planning practices.
- Single Use Plastics at Phoenix House – Councillors asked if there was a policy? What was the update? Was the Council avoiding single use plastics? The officer replied that there was a policy, the previous update had looked at our use of single use plastics at places like our leisure centres. Some things were external and that was more difficult. When it came to enforcement then Trading Standards would be monitoring the new rules coming from Central Government. Matthew Page - Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste - commented: The Council were awaiting forthcoming national guidance from Central Government regarding future practice and funding arrangements.
  - National Grid Energy Distribution (NGED) power infrastructure, a councillor asked if there was a Cabinet member responsible for looking at this matter. The Climate and Sustainability Specialist said that he tried to keep abreast of the situation; officers such as Forward Planning feed into NGED consultations.
  - Retro-fitting measures (Table 2) ENV01 – Councillors asked where the Council was and what were the barriers? The Climate and Sustainability Specialist answered that with regard to renewables it depended upon the ambition the Council had in this direction. He said that the Council were increasing the solar array hosted on the Leisure Centres and on Phoenix House and that these ideas were looking a long way into the future.
  - Councillors asked if Electric Vehicle charging could raise funds for the Council? Property Services need a response here.
  - Recycling rates and Education of the Public – a Councillor asked about recycling rates and how the Council were doing and mentioned Cllr Taylor’s plans relating to recycling of pots and pans and coffee pods etc. The Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste mentioned that at the next meeting of the PDG there would be a review of the Bin it 123 scheme and it would make comparisons between April/May 2022 and April/May 2023. Councillors commented that some members of the public were putting food waste into black sacks which were then being accessed by seagulls and creating a mess – how do we deal with that? Matthew Page, Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste commented that when Bin it 123 was introduced they had shown some leniency to help embed the scheme, but now there needs to be further education and if necessary the Council would need to enforce good practice with regard to waste and recycling. Councillors commented that allowances needed to be made for those in flats who did not have access to storage facilities.
  - The Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste said that they were still getting requests for recycling containers so that was encouraging in terms of the public being committed to supporting the scheme and increasing our recycling rate.
  - A member mentioned that the [consultation for developing local partnerships for onshore wind](#) was closing on 7<sup>th</sup> July, REGEN has information [online](#).

Note: \*update previously circulated and attached to the minutes

5 **START TIME OF MEETINGS (0:43:35)**

The Chairman proposed a start time of 5.30pm – carried unanimously

6 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (0:44:00)**

Apologies were received from Cllr M Jenkins. Cllr A Glover attended via Teams.

7 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (0:44:16)**

Members were reminded of the need to make declarations where appropriate  
Cllr C. Adcock declared a personal interest, he is a Director in South Somerset Community Energy Society, (a Community Benefit Society).

8 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (0:44:57)**

There were no questions from members of the public.

9 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (0:45:19)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2023 were NOTED

10 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (0:45:48)**

The Chairman thanked the PDG for electing him as Chairman and said he was looking forward to working collaboratively with all members of the PDG across the board.

11 **REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN REPORT FOR 2022/23 (0:46:10)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a \* report from the Deputy Chief Executive presenting the Revenue and Capital Outturn figures 2022/23 for both the General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The contents of the report were outlined and a high level summary provided specific to this PDG as follows:

- On the General fund the Council overspent by £190,000 and on the Housing Revenue Account it underspent by £312,000 both of which should be regarded as a good achievements in the current economic circumstances and pointed to a good level of Budget Management.
- The cost of living crisis had impacted the Council with a higher pay award for staff, staff turnover, vacancies and higher than normal sickness levels requiring hiring of temporary staff.
- There had been some investment during the year for example Bin It 123.
- There had been significant levels of grant funding to run the energy rebate schemes.
- With regard to the report the specific page numbers in the pack to refer to were pages 34 Grounds Maintenance, 41-42 Property Services & 45-46 Waste.
- There was minimal variance with regards to Grounds Maintenance. With regard to Property Services the underspend was due to some planned maintenance not being needed and some not being done due to staff

vacancies, those funds would go back into the Reserves so that the funds are there to do the work when needed.

- The notable variance in Waste was due to the funding of the Bin It 123 scheme which was funded out of reserves, increases in fuel costs and additional costs in terms of salaries and agency staff to cover vacancies. That increase in costs had been offset by increased income in things like Green Waste, Trade Waste, the money the Council gets from, for example, recycling materials.
- The Council had also received a higher refund from Devon County Council due to its higher recycling, there was less to put into landfill so DCC could share the saving with Mid Devon DC. – the refund is part of the service budget and so becomes a variance which went into reserves.

Discussion took place regarding:

- In relation to paragraph 3.63 relating to General Fund Housing and how the Council could make its own housing stock more sustainable? – The Climate and Sustainability specialist stated that there was a constant allocation of capital funds to maintain and improve Council stock – they wouldn't be able to retrofit to Passive House but depending upon the type of house, each one would have the potential to retro fit to a certain standard. Some of them have been insulated and then retro fitted with air source heat pumps for example. Some residences are not suitable because they cannot be insulated and draught proofed to the relevant standard, but each archetype has opportunities identified and depending upon what money is in the budget or what funds can be accessed by bidding from Central Government, then the Council is able to invest in those properties. There were a list of projects the Council have for investment in when the funds were available. With regard to new housing stock, the Zed Pods will be capable of Net Zero carbon performance.
- The Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change mentioned the Capital section of the report (pg51) Play Areas (very little variance against the budget), Shops (there has been some slippage as the planned maintenance was deemed not necessary at this time, funds would still be there for the following year) and in terms of other projects – there was a major expense that had not been expected in that they had to purchase a new mini excavator.
- In relation to the refurbishment of a Park – Were any further 106 funds earmarked to help play parks? Also could we plant trees using s.106 funds. – The Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change would reply in writing.

Note: \*report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

## 12 WORK PROGRAMME (0:57:27)

It was asked if the PDG could look at the fee for the Garden Waste Bin and whether the fee could be paid in instalments? The Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste would provide an update at the next meeting in August.

The Clerk reminded the PDG of their Thematic area as set out in the Constitution at page 22, Article 8 – policy Development Groups, in order that the PDG could consider what areas they might want to build into their work programme.

Items suggested were:

- The Data Processing Centre at the Exmouth Swimming Pool.
- Hydro Electric Power
- Linking the Planning Policy Advisory Group and Environment PDG to discuss the subject of Anaerobic Digesters
- Looking at a robust form of green support for all future planning applications. – Planning couldn't insist on very much when it comes to "Green" considerations. Cllr Holdman feeds these issues into the Planning Policy Advisory Group. – Perhaps we could link this PDG with that group?
- Developments around Cullompton and Air Pollution
- The Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste said that with regard to Fly Tipping, the Annual Review and First Quarter Enforcement figures will be on the Agenda for the next PDG meeting in August.
- Was there a tree planting plan? – The Climate and Sustainability Specialist answered that we hadn't got a fund but we did have a target of the number of trees to be planted. – A tree planting event was a good idea, he would work with the open spaces officers.
- Observation of Planning policies – people bought properties with large trees in the garden and then apply for them to be removed altogether rather than being pollarded – perhaps more trees need TPO's to be applied to them.
- The Climate and Sustainability Specialist informed the PDG that the Biodiversity duty to the Council has been upgraded and work is required this year. There may again be an overlap with the Planning Policy Advisory Group.
- The Scrutiny Committee would be looking at Motion 583 Protecting Rivers and Seas, where there may again be overlaps with Planning and the Environment PDG. – This PDG may want to look at that motion.
- Do we want to have a specific managing process as a specific focus group on ensuring that we can deliver net zero by 2030? The Climate and Sustainability Specialist said that this information was already included within the report that he would produce for each meeting of the PDG.
- Strengths and obligations on biodiversity net gains – The Climate and Sustainability Specialist responded that there are two main elements. Firstly the obligation for a 10% minimum biodiversity net gain on new developments. Local Authorities if they wish, could write in a higher obligation. Secondly nature conservation and enhancement of biodiversity – Government though the Environment Act 2021 requires plans to set out what local authorities will do and how – the Council needs to set some targets etc. The Climate and Sustainability Expert will pull a report together over the next six months.

The following areas were added to the Work Plan for this PDG:

- Garden Waste (the Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste will provide an update at the August PDG meeting)
- Renewable and Alternative Energy, Energy Efficiency including Community Energy Projects
- Green Standards in Planning
- Nature Recovery and Conservation within Planning

(The meeting ended at 6.57 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**