

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP**
held on 10 October 2023 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

M Fletcher (Chairman)
B Fish (Vice Chairman), C Adcock, C Harrower,
B Holdman, L Knight, J Poynton, S Robinson and
G Westcott

Councillors on Line

Cllrs. E Buczkowski, J. Buczkowski, N. Bradshaw,
A Glover, L Taylor & D Wulff.

Apologies

Councillor(s)

G Czapiewski

Also Present

Councillor(s)

J Wright and R Gilmour

Present

Officer(s):

Paul Deal (Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and
Climate Change), Jason Ball (Climate and Sustainability
Specialist), Darren Beer (Operations Manager for Street
Scene), David Parker (Democratic Services & Policy
Research Officer) and Sarah Lees (Democratic Services
Officer)

23 **Apologies and substitute Members (0:03:04)**

Apologies were received from Cllr G Czapiewski who was substituted by Cllr Lloyd Knight.

24 **Declarations of Interest under the Code of Conduct (0:03:38)**

Members were reminded of the need to make declarations of interest where appropriate.

None were declared.

25 **Public Question Time (0:03:56)**

There were no Questions from members of the Public

26 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting (0:04:17)**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on Tuesday 15 August 2023, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

27 **Chairman's Announcements (0:04:48)**

The Chairman encouraged all Councillors to share any ideas for this Policy Development Group to address/look into where possible.

28 **Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Update (0:5:22)**

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change addressed the PDG. She thought that the Council were making good progress. Mid Devon were working with the Devon Energy Planning Group, were bidding for Green Grants and making available more Electric Vehicle Charging points. There was ongoing engagement and support with local groups.

The Climate and Environmental Sustainability Statements Guidance* was brought to the meeting and was ready to be recommended to the Cabinet for adoption.

With regard to the costs of reaching Net Zero, the value for money provided by our officer capacity was very high and the aspirations of the Council's Climate Action Plan were also very high and could only be met by the Council working in partnership to attract external partnership for finance.

Consideration was given to:

- Scope 3 Emission Factors take inflation into account but the figures were an estimate / difficult to be accurate. The Council should identify areas of spend where they can achieve savings, engage with major suppliers and ask them what they were doing to reduce their carbon footprint and set them goals.
- Scope 1 – static fuel use in buildings and transport would start to fall as the Council had decarbonised two Leisure Centres.
- The Climate and Sustainability Officer was happy to support all teams in all Policy Development Groups, he already tried to bring the Environmental good news to the Environment PDG but would be very happy to support e.g. the Homes Strategy and the Community PDG through Leisure.
- Devon County Council was about to issue its consultation with Town and Parish Councils with regard to £7m of Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding about where they want Electric Vehicle Chargers. There were three areas of focus: (i) Street Level, (ii) Amenity or Community Car Parks, and (iii) Strategic Hubs (high volume turnover sites). Councillors should try to assist their Towns and Parishes to get as much of the LEVI funding as was possible spent within Mid Devon.
- Consideration could be given to village halls that have solar panels to offer EV charging, so that the energy used for the EV charging was renewable and generated locally.
- The Z-Pod installations in Cullompton were all net-zero with solar panels, electric heating, cooling and no gas.
- Councillor B Fish was asked to cross check the Net Zero Advisory Group membership against the membership of all PDG's, in order to get Climate Change awareness across the Council.
- The State of the District debate in March would include a discussion on Net Zero and the Council were about to consult with Towns and Parishes on the subjects that they wanted included in the debate.
- Consideration was given to what the Council could do about climate change without putting the burden on the tax payer. Climate change was coming

through in all reports in that every report had to consider climate change and be signed off. Councillors asked whether the climate change impact should move to the front of reports for Members of the public to see how the Council were tracking against objectives.

- What could the Council do to get climate and sustainability into planning and development? The Environment PDG did not have the remit for such matters but all the Members could attend the Planning Policy Advisory Group. It was on the Cabinet Member for Climate Change's radar to make Climate and Sustainability a part of planning and development.
- Members of the PDG commented that it would be helpful to know with Anaerobic Digesters what their carbon emissions were and what carbon emissions they save. The Climate and Sustainability Officer said that he was unable to obtain such information (each enterprise is different).
- The Council could reach out to Town and Parish Councils to get their local perspective about climate change.
- EV charging points and solar panels could be a revenue driver for the Council.
- Silverton Parish Council had been investigating EV Charging Points and were looking at the community hosting its own charging points. Once the pricing was available the information would be fed back in to the Environment PDG.

The report was **NOTED**.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the "Guidance: climate and environmental sustainability statements" for officers and Members regarding climate and sustainability statements be adopted. The guidance related to business cases and committee reports and should be used and maintained to help shape decisions and delivery in line with policy and statutory obligations.
(Proposed by the Chairman.)

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

29 **MDDC draft Budget 2024 - 2025 - First Review (0:42:11)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) presenting the updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which covered the period 2024/25 to 2028/29 for the General Fund (GF) and considered initial savings options.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- This was a 5 year plan with figures in relation to years 2 – 4 being best guesses.
- Inflation was likely to continue.
- The previous budget gap for 2024/25 of £1.5m had now increased to £2.1m partly as a result of stubborn inflation and the Government's indicative increase in planning fees not transpiring.
- Assumptions had been made in terms of not using any reserves and the need to revise the capital programme.

The Group considered the savings options outlined in Appendix 2 and discussion took place regarding:

- The Council was not intending to achieve savings by imposing compulsory redundancies but rather it would consider not replacing people automatically when they left and undertake a thorough review of the risks involved in each case.
- What the green, amber and red risk categories meant. –
GREEN : – a saving which did not significantly impact upon service delivery.
AMBER: - savings would impact on service delivery but that impact would be manageable.
RED: - savings would impact upon service delivery and would require changes to the levels of services offered.
- How staff sickness could best be managed and what the Council was already doing regarding this.
- The savings did not add up to £2.1m and there would need to be a further round of cuts.

The shortfall covered two aspects;

- £1m in year savings targets – a £400,000 staffing saving and £625k to avoid drawing from General Reserves. Hopeful if not confident that the Council would be able to absorb this - recommendations will be fed back to the Cabinet.
- £1m inflationary pressure across pay, utilities, supplies and services.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:

- i. Pool Cars be removed.
- ii. The Cross Council Shared Saving Scheme be continued and that the savings reflect the figure likely to be received rather than the prudent previous budget forecast.
- iii. Garden Waste Fees be increased in line or just above inflation. (Councillor B Holdman abstained from this vote).
- iv. Increase trade waste charges above 3% base.
- v. Staff – de-scoping or down-sizing activity, should turnover allow for natural wastage approach, managing workforce resource effectively through targeted vacancy and turnover management.
- vi. Reduction in Agency spend.
- vii. Reduction in cost of sickness.
- viii. The Council's own Business Rates – possibility of reduction following appeals.
- ix. Energy costs – possible movement depending on new unit price. There was a need to reduce usage.
- x. Fuel costs – possible movement depending on how prices move.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

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

30 **Himalayan Balsam (01:34:10)**

Concern had been raised in Oakford Parish, as the sewage treatment plant there was full of this invasive species. It grew up to 2 – 3m high and then the seed pods explode, covering an area of seven square metres and continuing down the water courses. The only way to stop it was to cut it before its seeds disperse. Consideration was given to:

- Environment Agency and South West Water not responding
- Upper Culm had a very good Himalayan Balsam Action Group where volunteers cut the weed down.
- Cullompton being flooded because the leats and streams were clogged with Himalayan Balsam and other invasive species.
- Lobbying Regional Director of the Environment Agency to see whether they had a strategy to clear Himalayan Balsam.
- Service Level Agreements with Voluntary Groups that receive funding from Mid Devon District Council.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change would work with Cllr R Gilmour to raise this matter with the Environment Agency and perhaps also bring in Lucy Jefferson the Co-ordinator from Connecting the Culm. The member also suggested that other members of this PDG also attend the Sustainable Tiverton AGM which would be taking place soon.

The Chairman agreed to take forward an action to invite the Environment Agency and relevant authorities to appear before this Group.

31 **Work Programme (01:52:40)**

It was mentioned that tours of the Exeter Energy from Waste Centre could be arranged and that dates were available from April for all Members.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Services asked for coffee pod recycling and the recycling of pots and pans to be added to the work plan.

The Environment PDG Chairman would liaise with Planning Policy Advisory Group relating to Housing Energy Efficiency.

The Bereavement Services Fees and Charges item would be broadened more widely to Fees and Charges.

Note: * Work Programme previously circulated

(The meeting ended at 7.29 pm)

CHAIRMAN