

**MINUTES of a MEETING of the PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY
POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 25 November 2025 at 5.30 pm**

Present

Councillors: B Fish (Chair)
G Cochran (Vice-Chair), C Adcock,
G Czapiewski, A Stirling and G Westcott

Apologies

Councillor: A Glover and C Harrower

Also Present

Councillor: S Keable

Also Present

Officer: Paul Deal (Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience), Jason Ball (Climate and Sustainability Specialist), John Hammond (Development Management Manager), Tristan Peat (Forward Planning Team Leader), Elaine Barry (Planning Obligations Monitoring Officer), Adrian Welsh (Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery) and Angie Howell (Democratic Services Officer)

Councillors

Online: N Bradshaw, D Wulff and G Duchesne

Officers Online: Dr Stephen Carr (Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager)

32 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00:04:36)

Apologies were received from Cllr A Glover and Cllr C Harrower both attended on-line.

33 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00:05:05)

The following questions were received from a member of the public:-

Andrew Moore (which the Chair read out)

Thank you for responding to my questions to your last meeting, and apologies that once again I am unable to attend in person this time due to business commitments that take me to Scotland. I would be grateful if answers could be provided to the following questions relating to the minutes of the previous meeting.

1. At the last meeting I asked whether the PDG would amend planning guidance in favour food security, the natural environment and beauty of Mid-Devon over conflicting solar and wind proposals. The answer was that it was not within? the PDG's remit. Can you please explain how it is that it is not within the remit of the 'Planning ... Policy Development Group' to develop planning policy, particularly when it comes to matters of importance to the local community such as those outlined?
2. At the last meeting I examined reported performance figures to discover that they had been changed. Can you please explain why the historic CO2 figures cited in the report presented to the last PDG meeting differ from those in the Council's Climate Strategy? The significant differences are in Transport (now 11% higher), Procurement (now 22% higher), and Buildings (now 1% lower). How can the Strategy be trusted if the baseline figures were so wrong?
3. At the last meeting I asked whether the PDG would commission a study to inform its strategy for the future in the light of alternative views on the standard climate change narrative. The answer was, in summary, a flat 'no'. Apparently, 'independent advice' was sought. In line with the point of my question, did that 'independent advice' include alternative opinions to provide a balanced view of the response to global warming? If not, the comment is not relevant. As is the case for citing views from nearly two years ago. An enquiring PDG, working on behalf of constituents, would be interested in new information that might mean that policy should be revised. It seems that this 'Policy Development Group', having developed a policy once per its remit, is not going to stir itself to do it again. So, here too, policy development does not seem to be the active remit of a 'Policy Development Group'. Bill Gates, a long-time climate change activist, has recently called for a “strategic pivot” in the effort against the climate crisis, writing that the world should shift away from trying to limit rising temperatures to instead focusing on efforts to prevent disease and poverty.

He has also criticized what he described as a “doomsday view of climate change” which focuses “too much on near-term emissions goals”. So, once again, will this PDG open its eyes and commission a balanced study to inform future strategy, considering whether use of public money is being appropriately targeted, given many other local priorities, in its recommendations to Cabinet and Full Council?

The Chair explained that the questions would be answered in writing within 10 working days.

34 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (00:09:31)**

No interests were declared under this item.

35 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (00:10:00)**

The minutes of the last meeting held on 23 September were approved as a correct record of the meeting and SIGNED by the Chair.

36 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00:10:17)**

The Chair had no announcements to make.

37 **DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET FOR 2026/2027 (VERSION 2) (00:10:24)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) presenting an update on the 2026/27 Budget and the emerging Capital Programme covering the period 2026/27 to 2030/31.

The Head of Finance, Property and Climate Resilience presented the report and the following was highlighted:-

- The report contained a very brief budget update which summarised the report that went to Cabinet in November 2025.
- The Government had made several announcements at the end of last week however this did not allow for individual Council levels of funding for next year.
- The Chancellors budget would be announced on 26 November which would be summarised in readiness for the Cabinet meeting on 2 December 2025.
- The new Year 5 bid was explained which showed investment in service areas.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- How capital assets would be affected by Local Government Reorganisation. It was explained that from April 2027 dual agreements would need to take place and these would have to be ratified by the new Authority. However local services would still be provided in this geographical area for some time.
- Whether there was scope or flexibility to defer some of the spend to future years? It was explained that there was a degree of flexibility when projects started depending upon compliance and health and safety.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

38 **PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD QUARTER 2 (00:23:24)**

The Group were presented with and **NOTED** the Performance Dashboard for Quarter 2 2025/26.

The Performance Dashboard gave an at a glance understanding of how services were performing in terms of performance, finance and risk.

Any measures that were part of the Corporate Plan were listed in yellow text. The indicators were presented with the current performance, the annual target and a rag rating (Red, Amber, Green) to indicate whether they were on track or not to meet targets.

The overall performance was presented in a pie chart and combined rag ratings from performance and finance measures.

The following was highlighted within the report:-

- Electric car charging points installed across Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) sites were showing as Red. No charge points had been installed so far this financial year. However, in the previous financial year six new charging points had been installed ahead of the annual target of four per annum.
- The projected capital outturn was showing as Amber. This was spending in terms of the Cullompton Relief Road which had slipped from the initial forecast. Although the project was well underway, spend was not at the forecast level.
- The capital slippage of overall projects was also showing as Red as all three projects had slipped
- Capital slippage as a percentage of projects was showing as Red. This related predominately to three land drainage projects that were being led by the Environment Agency which would continue to slip behind schedule.
- Building Control income was showing as Red and was approximately 20% below the target due to lower levels of applications this financial year than was originally forecasted.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- Why there were contradicting figures showing for net emissions. It was explained that there were two performance measures showing as Green which captured a small part of the overall footprint. The in-focus box was for the whole of the carbon footprint for Mid Devon District Council. Whilst the footprint for the whole estate increased, those two figures were outperforming. Also, the reporting timescales were slightly different as the in-focus box was focused on the annual carbon footprint comparing 2024/25 to the previous year and the Performance Dashboard which was looking at Quarter 2 2025/2026.
- Whether there was any possibility of the figures reflecting the overall picture as a mixture of timelines was difficult to compare. It was explained that the overall footprint were elements that the Council could not control. Whilst the in-focus box showed the very latest position, a live overall carbon footprint could not be provided as it took an amount of time after the year end to provide up-to-date figures.

- How was energy consumption per dwelling assessed? It was explained that the heating systems and upgrades provided to Council homes against the types of different buildings and the age of the house gave an estimate of energy performance. Exeter University were able to update the estimated figures which showed an improvement in energy performance overall for the Council's housing stock.
- The life-cycle of a building and the performance over a short- and long-term period of time. For example, the long-term view looked at whole life cycle and the requirement of developers to give assessments in understanding the long term impacts.

Note: * Performance Dashboard previously circulated

39 **SECTION 106 GOVERNANCE (00:37:44)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) presenting an update on the progress made in implementing the revised S106 arrangements as approved by Cabinet in December 2024.

The Planning Obligations Monitoring Officer presented the report and the following was highlighted:-

- Since the approval, the Governance Board had been fully constituted following an induction session and had met in line with the framework.
- The Board had actively engaged in its governance role, including monitoring funds risk, reviewing the quarterly reconciliation report and supporting continuous improvement.
- The Board undertook its annual review earlier this month. Two key updates were agreed – the removal of the fixed meeting time clause to allow greater flexibility in scheduling and the addition of a standing agenda item to report delegated decisions made in the previous quarter. This would strengthen transparency.
- Members were asked to note the progress made and the updated terms of reference included within the report.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- When Ward Members were required to attend how was it determined who was invited? It was explained that depending on the area that the spend related to, all relevant Ward Members would be invited to attend.
- The number of meetings that would take place. It was explained that every quarter the S106 monitoring records were reconciled with the Council's financial records to ensure they matched and therefore this was a good time for the Board to meet. The quarterly funding reports were then circulated to Town and Parish Councils. However there may be ad hoc meetings called at any time if there was a funding application that need to be decided within a certain timeframe.

- The number of attendees for the Board to be quorate? It was explained that there were a total of four members and that it required two of those four to be quorate.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

40 **NORTH DEVON RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE (00:46:59)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Strategic Manager Growth, Economy and Delivery introducing Members to the work of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance (NDRDA) to develop a strategic outline business case for significant capital investment in the North Devon Line between Exeter and Barnstaple.

The report requested consideration of the Council becoming a member of this Alliance and for Cabinet to consider a financial contribution towards the cost of the next NDRDA Annual Convention to be held in Mid Devon.

The following was highlighted within the report:-

- The Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance campaigned to secure significant capital investment into the North Devon Railway Line which was commonly known as the Tarka Line.
- It was operated by the Great Western Railway and ran between Exeter and Barnstaple calling at seven stations in Mid Devon.
- The Alliance was gaining significant momentum with support from a wide range of bodies which were listed in the report. Given the scale of ambition the Group had for the important transport corridor it was considered appropriate for consideration to be given to formally join the partnership.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- How could the Council help progress the improvement of the Tarka Line? It was explained that supporting the Alliance would be a way that the Council would have discussions with the rail industry and others in Devon County Council's Transport Authority and working more closely in terms of the improvement and the reinstatement of Clemson Station. It was a very important route for students travelling from Barnstaple to Exeter College.
- How would the £1000 be used? It was explained that the financial contribution would be used to fund a meeting in Mid-Devon.
- How long it would take for the project to come to fruition? It was explained that there would be a range of proposals put forward, and a strategic outline business case was currently being prepared. This would take time to deliver approximately 18 months to two years.
- Whether additional carriages would be provided to allow for additional seats being available for students to use? It was believed that this would help with capacity.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:-

- (i) That Mid Devon District Council supports the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance (NDRDA) by officially joining the alliance to achieve delivery of a modernisation programme for the North Devon (Tarka) Line passenger rail services between Exeter and Barnstaple, to achieve the associated economic, social and environmental benefits for our local communities and business.
- (ii) To consider a financial contribution of £1,000 to support the third annual convention of the NDRDA scheduled for March 2026 at a location in Mid Devon.

(Proposed by Cllr G Cochran and seconded by Cllr G Westcott)

Note: * Report previously circulated.

41 **CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE
(00:59:55)**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change.

The following was highlighted within the report:-

- The Council's environmental sustainability work was split into corporate actively related to its own assets and the Council's operations and community activities which enabled and facilitated community actions across Mid Devon as net zero targets could not be achieved alone.
- Net emissions for areas in the Council's direct control remained on a downward trend with an overall 35% reduction since 2018/19 when the net zero target was baselined.
- Over the last few months the Cabinet Member had engaged with Sustainable Tiverton, Exe Valley Farmers and considering the importance of Neighbourhood Plans to support local action.
- The Climate and Sustainability Specialist had been meeting with funders to enhance partnership working including promotion of the Green Enterprise Grant Scheme.
- Work towards a big event in Spring next year was taking place.
- Between April and September, Energy Boost Mid Devon had advised over 100 local residents and helped them to save nearly £5,000 on home energy costs.
- External funding included £472,500 Warm Homes Local Grant which was great news for low-income households across Mid Devon especially for those with an annual income of less than £36,000. The Warm House Local Grants would help low-income households with a poor energy performance certificates.

- With regard to electric vehicle (EV) chargers the Deletti Partnership Project would help the Council to deliver on the Corporate Plan target.
- Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) chargers would deliver more charge points at more than 20 other sites across Mid Devon.
- The Exe Valley Leisure Centre, Tiverton, the tenant Instavolt had decided to upgrade their chargers to faster more powerful units. This was something that the Council could not control however it did respond to the demand for faster charging.
- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy had been out for public consultation by Devon County Council. Mid Devon District Council promoted and responded to the consultation.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- Whether the Council were engaging with the South West Net Zero Hub? It was explained that the Council had been engaging with them and had attended a recent conference and were looking at ways they could support the Council with renewable energy investments. They could help the Council to understand how to use “complex sites” status to group several sites for renewable power installation. In terms of funding there was a community energy fund and although it currently had a limited scope, it was hoped that initiatives would be available.
- The Dart/Exe Valley Farmers Regenerative Soils Event – and that the Council had supported some of the costs of running the event. It helped to bring more farmers and the community together - farmers were keen to develop a landscape recovery project which would scale up the really good work already achieved.
- Collaborative work with the Broadpath Landfill Liaison Group and the preparation work for the closure of the landfill site.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:-

- The Planning, Environment and Sustainability PDG tasked officers to work with the Net Zero Advisory Group and the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change to draft the 2026-28 Climate Change Action Plan in line with the Climate Change Strategy.

(Proposed by Cllr G Cochran and seconded by Cllr C Adcock)

Note: * Report previously circulated.

42 PLANNING SUMMARY REPORT (01:14:45)

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Development Management Manager summarising activity undertaken in relation to planning matters.

The following was highlighted within the report:-

- In relation to the National Planning Policy Framework, announcements were expected but had not been received at the time of writing the report.
- There had been an announcement from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) which included proposals to promote house building near to train stations including minimum housing densities although it was unknown what those densities might be.
- There was a suggested requirement that the Council notify the MHCLG of any applications that were minded for refusal for 150 or more houses. This would be subject to a consultation.
- There was a current consultation on removing streamlining statutory consultees with the intention of removing Sport England, the Garden Trust and Theatre Trust as statutory consultees.
- There had been confirmation that that the National Development Management Policies would be a non-statutory document. A decision had to be made whether the Council prepared their own district wide development management policies knowing there was a potentially similar version that sat in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- It was anticipated that the new Local Plan would come forward within the 30-month procedure. However, the Council were still awaiting regulations which could mean it was likely to overrun vesting day and a new timetable would need to be presented to Council.
- With regard to recruitment there had been partial success in relation to the Policy Assistant posts. However, there was still a reliance upon external support for the Forward Planning Team. Principal and Planning Officers had been recruited to Development Management who would join MDDC in January. The position of the Planning Enforcement Officer would be readvertised.
- Enforcement cases remained high with a Public Inquiry just finishing. There were currently a total of 12 enforcement notice appeals.
- The Development Management Team performance remained strong and were seeing an increase in housing applications and fees..
- Building Control had retained a strong market share in the recent collapse of a private consultancy competitor which meant they had a lot of work by default which would result in financial returns.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

43 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (01:20:36)

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** the items identified in the Work Programme for the next meeting.

The Chair confirmed the following would be considered at the next meeting of the PDG:-

- Performance Dashboard for Q3
- Motion 608 – Anaerobic Digester Plants
- Climate and Sustainability Update
- Planning Summary Report
- Chair's Annual Report for 2025/2026.

(The meeting ended at 6.52 pm)

CHAIR