

MINUTES of a MEETING of the COMMUNITY, PEOPLE & EQUALITIES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 17 June 2025 at 12.30 pm

Present

Councillors

B Holdman (Chair)
S Chenore (Vice-Chair), D Broom, A Cuddy,
M Farrell, A Glover, L Knight and H Tuffin

Apologies

Councillors

C Harrower and L G J Kennedy

Also Present

Councillors

G Czapiewski, J Lock and S Robinson

Also Present

Officers:

Paul Deal (Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience), Simon Newcombe (Head of Housing & Health), Jane Lewis (Communications and Engagement Manager), Laura Woon (Democratic Services Manager) and David Parker (Democratic Services & Policy Research Officer)

Councillors

Online

G Duchesne and D Wulff

Officers Online

Harriet Said (Public Health Team Leader (Commercial)) and Dr Stephen Carr (Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager)

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR 2025/26

RESOLVED that Cllr B Holdman be elected Chair of the Community, People and Equalities Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2025/2026.

2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR FOR 2025/2026

RESOLVED that Cllr S Chenore be elected Vice Chair of the Community, People and Equalities Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2025/2026.

3 START TIME OF MEETINGS FOR 2025/26

It was **AGREED** that the start time for meetings for the remainder of the municipal year continue to be at 12.30pm on Tuesday afternoons.

4 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr L G J Kennedy and Cllr C Harrower who was substituted by Cllr L Knight.

5 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

No interests were declared under this item.

Members were reminded that interests could be declared at any point during the meeting.

6 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

7 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (0:09:48)**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 March 2025 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

8 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (0:10:36)**

The Chair thanked Members of the Group for their support and encouragement. The Chair also thanked the Clerk for his work during the previous year.

9 **COMMUNITY ALCOHOL PARTNERSHIP (0:11:19)**

The Regional Adviser for the Community Alcohol Partnership for South West England was unable to attend this meeting. This item was deferred to the next meeting.

10 **MEETING MANAGEMENT (0:12:05)**

The Chair brought forward the item on the Public Health Food Safety Service Plan to the next item on the agenda.

11 **PUBLIC HEALTH FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN (0:13:00)**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a *report from the Head of Housing and Health.

The following was highlighted:

- This was an Annual Report regarding the strategy of the Food Safety Team within the Public Health team.
- The Food Safety Service Plan set out how the Service would meet its statutory responsibilities around food safety.
- The Central Authority responsible for food in the United Kingdom was the Food Standards Agency, Mid Devon District Council were the 'competent authority' working on their behalf. The Council had to meet the Food Standards Agency's chief requirements and the plan set out how that service was delivered.

- There were nearly 1,000 registered food premises in the district.
- 750 of those establishments are in scope of the food hygiene rating scheme being scored between 0 and 5.
- 134 new businesses registered with the Service last year which meant that the base line of this work was growing by 2.5 businesses per week.
- 90% of the premises that the Food Service worked with were in a good category. The Council was one of only two districts in Devon with no premises in the zero category – those that were in urgent need of improvement. Overall, the rating of the businesses were improving so the Council's Food Service's interventions were very effective. The team had taken 100 premises through an improvement in their food rating.
- Only two thirds of the inspections or interventions that the Food Standards Agency required of the team during 2024/2025 were met. This was indicative of the lack in staffing resources and staff changes over the year, there were currently only 2.5 full time equivalent members of staff who were competent to carry out those inspections. A plan for the future staffing of the team was being developed. Meanwhile, an external food contractor was being used to carry out some inspections.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The difference between those premises that were registered and those that were required to have a food hygiene certificate was explained by the fact that certain businesses were exempt from the scheme. They were the ones that were classed as low risk, those perhaps who sold other items and a little sealed confectionary, or producers, manufacturers and distributors – all were excluded from the scheme as they did not sell directly to the consumer and that was what the food hygiene rating scheme was designed for.
- The number of additional staff required to visit all the premises the Food Standards Agency (FSA) required of the Council and meet their targets? It was confirmed that overall possibly 1 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) member of staff may be needed possibly split between 0.5 FTE in a senior food role and 0.5 FTE in a lower regulatory role. Those were statutory duties for which the Council received no funding by way of cost recovery. The resourcing issue was not just affecting the Council, it was nationwide, therefore, the FSA was looking into a cost recovery model for permitting or licensing businesses.

Note: *Report previously circulated.

12 PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD- QUARTER 4 (0:28:48)

The Group had before it and **NOTED** the * Performance dashboard for quarter 4 from the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager.

The following was highlighted:

- Measures that were part of the Corporate Plan were shown in yellow text on the dashboard.
- New subscribers to “Let’s Talk Mid Devon”, was showing as red, there were 162 subscribers in the year against a target of 400. However, there were

8,886 visits to the platform, 948 contributions and an engagement rate across the year of 14.1%.

- Food Service Inspections were Red rated, however, performance had increased from quarter 3 and was approaching performance levels from Quarter 1 and Quarter 2.
- Private water supply sampling was also below target and staff were being trained and accredited to undertake private water supply work.
- The PDG had slightly underspent its budget for the year 2024/25.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Let's Talk Mid Devon was a new platform for the Council and perhaps the target for registrations had been a little ambitious. Engagement was probably more important and customers may have been put off engaging due to having to register first. That would have to be looked at, perhaps allowing some interaction but if a customer wanted full interaction then they would need to register possibly to enter service specific forums.
- Feedback from the Residents Survey was put in a report which went to the senior leadership team and on to Cabinet. Then press releases were sent out thanking those who responded and directing those interested, to the report with statistics. Other surveys were service specific and the results went to those Teams.
- Digital surveys were generally the Council's default approach, however, alternative formats were made available at request.
- Private water supply sampling was below target, this was partially due to requirements placed on the Council in terms of staff taking samples being accredited. That training had taken staff away from front line duties and hence the target had not been met but that should improve over the next year.

Note: *Performance Dashboard previously circulated.

13 **COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY (0:39:19)**

The Group had before it a *report from the Head of Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement providing information on the Communication and Engagement Strategy.

The Communications and Engagement Manager highlighted the following:

- The revised Communications Strategy had been revised from the previous one, two years ago. Minor changes had been made to reflect changes over the two year period.
- The Communications Team had taken over the communications for Active Mid Devon the re-branded Leisure service.
- The Council were at the early stages of investigating how they could use Artificial Intelligence (AI) safely.
- Appendix 2 was the Media and Social Media Policy which included some useful Do's and Don'ts regarding social media.
- There had been nearly 19,000 visits to the "Let's Talk" platform and over two years a 20% engagement rate.
- There were 25,000 followers on the social media channels.
- The team had 14,000 subscribers to their E Bulletin.

Discussion took place regarding:

- What protection was built into the system to avoid the misuse of AI? It was explained that a separate AI policy relating to staff use of AI had recently been presented to the Cabinet limiting its use at this stage. As the Council were at the early stages of understanding how AI might be used a separate policy would come through the Council in due course.
- Only a few officers were registered to use Co-Pilot as a trial at the moment.
- Whether a review period in three years' time was too long bearing in mind the advances in technology. It was explained that so far as the AI policy was concerned the review period was every six months, there was no reason, if it was necessary, why the Council could not look at other social media channels in the interim. The reason why the review was timed for three years was to tie in with Local Government Reorganisation.
- Misinformation management in terms of AI would not just sit with the Communications Team but with other service areas across the Council. There was of course the possibility that increased automation could reduce workloads.
- The Communications Team had been reviewing the content of the Website and removing out of date content. There had been a hope to put a business case together for a new website in 18 months' time but now with Local Government Reorganisation this is being reviewed.
- The Toolkit for Emergency Training and Emergency Planning included some pre-approved messages for cyber-attack and for flooding. An Emergency Planning day was coming up where further ideas were expected. A survey would be sent to town and parish clerks to be circulated to their communities asking them to give individual responses.
- Information about Local Government Reorganisation was and would be available on the website for all to read.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:

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

(Proposed by the Cllr A Glover, seconded by Cllr L Knight.)

Note: *report previously circulated.

14 VOLUNTARY SECTOR NETWORKING EVENT UPDATE (0:52:40)

The Clerk to the Committee gave a verbal update regarding the proposed Community and Voluntary Sector Networking Event and highlighted the following:

- Invites had been sent out to various funding organisations suggesting that this event would be held in late July 2025.
- The response back had been poor with only one invitee able to attend, others were unable to attend due to finance, staffing and holidays.
- A decision had been taken to move the event back to the 22 October 2025 to see if that was a better fit with funders and fresh invites were about to be sent out.

- Invites would not be sent out to the Voluntary Sector and Community Groups until it was known what could be offered to them.

The Group were content with progress so far and with the revised date in October.

15 **WORK PROGRAMME (0:55:01)**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** the *Work Programme.

Items to note:

- The speaker from the Community Alcohol Partnership who was unable to make this meeting would attend at the September meeting of the Group.
- An offer from the Chief Executive Officer of the local Citizens Advice to come and discuss their work was accepted and timetabled for the meeting in September 2025.

Discussion took place regarding:

- It was suggested that the Licensing Team could be invited to the talk from the Community Alcohol Partnership in September.
- The Vagrancy Act and changes to decriminalise rough sleeping would be separate to the Council's own Homelessness Policy and its Unauthorised Encampment Policy. It was not expected that there would be any conflicts between those policies.

Note: *Work Programme previously circulated.

(The meeting ended at 1.31 pm)

CHAIR