

Community, People & Equalities Policy Development Group

**Tuesday, 17 June 2025 at 12.30 pm
Phoenix Chambers, Phoenix House, Tiverton**

**Next ordinary meeting
Tuesday, 16 September 2025 at 12.30 pm**

Please Note: This meeting will take place at Phoenix House and members of the public and press are able to attend via Teams. If you are intending to attend in person please contact the committee clerk in advance, in order that numbers of people can be appropriately managed in physical meeting rooms.

The meeting will be hybrid and an audio recording made and published on the website after the meeting.

To join the meeting online, [click here](#)

Meeting ID: 336 791 818 338

Passcode: rp7tZ96H

Membership

Cllr D Broom
Cllr S Chenore
Cllr A Cuddy
Cllr M Farrell
Cllr A Glover
Cllr C Harrower
Cllr B Holdman
Cllr L G J Kennedy
Cllr H Tuffin

A G E N D A

Members are reminded of the need to make declarations of interest prior to any discussion which may take place

1 Election of Chair

To elect a Chair of the Community, People and Equalities Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2025 – 2026.

- 2 **Election of Vice-Chair**
To elect a Vice-Chair of the Community, People and Equalities Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2025 – 2026.
- 3 **Start Time of Meetings**
To agree the start time of meetings for the remainder of the municipal year 2025 – 2026.
- 4 **Apologies and Substitute Members**
To receive any apologies for absence and notices of appointment of substitute Members (if any).
- 5 **Declarations of Interest under the Code of Conduct**
To record any interests on agenda matters.
- 6 **Public Question Time**
To receive any questions from members of the public and replies thereto.

Note: A maximum of 30 minutes is allowed for this item.
- 7 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting** *(Pages 5 - 16)*
To consider whether to approve the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on Tuesday 25 March 2025.
- 8 **Chair's Announcements**
To receive any announcements that the Chair may wish to make.
- 9 **Community Alcohol Partnership**
To receive a Presentation from Annie Ashford-Barnden the Regional Adviser for South West England.
- 10 **Performance Dashboard - Quarter 4** *(Pages 17 - 18)*
To receive a verbal update on the Performance Dashboard from the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager.
- 11 **Community Engagement Strategy** *(Pages 19 - 58)*
To receive a report from the Head of Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement.
- 12 **Public Health Food Safety Service Plan** *(Pages 59 - 82)*
To receive a report from the Head of Housing and Health providing a service update for the statutory work of the Food Safety team within Public Health and Housing Options and the reviewed Food Safety Service Plan for 2025-2026.
- 13 **Voluntary Sector Networking Event**
To receive a verbal update from the Working Group formed to discuss the practicalities of holding such an event.

- 14 **Work Programme** (Pages 83 - 86)
To receive the current work plan for the Community, People and Equalities Policy Development Group.

Stephen Walford
Chief Executive
Monday, 9 June 2025

Guidance notes for meetings of Mid Devon District Council

From 7 May 2021, the law requires all councils to hold formal meetings in person. The Council will enable all people to continue to participate in meetings via Teams. If the Council experience technology difficulties at a committee meeting the Chairman may make the decision to continue the meeting 'in-person' only to conclude the business on the agenda.

1. Inspection of Papers

Any person wishing to inspect minutes, reports, or the background papers for any item on the agenda should contact Democratic Services at Committee@middevon.gov.uk

They can also be accessed via the council's website [Click Here](#)

Printed agendas can also be viewed in reception at the Council offices at Phoenix House, Phoenix Lane, Tiverton, EX16 6PP.

2. Members' Code of Conduct requirements

When considering the declaration of interests and their actions as a councillor, Members are reminded of the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct and the underpinning Principles of Public Life: Honesty; Integrity; Selflessness; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Leadership.

The Code of Conduct can be [viewed here](#):

3. Minutes of the Meeting

Details of the issues discussed, and recommendations made at the meeting will be set out in the minutes, which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting. Minutes of meetings are not verbatim.

4. Public Question Time

Residents, electors or business rate payers of the District wishing to raise a question and/or statement under public question time are asked to provide their written questions to the Democratic Services team by 5pm three clear working days before the meeting to ensure that a response can be provided at the meeting. You will be invited to ask your question and or statement at the meeting and will receive the answer prior to, or as part of, the debate on that item. Alternatively, if you are content to receive an answer after the item has been debated, you can register to speak by emailing your full name to Committee@middevon.gov.uk by no later than 4pm on the day before the meeting. You will be invited to speak at the meeting and will receive a written response within 10 clear working days following the meeting.

Notification in this way will ensure the meeting runs as smoothly as possible

5. Meeting Etiquette for participants

- Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- If you're referring to a specific page, mention the page number.

For those joining the meeting virtually:

- Mute your microphone when you are not talking.
- Switch off your camera if you are not speaking.
- Speak clearly (if you are not using camera then please state your name)
- Switch off your camera and microphone after you have spoken.
- There is a facility in Microsoft Teams under the ellipsis button called "turn on live captions" which provides subtitles on the screen.

6. Exclusion of Press & Public

When considering an item on the agenda, the Committee may consider it appropriate to pass a resolution under Section 100A (4) Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, as defined under the terms of the Act. If there are members of the public and press listening to the open part of the meeting, then the Democratic Services Officer will, at the appropriate time, ask participants to leave the meeting when any exempt or confidential information is about to be discussed. They will be invited to return as soon as the meeting returns to open session.

7. Recording of meetings

All media, including radio and TV journalists, and members of the public may attend Council, Cabinet, PDG and Committee meetings (apart from items Media and Social Media Policy - 2023 page 22 where the public is excluded) you can view our Media and Social Media Policy [here](#). They may record, film or use social media before, during or after the meeting, so long as this does not distract from or interfere unduly with the smooth running of the meeting. Anyone proposing to film during the meeting is requested to make this known to the Chairman in advance. The Council also makes audio recordings of meetings which are published on our website [Browse Meetings. 2024 - MIDDEVON.GOV.UK](#).

8. Fire Drill Procedure

If you hear the fire alarm you should leave the building by the marked fire exits, follow the direction signs and assemble at the master point outside the entrance. Do not use the lifts or the main staircase. You must wait there until directed otherwise by a senior officer. If anybody present is likely to need assistance in exiting the building in the event of an emergency, please ensure you have let a member of Democratic Services know before the meeting begins and arrangements will be made should an emergency occur.

9. WIFI

An open, publicly available Wi-Fi network is normally available for meetings held in the Phoenix Chambers at Phoenix House.

MINUTES of a MEETING of the COMMUNITY, PEOPLE & EQUALITIES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 25 March 2025 at 12.30 pm

Present

Councillors

B Holdman (Chair)
C Connor (Vice-Chair), D Broom, A Cuddy,
M Farrell, H Tuffin and L G J Kennedy

Apologies

Councillors

C Harrower and A Glover

Also Present

Councillors

D Wulff

Also Present

Officers:

Simon Newcombe (Head of Housing & Health), Matthew Page (Head of People, Performance & Waste), Dr Stephen Carr (Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager), Joanne Pope (Commercial Team Leader Public Health) and David Parker (Democratic Services & Policy Research Officer)

Councillors

Online

J Buczkowski, A Glover and J Lock

Officers Online

Adrian Gardner (Specialist Lead - Community Safety and Safeguarding), Tanya Wenham (Operations Manager to Public Health) and Sarah Lees (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance

Inspector Mark Arthurs Neighbourhood Policing Inspector for Mid Devon and Police Constable Kate Jeffries a Local Neighbourhood Beat Manager.

34 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (0:03:29)

Apologies were received from Cllr C Harrower, she was substituted by Cllr L G J Kennedy.

Cllr A Glover attended on line.

35 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (0:04:01)**

There were no questions from members of the public.

36 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (0:04:20)**

No interests were declared under this item.

37 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (0:04:35)**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 December 2024 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

38 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (0:05:06)**

The Chair had no announcements to make.

39 **MEETING MANAGEMENT ITEM**

Due to the Police Inspector needing to be back at his office for 2.00pm, the Presentation from the Police would be brought forward to the next item on the agenda with the Community Safety Partnership Policy to follow that and the Corporate Anti-Social Behaviour Policy to follow that.

40 **PRESENTATION FROM THE POLICE ON THEIR EFFORTS TO TACKLE ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (0:05:42)**

The Group received a presentation from the Neighbourhood Policing Inspector for Mid Devon.

- In addition to the Inspector, there were currently 8 Police Constables and 6 Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) who covered the mid Devon area. Following the promotion of Sergeant Simon Andrews the Sergeant's post was currently vacant.
- Performance meetings were held monthly looking at performance indicators, crime, fraud, domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour, crime trends and issues within certain localities.
- Mid Devon had 3 Police Stations one in Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton and the team of 15 officers and staff were split equally between those stations. Due to the rural nature of Mid Devon, response times could be challenging but they had stepped away from officers all being in one hub to responding direct from the local Police Stations so there should be an improvement in response times.
- The Police and Crime Commissioner had just announced that a significant part of her plan would be tackling Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). ASB could cover a significant amount of issues some of which were criminal and some that were not. It covered anything from dog fouling, speeding, nuisance behaviour to drunk and disorderly. The Police had worked with the Council and Social Services in looking at the escalation process which looked at tackling both young and older people. Using the escalation process the Police and the Council tried to intervene at each stage working with partner agencies to try and reduce ASB.

- Recently, there had been problems in Tiverton around ASB involving young people. The Police working with the Council and Social Services had followed not just a criminal justice focussed approach but a joined up approach in terms of safeguarding and recognising vulnerability. Questions were asked about the cause of that person's ASB, was it their home? Was there someone grooming them? Was child sexual exploitation involved? All the partner organisations were brought together with the common goal of making that person safe whilst recognising that that person had made the community feel unsafe. In the autumn of 2024 there had been an increase in drug and drink related ASB in an adult cohort, the Police had pursued them through the criminal justice route to ensure that Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBO) were sought, as a result 3 or 4 main offenders received lengthy custodial sentences. That had resulted in a significant improvement in Tiverton town centre.
- Crediton Town Council had worked with the Police and the District Council to enforce Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) and so reduce ASB that way.
- Crime Trends Reports were available on-line. The Police had moved away from producing reports for Parish Councils as all the information was available on-line at www.police.uk. There had been a rise in dwelling house burglaries and performance car thefts which formed part of wider operations tactics and was held by one of the Police's investigative divisions.
- As mid Devon was predominantly a rural community and as spring had arrived, the current theme was livestock worrying and livestock theft along with responsible dog ownership.
- The local Police Team still had to tackle organised crime groups and recently had closed a really significant cannabis farm in Cullompton.
- The ASB escalation process included: Letter 1, Letter 2 and an Acceptable Behaviour Contract. That got the Police across the stages of telling people 'your behaviour is unacceptable if you don't stop this, you're going to get another warning letter', but eventually that would turn into either; a civil injunction at court or the perpetrator ending up with a criminal record with the police looking at community protection warnings and community protection notices.
- The Inspector was in favour of using civil legislation to prevent escalation in crime, as an example he mentioned 'gang injunctions' and tackling 'legal highs'. Further Acts were coming through Parliament which would give the Police additional powers.

Discussion took place regarding:

- No effect on crime or ASB had been seen by the dimming and switching off the street lights in rural areas, if ASB continued then the Inspector would have concerns if that policy was rolled out across Tiverton.
- County Lines were everywhere. Police Officers were trained in recognising it and training should be rolled out to partner agencies too.
- The ASB in the Tiverton multi-storey car park that was getting out of control and needed to be addressed by the Police. There was a risk to life with slates being dropped from the top floor.
There was a new Crime Management Investigation Team so that most of the everyday reports of crime, not serious complex crime investigations, went to a central point to be managed. There were a lot of new officers in that team and there had been some confusion as to the seriousness of the situation. Reports of ASB in the car park had dropped off but if the behaviour was continuing,

reports of that behaviour should continue to be made. If the Police saw a month on month increase in reporting of crime then that assisted the Inspector in getting more staff. Reports of crime, ideally should be made through the website.

- The Head of Finance, Property and Climate Resilience informed Members that there was currently underway a review of security in the Tiverton multi-storey car park with a significant project planned for the site which would enhance the critical nature of securing the site and preventing anyone from getting up to the higher levels.
- The Police did have a link to the CCTV control room, there were two radios in the control room, one for Exeter and one for East and Mid Devon. The situation had improved and the CCTV Team were responsive to requests from the Police.
- ASB at Moorhayes and the recent Police meeting with residents from there. Moorhayes would continue to be a policing priority for Police in Tiverton. It appeared to be an evening and night time issue and the Inspector would seek more resourcing from a wider area if the problems persisted.
- Vandalism at the Tiverton Town Allotments.
- Police priorities were set largely from engagement with the public and partners identifying trends in crime, so continued reporting of crime would influence priorities.
- The most effective way of contacting the Police for non-emergency matters was via the website using the on-line forms or Chat, however, if people wanted to get hold of a team individually, the e-mail addresses were: crediton@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk or cullompton@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk or tiverton@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk.
- Shop theft was a continuing problem. The Police were working with an external private company who worked with major brands and shops who were building an intelligence database looking at organised crime gangs in shoplifting. The Tiverton team did concentrate on those who were prolific offenders. It was important that shoplifting offences were still reported to the Police. There had been a 2% increase in shoplifting across the County.
- A new specialist in business crime was working from the Police headquarters.
- A high level of speeding cars on the B3181 at Willand particularly at times when the M5 was closed for overnight works. Would it be possible for the Police to monitor traffic speed the next time the M5 was closed? The Inspector asked to see the parish's Vehicle Activated Sign data to assist him in formulating a case for that resource.
- The Inspector invited Councillors to give him ideas of how to get his message out to communities particularly to make reports of crime.

41 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP (CSP) UPDATE (1:12:20)

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a *report from the Head of Housing and Health (Chair of the East and Mid Devon CSP).

The East and Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership (CSP) was a statutory function under the Crime and Disorder Act. It was a multi-agency group that came together to look at community safety and crime in a particular area. The group comprised; the Police, the upper and lower tier Local Authorities i.e. Devon County Council (DCC) and the District Councils, the Fire and Rescue Service, the Probation

Service and the NHS. They were the statutory partners that made up the board of the CSP. The CSP had its group terms of reference which were updated this year and the role of chairing the partnership could be met by any of those statutory partners.

Two key initiatives and key areas of work that the CSP had focussed on in the last 12 months had both focussed on Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). The use of the Council's powers had been expanded and they had equipped Mid Devon's housing team to do more ASB work directly and work specifically with young people and the intervention panel around young offenders and young persons engaged in ASB.

The following was highlighted:

- There was a link at the bottom of the report that would take readers to the Devon County Community Safety Partnership full report, which included the Community Strategic Assessment.
- The CSP had seen the second highest increase in crime after South Devon and Dartmoor CSP, proving that there was a rural nature to some of the crime in addition to the city and town nature.
- Crime numbers were quite low so any change in them led to fairly high percentage changes.
- There had been a double figure increase in domestic abuse so that type of crime would be a priority for the CSP.
- Martyn's Law – The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill 2024. The Security Industry Authority would be the regulator and it would not be for the Council to enforce.
- The new Police and Crime Bill would include changes around how shoplifting was treated as a crime. There would be a broad focus on anti-social behaviour with particular emphasis on young people and street related ASB.
- Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls. This would include a focus on young people and harmful sexual behaviours including misogyny and harmful sexual content.
- Exploitation with an emphasis on young people which again led back to 'County Lines', drugs and modern slavery.
- Statutory Duties on the CSP irrespective of where they set their own priorities included: a serious violence duty; domestic homicide reviews; and safeguarding adult reviews which was about particularly complex cases where there had been a failure to protect a vulnerable adult (learning lessons from the past and applying those going forward).
- The CSP had no direct funding other than ad-hoc specific grants for particular projects and so was largely a facilitating body. It was about the people in the room rather than the money they could spend, it was about partnerships. The CSP also facilitated groups in accessing Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) funding and some of the community grant work that the PCC had stood up. There was a small local authority budget to cover those statutory duties mentioned earlier.

Discussion took place regarding:

- A Community Alcohol Partnership had been set up in Tiverton to educate young people around the dangers of alcohol misuse and to help promote healthier activities. Recently they had held a family day and invited a wide range of families that had been struggling and had young adults and children

that had been associated with some of the local problems, there they were offered support and encouragement. The Coordinator had expressed an interest in developing similar partnerships in Crediton and Cullompton.

- Public Space Protection Orders (particularly a new order under review in Crediton).
- Respect Orders may be a new power coming through central Government later in 2025.
- Street related ASB in young people included drug taking as well as alcohol and anything else happening on the streets, in the town centres and in the communities that focussed on young people.
- Causes of and trends in Domestic Abuse.
- Home Office funding through Devon County Council to fund sessions in schools around appropriate relationships and appropriate behaviours.
- Lack of early intervention caused by lack of resources.
- Domestic Violence from the child on the parent. Members of the family were often in the front line.
- The age at which young people may need to be engaged with. There were 2 key age groups. Those pupils transitioning from primary to secondary school (10-12 years old) and those who were 15 to 17 years of age were also particularly vulnerable.
- Provision of Youth Services outside the school remit was largely left to voluntary agencies.

Note: *Report previously circulated.

42 CORPORATE ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR UPDATE (1:53:02)

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a *report from the Head of Housing and Health presenting an update on Anti-Social Behaviour.

The contents of the report were outlined with particular reference to the following:

- The work the Council was doing was driven through the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) working with the Council's Public Health, Community and Housing teams working directly with people that commit Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).
- The definition of ASB in the report showed how wide the issue was.
- East Devon and Mid Devon were working with the South Devon and Dartmoor CSP.
- The Youth Intervention Panel was something that had been piloted by the Police working with the CSP. It was about bringing young people into the process at a very early stage with the agencies that touched upon their life whether it was with Housing Teams, Social Services, doctors NHS, Police, the family and those young people. During the process the group talked through what was happening, why the behaviour was occurring and what else was going on in that individual's life or in their family. Was it about the cost of living crisis, lack of decent housing or alcohol and drug misuse? The group discussed how they could tackle the problem together from a multi-agency perspective and how they could intervene before a Community Protection Warning (CPW's) or Community Protection Notices (CPN's) were issued.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The Fire and Rescue Service were also a statutory partner on the CSP.
- Irresponsible dog ownership.
- The Youth ASB toolkit (Annex B in the report) showed early interventions. Letters 1 and 2, Community Protection Warnings (CPW) Criminal Protection Notices (CPN) were all civil justice actions and not criminal justice until such time as there was a breach. There were lots of interventions that could be made on a civil basis which hopefully would keep the individual away from the criminal justice process.
- Current compliance across the 2 CSP's with CPW's and CPN's were 98%. It was diverting a huge percentage of individuals away from the criminal justice system.

Note: *Report previously circulated.

43 **ANNUAL AIR QUALITY REVIEW (2:04:18)**

The Group received and **NOTED** a *report from the Head of Housing and Health presenting the Annual Air Quality Review.

The contents of the report were outlined with particular reference to:

- The Council had a statutory responsibility to monitor air quality under the Local Air Quality Management regime and to report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).
- There were 2 Air Quality Management Areas, one in Crediton and another in Cullompton which were set up on the basis of historic air quality exceedances of the air quality standards in each town. As the Council had continued to monitor and introduce changes and measures to tackle the air quality, so the air quality in both towns had improved. DEFRA were now expecting that the Council should be reviewing the status of their air quality management areas going forward. Within the next 12 months the Council would review the presence of the air quality management areas.
- In the intervening period, the Council had commissioned 2 new air monitoring stations that would be placed in Crediton and Cullompton and allowed the Council to receive high resolution, high quality data, minute by minute, 365 days a year. It was expected that the data would show a continuation of the trend towards cleaner air, however, in Cullompton in particular there would be pressures caused by development and infrastructure delivery. Bearing that in mind, the review would happen in 12 months' time.
- Data from the monitoring stations would be available on line for all to see.

Discussion took place in regarding:

- How the Council could be sure that the air quality was safe when no real time monitoring had been carried out since September 2023?
- The delay in providing a railway station at Cullompton.

Note: *report previously circulated.

44 PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD FOR QUARTER 3 (2:22:05)

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a *slide showing performance information in the Community, People and Equalities area for quarter 3.

The following was highlighted by the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager:

- The Dashboard aimed to give an "at a glance" understanding of how services were performing in terms of performance, finance, and risk. Any measures that were also part of the Corporate Plan were listed in yellow text.
- The indicators were presented with their current performance, the annual target, and a RAG (red, amber, green) rating to indicate whether the Council was on track to meet their targets.
- Overall performance was presented in a pie chart and combined the RAG ratings from both the performance and finance measures.

For the measures showing as Red:

- New subscribers to Let's Talk Mid Devon - during Quarter 3 the Communications Team used the platform once again for the Council's Residents' Survey. However, for the first time the Council asked the public to sign up to the platform before they could complete the survey questions. This meant the Council saw a big uptake in the number of people joining the platform. In Quarter 3 there were 3,729 visits to the website, 598 contributions, 123 sign ups and an engagement rate of almost 21%.
- Licenced vehicle inspections. Due to vacancies within the Licensing Team and the work associated with implementing the new Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy, the team had undertaken few taxi inspections. The new Policy introduced additional criteria as part of the vehicle inspections. While the team worked through the process to ensure consistency of approach, the number of inspections had decreased. The vacancies meant it was unlikely the target would be reached this year.
- Private water supply sampling. Additional staff were being trained to undertake the private water supply work. Each officer had to be accredited to take samples.
- Food Service - Total Inspections completed. The service was now struggling to keep up with demand due to vacancies. The Regulatory Officer role had now been filled and would concentrate on those premises rated D and E, however, this role was not competent to deal with the higher risk premises. Due to difficulty recruiting to a senior role, the Council were now unable to deliver the number of inspections per quarter that were needed to achieve the target of 100%. A review of resources and structure to deliver was underway.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Was the sign up rate of 21% on "Let's Talk Mid Devon" what the Council expected? The Council had shown that it was committed to using the tool, there

had been some successes in Housing and the Planning Team were now looking at how they could use it. The Management Team were constantly reviewing how they could encourage people to utilise the platform for the benefit of the residents as well as for the benefit of the Council.

- Were there too many public platforms and was that confusing for the public?
- Licenced vehicle inspections were lower for Quarter 3 due to some key changes in the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy which brought in new standards and new requirements. Those changes had been substantially different for operators, so whilst the operators were getting used to the new requirements there had been a 'soft touch' approach with them. This year the approach had been around education and making sure that they were familiar with the Policy and some of the new requirements.

Note: *slide previously circulated.

45 **SINGLE EQUALITIES POLICY AND EQUAL OBJECTIVES (2:31:50)**

The Group had before it a *report from the Head of People, Performance and Waste and the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager on the Single Equalities Policy and the Equalities Objectives.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- The document had been reviewed and updated by officers over the past six months, including review at the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group.
- The Single Equality Scheme for 2025 at Appendix 1 was subject to a significant update in 2023 following the release of the 2021 Census data at a district level. It had been reviewed and improved upon in each year following this. Any changes to the document were highlighted in red text.
- This year the Council had further structured the document into four key sections:
Section one simply introduced the document. Section two was the Equality Profile for Mid Devon - this was a data rich section which pulled information from a wide range of sources to help the Council form a greater understanding of the people who lived in the district. Section three set out the Council's Equality Objectives for the next financial year. As set out in legislation, those objectives had to be specific and measureable. The Objectives were largely based on those from the previous financial year, but had been further refined by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group and the Leadership Team. Section four set out the ways in which the Council worked in support of the Equality Act.
- In addition to this, Members had before them at Appendix 2 the Equality Action Plan for the current financial year. The Action Plan was based specifically on the Equality Objectives from the current year, and data was collected and monitored in year by the EDI Group.
- A number of other initiatives related to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion that the Council was undertaking were included in the covering report for information.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Menopause Awareness. Menopause awareness training was to be rolled out to staff and the Council was looking to set up a network of Menopause champions. The Council already had a Union (UNISON), Staff Impact Group and Well-being ambassadors in place and the Council were looking to repeat this in relation to menopause awareness.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the Single Equality Scheme together with the Equality Objectives for 2025/26 be approved.

(Proposed by Cllr D Broom and seconded by Cllr H Tuffin)

Reason for the decision:

The Equality Objectives contributed to various sections of the Corporate Plan, but in particular helped to support the Council achieve its objectives under the Community, People and Equalities theme, helping to ensure that the Council was “Involving and engaging with communities, ensuring everyone was treated with equity and respect and protecting the most vulnerable”.

Note: *report previously circulated.

46 **MEET THE FUNDERS EVENT FOR THE VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE ORGANISATIONS (2:38:30)**

The Chair led the group in a discussion about the possibility of organising a “Meet the Funders” event for the voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations.

- The Chair had been at an event with voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations last year where they raised a need for a platform and networking opportunity to help them build relationships and work together with similarly aligned groups.
- This event had been suggested, building upon something similar which had happened at East Devon.
- The proposal was that the Council set up a Working Group to plan an event.
- The plan would be to have 10 or 12 funders, including the Council, where Community Groups, Charities and Social Enterprise Organisations would be invited to come and meet the funders.
- The Working Group would work out details for such an event.
- The following Councillors agreed to join the Working Group: Cllr B Holdman, Cllr C Connor and Cllr H Tuffin. Cllr G DuChesne (Cabinet Member for Parish and Community Engagement), Cllr J Lock (Cabinet Member for People, Development and Deputy Leader) would attend in an advisory capacity.

The Group **AGREED** that a Working Group be formed to set up a ‘Meet the Funders’ event for the voluntary sector.

(Proposed Cllr A Cuddy and seconded Cllr C Connor).

47 **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE COMMUNITY, PEOPLE AND EQUALITIES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP. (2:42:44)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, the Chair's Annual Report * for 2024/2025.

This report along with all other Chair's reports for 2024/2025 would be presented at full Council on 23 April 2025.

The Chair thanked Members of the Committee and officers for their help and support throughout the past year.

Note: *Report previously circulated.

(The meeting ended at 3.40pm)

CHAIR

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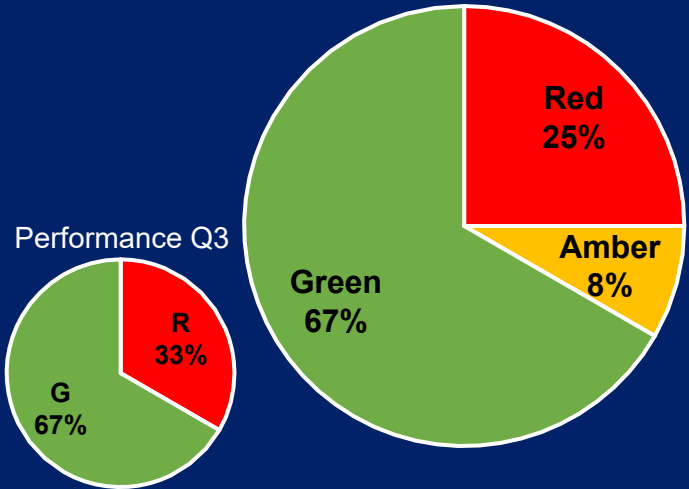
Community, People & Equalities PDG Performance Dashboard – Quarter 4 2024/25

Performance Measures	Performance	Annual Target	RAG
Homes made safe under the Housing Assistance Policy (YTD)	110	60	G
Complaints resolved within target timescales (YTD)	93 %	85 %	G
New Subscribers to Let's Talk Mid Devon (YTD)	162	400	R
Support towns and parishes to develop their Community Emergency Plans (YTD)	5	4	G
Support VCSE sector by securing external funding (YTD)	£252,973.09	£200,000	G
Licenced vehicle inspections (YTD)	47	40	G
Food Service - Total Inspections completed (Current QTR)	67.8 %	100 %	R
Private water supply sampling (YTD)	80	120	R
Environmental protection service requests (Average YTD)	97.8 %	95 %	G
Engagement rate on Let's Talk Mid Devon (Current)	15.0 %	16.0 %	A

Finance Measures	Performance	Annual Target	RAG
CP&E PDG – Outturn	(£50k)	£1,018k	G
CP&E PDG – Capital Slippage % of projects (Current)	0 %	0 %	G
Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Current)	£4,861,539	N/A	

Corporate Risk	Risk Rating (Trajectory)
Severe Weather Emergency Recovery	12 (No Change)

Overall Performance Q4



In Focus

The Council supported the development of five community emergency plans by towns and parishes in 2024/25 (Cullompton, Bradninch, Willand, Nymet Rowland and Tiverton), ahead of the target of four per annum.

There were 495 complaints in 2024/25. Of these 93% were responded to within the target timescales, against a target of 85%.

The Outturn is showing as (£50k) for 2024/25. This is due to the late S106 of £1m received for air quality around the Cullompton Relief Road.

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Report for:	COMMUNITY, PEOPLE AND EQUALITIES PDG
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Date of Meeting:	17/06/2025
Subject:	Communications & Engagement Strategy
Cabinet Member:	Cllr David Wulff, Cabinet member for Quality of Living, Equalities and Public Health
Responsible Officer:	Head of Digital Transformation & Customer Engagement
Exempt:	Not applicable
Wards Affected:	All
Enclosures:	Appendices 1 & 2

Section 1 - Summary and Recommendation(s)

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with the revised Communication and Engagement Strategy and accompanying Media and Social Media Policy.

Recommendation:

- 1. To recommend to Cabinet the content of the reviewed Communication and Engagement Strategy and the Media and Social Media Policy.**

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. The Council has a duty to consult and engage effectively with residents, partners, employees and other stakeholders when deciding about future changes to services and new developments.
- 1.2. As a council we must offer value for money and customer satisfaction, therefore two-way engagement is an essential part of delivering our services.
- 1.3. This engagement must be delivered in an open and transparent way that is accessible to our audience.
- 1.4. Since the last strategy was revised in 2023 the Communications Team has continued to support services across the Council.

- 1.5. The team has supported the elections service, with the UK Parliamentary Election, Police and Crime Commissioner Election, Devon County Council Election and a number of town, parish and by elections.
- 1.6. Each year the Communications Team organises the Council's stand at the Mid Devon Show, which in 2024 focused on housing and leisure with support from both services.
- 1.7. A drive to improve engagement with our residents has also seen our engagement platform Let's Talk Mid Devon utilised further. In the two years since the last strategy was produced the platform has gained 592 registrations, been visited 18,801 times and had an engagement rate of 20%.
- 1.8. In the past year two years the team has attracted an extra 2,330 followers to our social media channels with our channels now having a total of 25,002 followers across the platforms.
- 1.9. GovDelivery is our e-bulletin system which is used to send out news stories and service changes. We now have 14,420 subscribers who regularly receive bulletins.
- 1.10. A web review is underway which has already streamlined content. This review will also consider the need for a new website design and hosting, but this project may be impacted by LGR.
- 1.11. The team has also launched two full resident surveys, in 2023 and 2024. The most recent survey showed 59.6% of respondents felt very or fairly well informed about the Council's work, an increase from 52.8% in 2023. We are continuing to explore ways to improve the survey response rate across the district.
- 1.12. A number of civic events, which have been organised by Democratic Services, have been supported by the Communications Team such as VE Day commemorations and Chairman events.
- 1.13. Most recently the Communications Team has taken on a large proportion of Active Mid Devon communication work, including managing social media pages and supporting the Active Mid Devon website, campaigns and branding.

2. Future

- 2.1. The Communications Team will continue to support services across the authority.
- 2.2. Upcoming projects in 2025 and beyond include the completion of a website review and potential for a new website, Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) communications and further Active Mid Devon campaigns. The team will also be exploring the Council's use of AI as a communication tool for different

services, ensuring it is used in a transparent and controlled way. The creation of a comprehensive emergency planning toolkit is also being planned.

It is anticipated this Communications Strategy and accompanying policies will be revised again in three years, potentially to coincide with LGR depending on timeframe.

Financial Implications: The revised strategy does not have any specific financial implications. Should the Council wish to implement larger scale communication changes, such as to develop a new intranet or website, or carry out a full rebranding exercise, this would involve a financial cost and these would be accompanied by a business case

Legal Implications: To ensure that all communication and methods of consultation are GDPR compliant and adhere to the Council's Single Equality Scheme.

Risk Assessment: Failure to engage with the Council's stakeholders could mean the Council's actions and objectives are not understood, risking reputational damage.

Impact on Climate Change: The Communication and Engagement Strategy includes work to support the Council's Climate Strategy and Climate Action Plan. The Council's communication utilises a digital first approach, contributing to a reduction of our carbon footprint from printing and postage. However, we always include alternative formats for those who need or prefer different communication channels.

Equalities Impact Assessment: Any consultation and communication channels would have regard to the Council's Single Equality Scheme.

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

SECTION 3 – STATUTORY OFFICER SIGN-OFF/MANDATORY CHECKS

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett
Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151 Officer
Date: 5.6.25

Statutory Officer: Maria de Leburne
Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 5.6.25

Chief Officer: Stephen Walford
Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director
Date: 5.6.25

Performance and risk: Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager
Date: 29/05/2025

Cabinet member notified: yes

Report: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. No

Appendix: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. No

SECTION 4 - CONTACT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact: Jane Lewis, Communications and Engagement Manager

email: jlewis@middevon.gov.uk

Tel. 01884 234953

Background Papers:

Appendix one: Communication and Engagement Strategy 2025

Appendix two: Media and Social Media Policy 2025

Appendix One

Version Control Sheet

Title: Communication and Engagement Strategy
Purpose: To set out how the Council will inform, engage and listen to our communities, in order for the Council to provide services which are fit for purpose for our customers and provided in a cost effective and transparent way.

Owner: Communications & Engagement Manager
jlewis@middevon.gov.uk

Date: May 2025

Version Number: 1.0

Status: DRAFT

Review Frequency: Every three years or sooner if required. This date is suggested to coincide with LGR.

Next review date: May 2028

Consultation: This document will be sent out for consultation to the following:
Community, People and Equalities PDG
Cabinet

Document History

This document obtained the following approvals.

Title	Date	Version Approved
Community, People and Equalities PDG*		
Cabinet		

*- Delete if not applicable

1.0 Introduction

The Communications and Engagement Strategy sets out how the Council will inform, engage and listen to our communities, in order for the Council to provide services which are fit for purpose for our customers and provided in a cost effective and transparent way.

Communication within the Council supports the Council's values which are People, Pride, Performance and Place as well as sharing the objectives and successes detailed in our Corporate Plan.

The Communication function is split into three key areas. These functions are:

- Community engagement
- Media relations
- Internal communication

This strategy works in conjunction with the Media and Social Media Policy, the Corporate Branding Guidelines and the Single Equality Scheme.

2.0 What we do

The core functions of the Communications Team are:

- Media relations and media monitoring
- Social media management
- Staff communication
- Community consultation and engagement
- Stakeholder consultation and engagement
- Branding and corporate campaigns
- Communication advice and training
- Website editing

The current structure of the Communications Team is a part-time Communication and Engagement Manager, a part-time Communications Officer and a full-time Digital Communications Officer. The team sits within the Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement Service and works closely with all service areas of the Council to provide a more effective approach to communication and engagement with our customers.

3.0 Who we communicate with

The Council has a wide audience in terms of demographics with a population of circa 82,800 spread over a largely rural area.

The majority of the work carried out by the Communications Team is with our customers who live in the district and with our staff who run our services.

This communication may be directly with these audiences or via the local media, partners or stakeholders such as local charities, parish and town councils, MPs and schools, as well as visitors to the area.

Communication with Mid Devon businesses is an important part of the Council's work, but this strand of communication is led by the Growth and Economic Development Team.

The Communications Team also supports Active Mid Devon with communication to its users and members, through campaigns, the Active Mid Devon app and their social media pages.

4.0 Our aim

The Council aims to provide communication which is:

- accessible and clear
- planned and proactive
- creative and engaging
- cost-effective
- positive and transparent

5.0 Community engagement

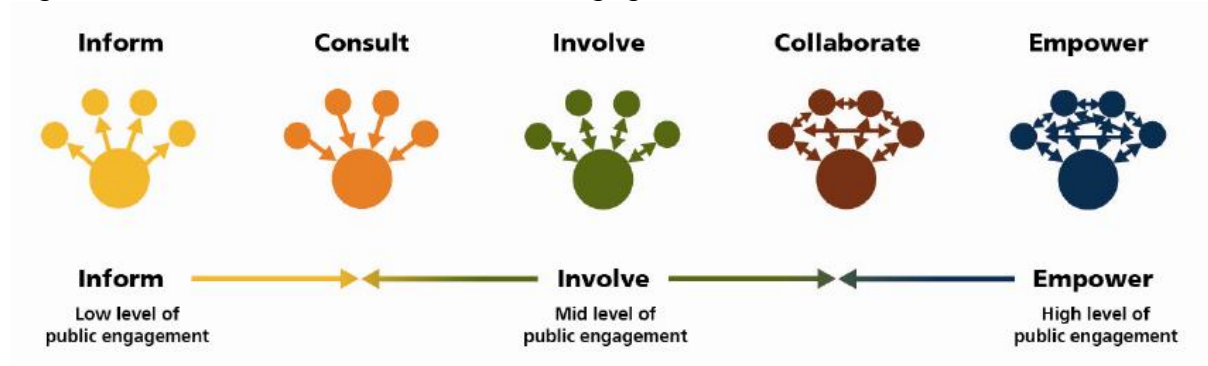
The Communications Team provides effective engagement channels which aim to give the local community a greater say and impact on the delivery of local services, while being better informed about the Council's work. Community engagement is about putting communities at the heart of their own local services. Effective community engagement is essential to ensure the services the Council operates are fit for the communities they serve.

In some areas of the Council there is a statutory consultation requirement when the Council has a duty to engage with the public, such as planning and licensing, which is supported by the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement 2020.

At other times the Council voluntarily and actively seeks out the views of the community to ensure the Council is delivering a high quality, cost effective service which meets the needs of the customer.

There are different levels of engagement and this should be considered when embarking on any form of engagement. The most appropriate method of engagement will depend on the desired outcome and audience.

Figure 1: Shows the different levels of engagement



To develop and improve community engagement the Council should:

- understand and respond to the needs of our customers
- plan and deliver better and more efficient services
- take transparent decisions based on evidence and be held accountable for these decisions
- build relationships with the local community and partners
- test out ideas and explore local issues
- measure the performance of the Council in delivering services

The Communications Team will support this by:

- Sharing information via multiple channels in multiple formats
- Exploring new partnerships, particularly with community and voluntary groups, as well as statutory/public sector partners
- Working with Members to promote the work of the Council and to receive feedback from constituents
- Encouraging service areas and Members to share news, upcoming events and consultation
- Giving the community and stakeholders clear means to express their views
- Listening to the feedback from our customers and acting on this feedback
- Working with partner organisations

Our community engagement methods will also support and adhere to our Single Equality Scheme 2025.

Our engagement can be split into three main areas: Customers, Members and Staff.

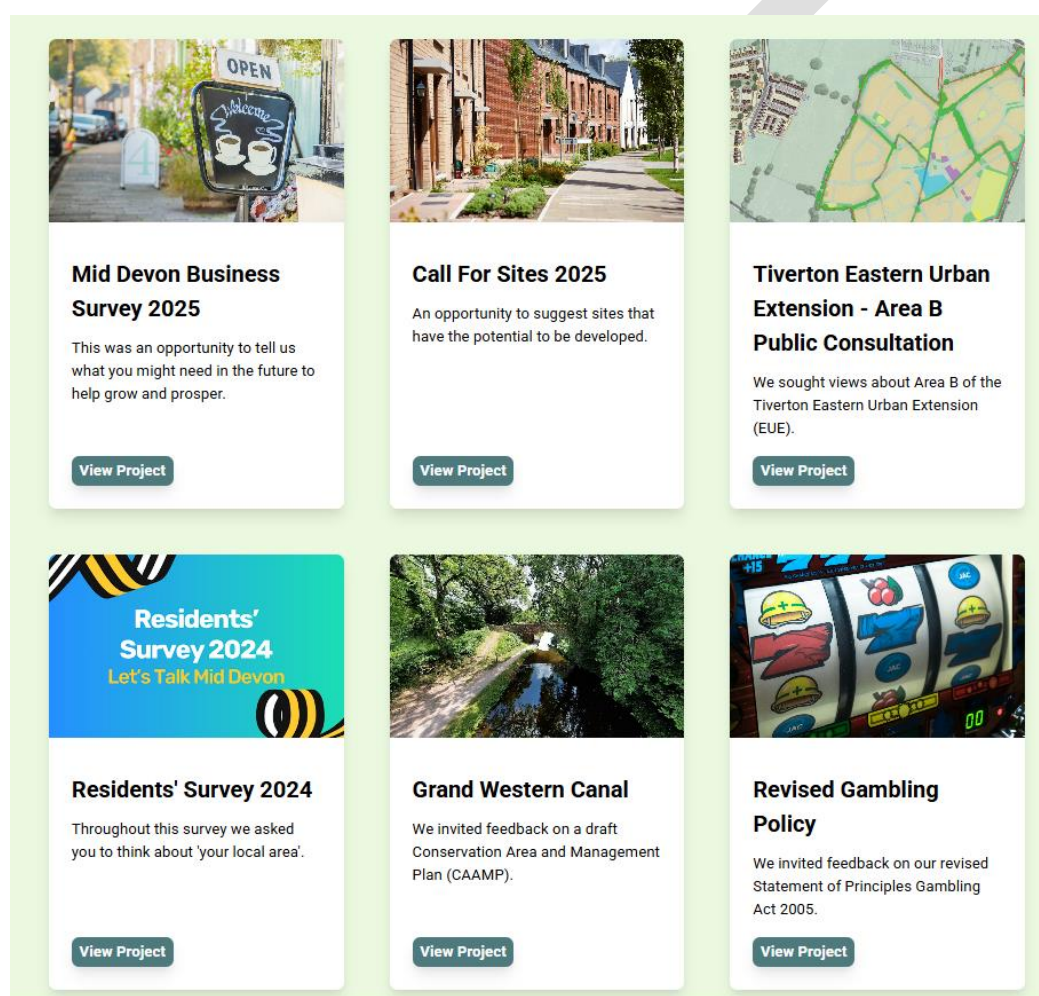
Customers

We share the work of the Council, its achievements and upcoming changes to services. We do this through a digital first approach, while ensuring all residents have

access to information by using a number of different communication methods including print, in-person events and online platforms.

The Council has an online engagement platform, Let's Talk Mid Devon which is steadily growing in use. The aim of this is to act as a hub for residents and businesses to communicate directly with the Council. The platform allows the Council to share information, ask questions, invite discussion and host forums directly with residents and businesses. It is a two-way communication tool that can be used for both statutory and non-statutory communication.

Figure 2: *Homepage of Mid Devon's Community Engagement Platform called Let's Talk Mid Devon*



Our communities already have a number of methods to engage with us including:

- An annual resident survey
- Service specific consultation exercises
- Service specific feedback processes
- An e-newsletter subscription service
- Multiple social media channels
- Business Forum
- Mid Devon Show event

- Specific in-person planning events
- Printed and online feedback forms

Elected Members

We aim to ensure our elected members, who represent our residents, are kept informed and engaged with our activities and we ask them to support this work by sharing information within their wards.

We will work closely with Democratic Services to:

- Share weekly key messages with councillors
- Share our news releases with all members
- Share media monitoring
- Host relevant councillor information on SharePoint and Teams
- Follow councillors' social media profiles on our official channels

We encourage Members to support community engagement, as they are the face of the Council in the community and can help ensure the Council's priorities reflect the community's wishes. It is important that our Members:

- Support and share council-run campaigns
- Share good news within their communities
- Feedback community ideas and issues
- Encourage participation with the Council
- Share community events and consultation

Staff Engagement / Internal communications

The Communications Team works closely with the Leadership Team, Corporate Management Team, Operations Managers and People Services to support staff communication across the organisation.

Our aim is to provide an internal communication system which promotes interaction and ensures staff at all levels feel valued and informed, giving them the best position to support the objectives and values of the Council.

We will do this by:

- Ensuring communication is shared with staff in a timely, easily accessible way, especially during periods of change, so that they feel better informed and engaged
- Helping employees see the connection between their job and the organisation's aims and objectives
- Recognising that different methods of communication are needed depending on the audience and message
- Encouraging staff to share good practice and expertise

- Encouraging senior management to listen to staff feedback and questions, and respond accordingly, creating a climate of two-way communication and improved levels of trust
- Facilitating free-flowing communication

The Council runs quarterly staff briefings which are hosted in a hybrid way, publish a fortnightly staff newsletter, send all officer emails when appropriate, host a staff consultation group and work with People Services to support regularly team meetings.

6.0 Media relations

The Communications Team works closely with existing and emerging media (local and national) to inform and engage the public about the work of the Council, ensuring the reputation of the Council is upheld and enhanced.

We will do this by:

- Generating news content
- Generating photo and video content
- Monitoring local and national news and sharing this information internally
- Liaising regularly with local reporters and editors
- Linking trending articles to the Council's work on social media
- Working closely with Members on issues that matter to them
- Using paid for adverts, when budget allows, particularly for campaigns

7.0 Media training

The Communications Team can support Members and officers who wish to learn or improve their interview skills and media handling, as well as support them with the setting up of social media pages. The team can also support Members by utilising external training providers for media training, particularly as part of the Member Induction Programme.

AI

The Council's first Artificial Intelligence Policy was adopted in 2025. This policy ensures users are aware of the methods the Council uses to manage AI. Users must comply with this policy to ensure appropriate use of AI tools. It links with other policies, including Corporate Data Protection, Information Security, ICT Acceptable Use, and Freedom of Information Policy.

The Council recognises that the use of AI is becoming more accessible and more frequently used by organisations and individuals in the work place. While the Council is in the early stages of developing its use of AI, the Council acknowledges there will be many opportunities to use AI in the future, generating benefits to the Council and our customers. It is also aware of the risks and need for robust governance with the use of AI. AI tools may be used in the future for tasks within the Council such as document improvements, meeting notes, report writing, data analysis, summarising

complex documents, translation, drafting communications, content creation, workflow management, and reviewing accessibility. However, it is important to remember that these tools will be used in a manner that complements professional judgement and expertise, without replacing them. Users remain responsible and accountable for the quality and content of any AI-generated output, regardless of how it is generated or used.

8.0 Emergency Planning

The Communications Team is on hand to support the Council during an emergency ensuring residents, staff, visitors and businesses are kept up to date in a time of crisis. The team is part of the Local Resilience Forum and liaises regularly with other local authorities within Devon. There is a mutual aid agreement in place with Devon County Council for use during an emergency if further communications resources are needed.

9.0 Corporate Branding

The Council recognises the importance of communicating in a way that is clear, consistent and uses Plain English. The Council has Corporate Branding Guidelines which should be adhered to when undertaking communications.

10.0 Accessibility

The Council must follow WCAG 2.1 AA standards on all public-facing websites and business applications that the public can use, such as apps. The standards required can be found here: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>

Any software procured / commissioned by the authority should be checked to ensure it meets WCAG 2.1 AA standards. We would be breaking the law if we purchase publicly visible apps / websites that don't meet this criteria.

The Communications Team and Web Developer manage a team of Content Editors / uploaders who are responsible for the accessibility of the content they upload to any Council-run website or where a website is hosted by a third party supplier such as ModernGov.

Officers in the Council have a responsibility to ensure content they would like in the public domain is accessible following WCAG 2.1 AA Standards.

11.0 Our success and accountability

It is important that our communities know how we are performing and what decisions we are making, so that they can challenge us and hold us accountable.

The Council is committed to working with communities to give them the chance to shape our priorities and to ensure they have the information they need to hold us to account for our performance.

This can be achieved by:

- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Tenant involvement
- Business forums
- Performance sharing
- Consultation exercises
- An open budget setting process
- A simple and transparent complaints process

We will measure communication and engagement success by:

- **Evaluating** website and digital analytics
- **Monitoring** media coverage
- **Increasing** our social media following and reach
- **Developing** partnership work
- **Implementing** an annual resident survey
- **Supporting** the annual staff survey
- **Developing** our two-way engagement platform Let's Talk Mid Devon

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Appendix Two:

Media & Social Media Policy

May 2025

Media and Social Media Policy

Version Control Sheet

Title: **Media and Social Media Policy**

Purpose: **To outline how we deal with media and social media and to provide advice and guidance to officers and elected Members**

Owner: **Communications & Engagement Manager**
jlewis@middevon.gov.uk

Date: **May 2025**

Version Number: **1.0**

Status:

Review Frequency: **Every three years or sooner if required**

Next review date: **May 2028**

Consultation: **This document will be sent out for consultation to the following:**
Community, People and Equalities PDG
Cabinet

Document History

This document obtained the following approvals.

Title	Date	Version Approved
Community, People and Equalities PDG*		
Cabinet		

*- Delete if not applicable

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1 Introduction

This policy outlines procedures for Mid Devon District Council officers and elected Members who may come into contact with the media. It supports the Council's **Communication and Engagement Strategy**.

This policy relates to social media, online versions of newspapers, blogging and citizen journalism, and any media policy must take into account both the traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio and TV) and online digital media (including websites, blogs and social media).

It explains processes in relation to: proactive media relations; dealing with media enquiries; and dealing with posts on social media. It also provides guidance on a range of other media-related issues.

1.1 Our strategic aim

To work closely with existing media, and to develop relationships with new media channels, to inform and engage the public about the work of the Council, ensuring the reputation of the Council is upheld and enhanced.

1.2 Our policy statement

Mid Devon District Council recognises the value of the media and social media as a means of communicating information and messages to the public. We are committed to:

- transparent government;
- a positive working relationship with the media;
- always being open, honest and proactive in our dealings with the media and on social media, and;
- respecting the right of the media to report all views on any given topic.

2 Proactive media relations

Positive media coverage comes from pro-active media relations and the recognition of a good news story. Ideas for stories can come from both officers and elected Members. The drafting of press releases is undertaken primarily by the Communications Team. Creative and editorial support is also offered to services, however, they are free to submit their own drafts to the Communication Team where appropriate sign-off has already been sought.

2.1 Press releases

Media coverage is predominantly generated through the publication and distribution of press releases to:

- Increase public awareness of services provided by the Council and the functions we perform
- Explain to residents and council taxpayers the reasons for particular policies and priorities
- Improve local accountability
- Publicise forthcoming events
- Encourage participation in public consultations
- Explain changes to services
- Explain how the Council is dealing with issues of particular interest to local communities
- Share good news

2.1.1 Press release content

In the first instance services should contact the Communications Team for advice on submitting and writing a press release.

Tip: Make sure that the relevant Cabinet Member(s) – and, for local issues, any Ward Members – are informed about what is happening and that a press release is being prepared (even if those Members are not actually quoted in the press release).

2.1.2 Who should be quoted in a press release?

Quote attribution depends on the nature of the press release, for example:

- The relevant Cabinet Member and the officer most directly involved in the subject may both be quoted – this gives the media a strategic/policy viewpoint, as well as the day-to-day operational viewpoint
- An officer
- A Member
- An external partner

If the press release provides only straightforward information, there's no need to include a quote.

2.1.3 Contact details on press releases

Generally only contact details for the Communications Team are included in the 'ENDS' of all press releases for follow-up enquiries from the press. This is to prevent journalists from contacting officers directly with future enquiries and to ensure all contact with the press is directed through, and logged with Communications.

Specific contact details may be included in relation to consultations, where a 'return path' is required for respondent enquiries.

Tip: Where a press release covers a specialist subject for which follow-up inquiries from the press can only be answered confidently by a specific officer or Member, he/she should ensure they're available for contact by the Communications Team, the following few days after release.

2.1.4 Press release approval

For press releases written by the Communications Team, sign-off is sought from the relevant Corporate Manager and Cabinet Member. Where a press release has been written by a service directly, it's up to the author to agree sign-off with the relevant Service Manager or Corporate Manager and Cabinet Member before submitting to communications@middevon.gov.uk, for publication and distribution. However, we strongly advise services to contact the Communications Team in advance so that press releases are written and approved based on the Council's corporate style.

Before issuing to the media, the Communications Team will undertake checks for spelling, language and grammar.

Tip: Depending on the complexity of the subject matter, various people may need to agree the wording of a press release, such as:

- Any quoted elected Member/officer(s)
- The relevant service manager
- The Chief Executive, Director or Corporate Manager (for important corporate issues or important operational issues)
- The Leader of the Council or the relevant Cabinet Member (for important strategic issues or policy decisions)
- Relevant partner organisations

2.1.5 Press release distribution

Press releases from services which are time-sensitive and sent in advance, must contain *****EMBARGOED***** within the subject line, along with the specified date for release. Press releases must also be accompanied with an appropriate image at an industry standard resolution of ~300dpi. This is not only for publication online, but also for reprinting by the press, should they choose to cover the article.

All press releases are published onto the Council's website and then distributed via email to all media contacts, town and parish councils, and internally to Corporate Managers, Members and Customer First for info.

Press releases are further promoted through:

- social media posts published on the corporate Facebook and X , LinkedIn and Nextdoor pages, which link back to the story on www.middevon.gov.uk/news and;
- via e-bulletin to GovDelivery subscribers subscribed to the Council's email subscription service.

2.2 Other ways of generating coverage

The Communications Team can be consulted for advice on other aspects of media relations including:

- Planning media campaigns
- Setting up photo opportunities
- Media briefings and media launches
- Use of embargos (where the media is given advance notice but cannot publish until a specified date)
- Negotiating special features
- Improving webpages to support publicity
- Making better use of social media
- Increasing community engagement through GovDelivery
- Hosting community engagement on the Let's Talk Mid Devon platform

3 Reputational issues

3.1 Imbalanced or inaccurate media coverage

When media coverage of a particular issue is unduly negative and imbalanced, services can liaise with the Communications & Engagement Manager about how best to try to redress the balance. Action taken in response may involve:

- An email/phone conversation with the reporter
- A letter to the publication/Editor
- A request for a correction
- Communications & Engagement Manager, Chief Executive and/or Leader to meet and discuss with the Editor
- Generating further media coverage to move the story on in a more positive way

If we judge the following coverage to still be unfair or not based on fact, a complaint may be made to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO).

3.2 Confidential information

Leaking of confidential information, exempt agenda items and minutes to the media, is viewed seriously by the Council. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (see also 4.3 below), allows certain information to be available on request to anyone including the media, unless the Council has a valid reason for not releasing it. Please refer to the Freedom of Information Policy on SharePoint for further information.

Occasionally, issues come to the notice of the media that involve staff or Members and aspects of their private lives or employment contracts. Our policy is not to comment upon such issues. Factual responses are permitted, for example: *“I can confirm that the employee is no longer in employment with Mid Devon District Council, but I am not able to discuss the situation in any greater detail.”*

The Communications Team will liaise with a member of the Leadership Team to discuss any response to the leaking of sensitive information.

3.3 Issues relating to employee relations

It is recognised that there will be occasions where the Unions wish to comment to the media in relation to issues rather than individual cases, on behalf of itself and its members.

There are mechanisms for complaining about issues or situations arising in the workplace and individual employees should refer to the procedures laid out in the appropriate policies (e.g. grievance, dignity at work/harassment and appeals procedure, whistle-blowing), available on SharePoint. If in doubt about how to raise concerns or which policy would be most appropriate for their needs, employees should seek advice and guidance from People Services.

3.4 Protecting the Council's reputation

While it is recognised that elected Members will want to comment on particular issues such as council policies and decisions, neither officers nor Members should bring the Council into disrepute or publicly criticise individual officers or associates.

4 Media enquiries

Every media enquiry can be used as a positive opportunity to get a message across to the public. Failure to provide a response explaining 'our side of the story' is an opportunity missed to ensure the subsequent reporting is fair and balanced. Our preference is to provide a response rather than a reply of 'no comment', which can come across as aloof, uncaring or that we have something to hide. If, for some reason we cannot comment in detail, for example, in relation to case work which is ongoing, we can usually provide a general comment and an explanation as to why we cannot go into detail.

4.1 Points of contact for media enquiries

4.1.1 Communications

The press and media personnel are encouraged to contact the Communications Team with any requests for comments, supporting information or interviews. Communications will liaise with the relevant Corporate Manager or service spokesperson to coordinate a response. The enquiry and proposed response is also cc'd to the relevant:

- generic department email if there is one;
- Cabinet Member;
- Leader of the Council (if controversial), and;
- Committee Chair (if in relation to an incident or comment made at a committee meeting).

The Communications Team will ensure all statements received are well written and submitted within the media's deadline. Final statements will be appropriately attributed, ensuring staff names and job titles are correct. Care is also taken to ensure that direct contact details for staff are not disclosed in any replies sent to the press.

Where a response from the relevant service is outstanding, we will respond to acknowledge receipt of the journalist's enquiry and to ask whether he/she is willing to extend the deadline for their enquiry. If no one is available, we will reply stating that the appropriate officer is currently unavailable for comment.

All contact between the press and staff is currently documented on the media reporting system CommsFlow for future reference and month-end analysis. This system will be replaced in the new CRM.

4.1.2 Officers and Members

The media may contact officers or Members directly. If the enquiry is straightforward, requiring only a factual answer, this can be answered there and then. However, the responding officer or Member must notify the Communications Team to record the enquiry onto CommsFlow (soon to be replaced with a tool within the CRM).

With the immediacy of news now being published predominantly online, officers and Members should be aware of the urgent need to respond within the deadline set by the enquiring journalist. It is within our mutual interest to respond positively and on time. The forging of good relations with the press allows us to build positive relationships and seek to ensure any future coverage is accurate, with either a favourable view, or, if the story is more negative, the opportunity to provide the council's perspective. Similarly, journalists will tend to be more willing to amend or withdraw a story if it's been reported inaccurately.

Note: Nothing in this policy precludes Members or political groups from speaking to or contacting the media. Members should make it clear to the media whether they are speaking:

- officially on behalf of the Council – in this case the Communications Team should be kept informed, *or*;
- officially on behalf of their particular political group, *or*;
- in a personal capacity.

Media training may be offered to all Members who are likely to be called on to speak to the media.

4.2 Media interviews and comments

4.2.1 Officers

It is up to Heads of Service and Corporate Managers to make arrangements for which officers in their teams can act as a spokesperson to provide comments or be interviewed by journalists.

The relevant Cabinet Members, should be consulted for advice at any time and be involved in drafting any media statements or preparing for interviews

that are highly controversial or where this is a significant reputational risk to the Council.

Staff are likely to be called on to comment on these issues:

Chief Executive / Leadership Team	Major corporate issues (and in situations where the Leader would normally respond but is not available within the timescale)
Corporate Managers	Corporate issues within their service areas (and in situations where the Cabinet Member would normally respond but is not available within the timescale)
Officers	To answer questions of fact and/or technical information within their areas of expertise and in relation to projects and initiatives they are involved in, but they will not be expected to do live on-air interviews unless they have received appropriate media training

4.2.2 Members

Members are likely to be called on to comment on these issues:

Leader	Strategic issues, key policy decisions, and other major corporate issues affecting the Council
Cabinet Members	Issues that come under their remit
Chairmen of PDGs	Issues their PDG is involved in
Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of committees	Recent committee decisions
Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Scrutiny	Issues that Scrutiny raise and reviews that they are working on
Local Ward Members	Issues of particular local concern
Group Leaders	Issues that transcend politics, for example obituaries

4.3 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests

Some media enquiries are submitted as FOI requests, in which case the Performance, Governance and Health & Safety Team will coordinate the response in accordance with the applicable legislation. See Freedom of Information Policy in the governance area, within 'Policies & Strategies' on SharePoint.

5 Social media

In addition to posting proactive stories on [Facebook](#), [X](#), LinkedIn, Nextdoor, and YouTube, social media is now also used as a customer service channel, where we can respond directly to customers' questions, comments or complaints.

Customer enquiries are currently dealt with via the Communications Team but in future this area of social media may fall to the Customer Services Team. The new CRM may also affect how direct messages are answered by the Council and by whom.

5.1 Main corporate accounts

The Communications Team maintains and administers the corporate [Facebook](#), [X](#), LinkedIn, Nextdoor, and YouTube accounts. Where applicable, notifications in the form of questions, complaints and comments are dealt with directly by a member of the Communications Team. If the query is more complex, or concerns service policy, the relevant service is approached for information and guidance when forming an appropriate response.

Services should be aware there is no such thing as a deadline on social media; customer expectation is for a quick response – certainly hours rather than days – and leaving a post (particularly a negative comment or complaint) unanswered for more than a few hours gives the impression we are ignoring it.

5.2 Other service-specific accounts

A number of services have their own specific social media accounts and these include:

- Mid Devon Housing
- Tiverton Pannier Market
- Electric Nights Streetfood
- Active Mid Devon (one main page and three separate pages, one for each site)
- Culm Garden Village
- Mid Devon Business
- Visit Mid Devon

Staff within these services respond to their own notifications, however, with the use of Meta Business Suite for Facebook, the Communications Team can access and publish posts onto these pages, where urgent action is required and the relevant page editor is absent. (This does not apply to X, for which there is no Business Manager equivalent).

Any service wishing to set up a new social media account must discuss this with the Communications & Engagement Manager first. An officer/service must prepare a business case in conjunction with the Communication and Engagement Manager before setting up any new channel/page. This must include details about clear aims and reason for the channel, methods of management control and responsibility for content creation and direct messaging. Any new Facebook page must be set up correctly using Meta Business Suite which allows the Communication Team to monitor access appropriately. The overall approval for a new social media page/channel lies with the Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation & Customer Engagement & Digital Services.

The relevant service Operations Manager (or equivalent post) has overall responsibility for their social media content and users.

Two-factor authentication must also be used on all social media channels. This will have implications for users who access pages using personal devices. Under Facebook T&Cs all pages must be linked to a personal profile meaning personal accounts must use two-factor authentication.

All users must be included in the Council's Register of Social Media Access document. Each department will be limited to a maximum of five registered social media users per team/site, unless the Operations Manager (or equivalent role) has put a case forward for more users to Communications Team

It is also mandatory for all registered users to read the latest Media and Social Media policy each year via the LMS.

As a commercial arm of the Council, Active Mid Devon also runs a number of social media pages and channels. The leisure social media pages, and those staff accessing these pages and platforms, will follow this policy and it is recognised the overall governance of those accessing these pages is the accountability and responsibility of the Leisure Management Team.

5.3 Dealing with detractors

When dealing with detractors, all page editors and administrators using social media business accounts should avoid getting into an argument or inflaming a discussion. Officers will try to help in the first instance; if the user continues to post without engaging our offer of help, their posts will be ignored.

5.4 Deleting abusive or discriminatory comments

As a general principle we do not attempt to moderate posts on social media, as to do so could also open us up to accusations of censorship. However, we will remove any posts from our social media accounts that are abusive (for example, use of language, personal attacks on a particular named officer or Member, or discriminatory (for example, racist or homophobic).

As a last resort an individual account may be blocked if content posted continues to be repeatedly abusive or offensive.

5.5 Social media guidelines

The following guidelines set out the responsibilities, standards of behaviour and provide guidance to employees and Members using social media in a professional capacity, and things to consider when using social media for personal purposes.

All employees and Members should be aware of and adhere to the following policies, whichever is applicable:

- [Dignity at Work](#)
- [Single Equality Scheme](#)
- [Member Code of Conduct](#)
- [Officer Code of Conduct](#)
- [Council Safeguarding Policy](#)

5.5.1 Do

- **be responsible and respectful** at all times by adhering to the existing policies listed above
- **trust yourself** to use social media – the Council already trusts you to send an email on behalf of the organisation and the same applies for social media
- check your **privacy** settings – understand who can see the information you publish and your personal information
- **chat** informally with other users – use language and tone of voice that's consistent with your target audience
- **credit** other people's work, ideas and links

- **respond** to all comments and private messages as quickly and honestly as possible. Be personal and professional in your response – show empathy and a desire to find a resolution to problems where appropriate
- drive the conversation **offline if it's sensitive** in nature or likely to escalate – ask the individual to message you privately with more details and include your name so the customer knows who he or she is talking to.
- **listen** in on other pages to what's being said about the Council, its services and the local area, then join in on discussions, and;
- **share** helpful content and links signposting people to the appropriate service or authority to inform and grow your audience. If you're in any doubt about sharing any particular content, the best rule-of-thumb to follow is don't share it!
- seek advice from the communications team or legal services if you are unsure, it's there to help you
- **add value** by creating content that educates and spreads awareness about Council services. Include positive stories encountered whilst on the 'day job' and news-bites with perspective to show the human side to public services
- align your posts with the **Council's purpose and values**
- **seek permission** to publish any information, report or conversation that is not already in the public domain.
- **respect copyright** when linking to images or other online material – obtain owner permission and provide appropriate attribution when using images that aren't your own, and make sure you purchase the correct license for any stock images used
- respect the pre-election period (see local.gov.uk/our-support/purdah)
- **ask** your followers questions to glean valuable insights (but ensure there's a clear and resourced return path for respondents to leave their feedback and make sure you share the results with them)
- **monitor and evaluate** the success of your activity.

5.5.2 Don't

- post content which will **embarrass** the Council or yourself
- **reduce your credibility** by posting your every personal thought – especially if you're complaining
- **moderate posts** unless they are abusive – blocking someone or deleting their posts without just cause will incur accusations of 'censorship'
- use council **jargon** or corporate speak
- **ignore comments** and private messages (unless engaging will inflame a situation or the comment is clearly politically motivated, or the person commenting has received an answer multiple times to the same question)
- say anything you **cannot substantiate** – if you don't know the answer, let the individual know you're looking into the matter

- cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers **without their approval**
- **argue** with customers or inflame a discussion
- refer customers to **another channel** such as email or telephone – if they've contacted you via Facebook, you should respond in kind. The exception would be sensitive topics such as comments in relation to planning applications, etc.
- follow or share **political opinions** or groups which could otherwise compromise the Council's impartial service to the Government
- **broadcast** or talk at people. Users who post information which is mostly information-sharing have twice as many followers than those who post mostly relating to themselves
- **cover up** mistakes, be honest and you'll get more respect for it in the long run
- disclose **personal information** – to do so would be in contravention of the [Information Security Incident Policy](#) and the social media platform's rules
- **assume** that social media will look after itself – you will need to invest time, enthusiasm and energy to make it work.
- **share your passwords** with anyone other than the Communications Team.

5.6 Training

One-to-one staff or Member training to use social media can be provided by the Communications Team on request. Such requests should be emailed to communications@middevon.gov.uk. A Social Media Guide for Members and Staff is also available.

6 Other issues and special circumstances

6.1 Emergencies and out-of-hours contact

In the event of an emergency situation affecting multiple agencies, a Media Cell will be setup by the lead agency to manage communications and the press. For more information, please refer to the [Devon Emergency Planning Service \(DEPS\) Incident Response & Recovery Plan](#) on SharePoint.

In the event of the media contacting the Council outside normal office working hours and if deemed an emergency, contact details for the Communications & Engagement Manager and Communications Officers are listed in Part 5 of the DEPS Incident Response and recovery Plan. The Communications & Engagement Manager will decide if and what response is required. If a response is required, they will contact the relevant officer (Chief Executive or head of service) and/or lead Member.

6.2 Court cases

The Council will occasionally launch prosecutions and will want to use successful outcomes of court cases to deliver a message to the public. The best way of doing this is by issuing a press release, or prior notification to the media of an impending court case. The relevant Corporate Manager should be consulted.

6.3 Photography and child protection

As outlined in our [Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk Policy and Procedures](#), officers, Members and volunteers should be vigilant at all times. Any person using cameras or videos within Council premises and at events or activities which involve children and young people, should be approached and asked to complete a [Photography Consent Form](#) (see **SharePoint >> Communications >> External Communications**).

Guidance for commissioning professional photographers or inviting the press to cover Council services, events and activities

- Ensure that you make your expectations clear in relation to child protection

- Check credentials of any photographers and organisations used
- Ensure identification is worn at all times, if they do not have their own – provide it
- Do not allow unsupervised access to children or young people or one-to-one photographic sessions
- Parents must be informed when photographs of their child or young person may be taken at activities or events, and parental consent forms need to be signed agreeing to this
- It is recommended that the names of children or young people should not be used in photographs or video footage, unless with the express permission of the child or young person's parent

6.4 Data protection

Personal information and data protection

The Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) determines the way in which the Council obtains, holds, uses, releases and disposes of personal information. Under the DPA you are entitled to request copies of your personal information that is held by us.

Freedom of information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) provides a right of access to information held by Public Authorities. Under the FOIA you are entitled to request disclosure of any information that is held by us. However, some of the information held may be exempt. The FOIA also places an obligation to pro-actively publish certain information through the Council's Publication Scheme.

For guidance, see [Data Protection Policy](#) or contact our Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager.

6.5 Elections

During elections, all publicity referring to a political party or anyone standing for election will – except as in the following paragraph – be suspended between the publication of a notice of election and polling day.

Members will not be quoted in press releases during this period unless it is a Member holding a key political or civic position commenting on an emergency

or an important event outside the Council's control and where there is a genuine need for a response by a Member. For further information concerning the publicity restrictions observed by Local Authorities during the pre-election period previously known as 'purdah', please refer to local.gov.uk/our-support/purdah.

6.6 Filming, recording and use of social media at Council meetings

All media, including radio and TV journalists, and members of the public may attend Council, Cabinet, PDG and committee meetings (apart from items where the public is excluded). They may record, film or use social media before, during or after the meeting, so long as this does not distract from or interfere unduly with the smooth running of the meeting. Anyone proposing to film during the meeting is requested to make this known to the Chairman in advance. The Council also makes audio recordings of meetings which are published on our website.

7 Media monitoring and evaluation

7.1 Monitoring

7.1.1 Newspaper and online mentions

The Communications Team monitors local media, notably Mid Devon Gazette, Crediton Courier, Devon Live, and BBC.

Any articles referencing the Council, its staff or Members are summarised and sent to the Leadership Team, relevant Corporate Managers and Members for information.

For any printed or online reporting which is found to be baseless, either the Communications & Engagement Manager or relevant Corporate/Service Manager can decide whether any follow-up action is required in response (see also 3.1 above). Any coverage generated – whether from a press release or by responding to a media enquiry – is collated and reported monthly to the Leadership Team for evaluation.

7.2 Hard copy press cuttings

Because it is prohibitively expensive, we do not have the necessary NLA Media Access licence to permit us to photocopy or electronically scan press cuttings. Officers and Members should therefore not make or store any copies of press cuttings for any purpose, as to do so would be breaking copyright law. The originals of articles may, however, be cut out from newspapers and kept.

7.3 Social media monitoring

The social media channels for the following areas are monitored by the Communications Team:

- Media organisations (both local and national)
- Community news and forums (including some groups members may be part of)
- Local what's on pages, partners and charities
- National partners, charities and government organisations

References to the Council or Members are flagged and reported as above where seen. Note that social media monitoring can be a full-time role and there is not currently the capacity within the Council to carry out this task in this way.

7.4 Web Alerts

Monitoring of the web for accessibility is carried out on a quarterly basis using Sort Site.

The Communications Team receive Google Alerts to detect changes in content for predefined search terms. Terms have been entered for the Council, its premises, ongoing plans/developments, and names of key staff, Members and vexatious complainers. Additional search terms are added as and when appropriate, or the need arises. Any detections are automatically emailed to communications@middevon.gov.uk, then forwarded to the relevant staff and/or Members, as above.



Report for: Community People and Equalities PDG

Date of Meeting:	17 June 2025
Subject:	FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN ANNUAL UPDATE 2025-26
Cabinet Member:	Cllr David Wulff, Cabinet Member for Quality of Living, Equalities and Public Health
Responsible Officer:	Simon Newcombe, Head of Health and Housing
Exempt:	No
Wards Affected:	All Wards
Enclosures:	Annex A: Food Safety Service Plan 2025/2026

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

This report intends to provide a service update for the statutory work of the Food Safety team within Public Health and Housing Options and the reviewed Food Safety Service Plan for 2025/2026 (Annex A).

Recommendation(s):

- 1. That the PDG notes the report**

Section 2 – Report

1 Introduction

- 1.1 An annual Food Safety Service Plan is required under the Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The Plan provides a focus for service delivery outcomes and a framework for assessing performance against those outcomes.
- 1.2 The Service plan sets out how the competent authority intends to deliver and resource official food controls and other official activities in its area, and address any variance in meeting the outcomes of the previous service plan.

- 1.3 The 2025-2026 Food Service plan aligns with the corporate plan objective under Community, People and Equalities, of supporting the health, wellbeing, and safety of our residents, by keeping the public safe through rigorous public health inspections.
- 1.4 The primary aim of the food safety service is to ensure food safety across the district. This is delivered through interventions that aim to prevent food poisoning, food borne and water borne illness and to ensure, so far as is possible, that food and drink intended for sale for human consumption, which is produced, stored, distributed, handled or sold/consumed within the district is without risk to the health or safety of the consumer.
- 1.5 The FSA has a key role as the central competent authority in overseeing official feed and food controls undertaken by local authorities. It also seeks to work in partnership with local authorities to help them to deliver official feed and food controls. The FSA is therefore pro-active in setting and monitoring standards, and in auditing local authorities' delivery of official controls, in order to ensure that this activity is effective, risk based, proportionate and consistent.
- 1.6 Powers enabling the FSA to monitor and audit local authorities, and ultimately take over delivery of official controls, are contained in the Food Standards Act 1999 and in the Official Feed and Food Controls Regulations.

2 Service update

- 2.1 Mid Devon District Council has 960 registered food premises. Under the FSA Code of Practice all food premises are categorised with an inspection risk rating that determines the frequency of interventions from 6 months to 3 years.
- 2.2 New food business registrations are steady, with 134 received by the team in 2024/2025 which is approximately 2.5 a week.
- 2.3 During 2024/2025 63% of due interventions with established businesses were carried out.
- 2.4 747 businesses are currently in scope of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and are scored as follows:

Rating	5	4	3	2	1	0
Descriptor	Very good	Good	Generally satisfactory	Improvement necessary	Major improvement necessary	Urgent improvement necessary
Number *	652	46	33	6	10	0
%	87.2%	6.2%	4.5%	0.8%	1.3%	0%

*taken from FHRS public facing website 20/04/25

- 2.5 Any business scoring 0, 1 or 2 will have a compliance re-visit carried out and officers will consider what further actions are required to improve standards, this will range from sampling, education and guidance through to formal enforcement action. Enforcement action is delivered in accordance with the Mid Devon District Council Enforcement Policy PH/EP/09/20.

- 2.6 The team is responsible for investigation of infectious diseases, and this year 55 notifications of infectious disease were received and dealt with by the service. These included, 29 Campylobacter, 12 Salmonella, 12 Cryptosporidium and 2 Shigella.
- 2.7 A mini re-structure completed during 2023/24 identified 2 new posts that were needed to strengthen the team in terms of capacity and capability to deliver against our service objectives.
- 2.8 The Regulatory Officer post went live in December 2024 and has already had a positive impact within our lower risk food businesses. During quarter 4, the officer was able to action 23% of the due E rated interventions, an increase from 0% completed in quarter 3.
- 2.9 In relation to the production, handling and storage of Products of Animal Origin there are currently 17 approved establishments operating under Regulation (EC) 853/2004 in Mid Devon, summarised below:

Approved Premises Type	Number of Premises
Dairy Products	5
Meat Products	1
Meat Preparations	1
Cold Store	4
Fish Products	0
Egg products	1
Egg Packing Centres	5
Total	17

3 Current challenges and opportunities

- 3.1 Section 2.2 of the plan provides the organisational structure, and details the staffing resource required to deliver the service plan. We currently have 1FTE post vacant, due to recruitment challenges and internal movement.
- 3.2. Whilst recruitment into the Regulatory Officer role was successful, we were unable to attract any suitable candidates to the Lead Officer role.
- 3.3 A second recruitment attempt, offering a temporary market supplement, did not attract any external applicants, however an internal candidate has stepped into the role for a temporary 12 month secondment. This has diverted 0.6FTE Specialist Officer away from Food Safety duties, prolonging the impact on our ability to meet our statutory requirements. The real impact of this is compounded by further vacancies within the Licensing team, due to the nature of the Lead Officer post having shared responsibility across the two distinct functions.
- 3.4 During quarter 1, the service manager will review the vacancies as a priority and will seek to address these ongoing recruitment challenges.

- 3.5 During 2024/2025 a part time Specialist Food officer retired.
- 3.6 Following a procurement process in quarter 3 and 4, we are now using an external contractor to support with the delivery of food interventions over the next financial year. More information is provided in Section 5 (Future Plan) below.

4 KPIs

- 4.1 Current performance measures for 2024/2025 are as follows.
- 4.2 **The percentage of interventions due at each risk category carried out** (should be 100% at each risk category). This is a measure of our capacity to deliver the number of due interventions in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice. We have not met the target of 100%, and delivered 63% of due interventions during 2024/25. Resource is wherever possible targeted at higher risk premises, or where intelligence indicates that there are non-compliances within a premises, even if it is sitting in a lower risk category.
- 4.3 **The movement of businesses from 0 to 2 rating at subsequent interventions.** There is some work required within the database to enable us to extract and interrogate the data to provide this (aim to see an upward movement). This is a measure of the effectiveness of our interventions. As show below:

Movement of FHRS	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
FRHS improved	89	90	100	100
No change in FHRS	11	10	0	0
FHRS decreased	0	0	0	0

5 Future plan

- 5.1 The Public Health team are further considering the local structure and roles with a view to addressing recruitment challenges.
- 5.2 Whilst working towards the full structure and compliance with the Food Law Code of Practice, the focus will remain on the higher risk premises and processes, new registrations, and premises where intelligence suggests that the risk may have changed.
- 5.3 The team will continue to utilise the Food Safety contractor until the new structure is in place. The contract has been set up with an option to extend to 36 months if required. This gives us some reassurance that we can work towards compliance with the Food Law code of practice during the 2025/2026 year and beyond in order to meet the FSA target for interventions whilst there is a resolution of the structure and implementation of more permanent arrangements.

Financial Implications: Failure to deliver against the service plan has the potential for financial implications, as the FSA have authority to deliver official controls where a Local Authority fails in its obligations, this is done on a cost recovery basis.

The review of posts is likely to result in an increase to the required FTE allocation, which will have associated cost implications. There will need to be approval for any increase to budget.

Legal Implications: The Authority have a statutory obligation to deliver food safety official controls in accordance with The Official Feed and Food Controls (England) Regulations 2009.

Risk Assessment: Failure to deliver official controls in accordance with the Food Law code of Practice, as laid out in the service plan, presents a risk to members of the public, due to drop in food hygiene standards within food establishments. Failure to deliver official controls in accordance with the Food Law code of Practice leaves the Authority at risk of reputational damage and financial cost due to potential FSA intervention.

Impact on Climate Change: There is no direct impact on climate change as a result of this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment: An equality impact assessment is not required in respect of this update report.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: This report links directly to the corporate plan objective under Community, People and Equalities, of supporting the health, wellbeing, and safety of our residents, by keeping the public safe through rigorous public health inspections.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett
Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151 Officer
Date: 5.6.25

Statutory Officer: Maria de Leburne
Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 5.6.25

Chief Officer: Stephen Walford
Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director
Date: 5.6.25

Performance and risk: Steve Carr
Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager
Date: 29/05/2025

Cabinet member notified: Yes

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Harriet Said, Team Leader (Commercial), Public Health or Simon Newcombe, Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing

Email: hsaid@middevon.gov.uk / snewcombe@middevon.gov.uk

Telephone: 01884 255255

Background papers:

Food Standards Agency, Food Law Code of Practice [Food law code of practice \(England\)](#)

Framework Agreement on official Feed and Food control by Local Authorities [THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT ON LOCAL AUTHORITY FOOD LAW REGULATION](#)

Food Standards Agency Food Law Practice guidance (England) [FSA Communications \(food.gov.uk\)](#)

The Official Feed and Food Controls (England) Regulations 2009 [The Official Feed and Food Controls \(England\) Regulations 2009 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Food Hygiene Rating Scheme [Search for ratings | Food Hygiene Ratings](#)

Food Service Plan 2025-2026

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1.0 Introduction

An annual Food Safety Service Plan is required under the Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement by the Food Standards Agency. The plan outlines the strategic link to corporate and financial planning through the Service Business plan. This plan has been produced in accordance with the FSA's service planning guidance for Food Law Enforcement, the Food Law Code of Practice (England) and Practice Guidance.

The service plan relates to the 2025/2026 year.

The plan provides key stakeholders, and members of the public, the information that they require to understand the approach to food safety enforcement adopted by the Council.

Food safety enforcement is covered by the Mid Devon District Council Enforcement Policy PH/EP/09/20, however this plan may make reference to enforcement practice where applicable. The service plan will help to ensure that the actions of the Council are fair, consistent, open and effective.

The Plan provides a focus for service delivery outcomes and provides a framework for assessing performance against those outcomes.

The plan will set out our priorities and our planned approach to the following:

- Inspection programmes
- Methodology for risk rating
- Sampling programmes
- Enforcement
- Food Business Registration
- Communication and engagement
- Approved Premises
- Export certificates
- Dealing with complaints about a food business / food products
- Dealing with investigations following allergic reactions within food premises

A series of processes and procedures will sit behind this plan for internal use by officers to ensure consistency.

1.1 Aims and Objectives of the service

The primary aim of the food safety service is to ensure food safety across the district. This is delivered through interventions that aim to prevent food poisoning, food borne and water borne illness and to ensure, so far as is possible, that food and drink intended for sale for human consumption, which is produced, stored, distributed, handled or consumed within the district is without risk to the health or safety of the consumer.

In delivering this service the food team aims to:

- (i) Perform the Council's statutory food safety responsibilities required by the Food Safety Act 1990 as amended, the Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013 and relevant regulations made thereafter, including duties related to imported food.

- (ii) Protect public health, promote consumer confidence and enhance food safety through the provision of food which is safe and without risk to health.
- (iii) Prevent and control the spread of food borne illness.
- (iv) Ensure that enforcement work is targeted, proportionate, consistent, and transparent and supports the principles of good enforcement and the provisions of the Regulators' Code 2014 as outlined in our Enforcement Policy.

1.1.2 Our key objective is to promote and maintain high standards of food hygiene and safety across the district and will be achieved by:

- (i) Carrying out a risk-based programme of food hygiene enforcement interventions in accordance with statutory requirements, the Food Law Code of Practice (England) issued under Section 40 of the Food Safety Act 1990; regulation 24 of the Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013 and regulation 6 of the Official Feed and Food Controls (England) regulations 2009; and associated guidance.
- (ii) Registering and/or approving premises and maintaining a food premises register of all food establishments operating in the district.
- (iii) Informing businesses of their legal obligations under relevant legislation
- (iv) Responding to notified cases and outbreaks of food borne infectious diseases, advising on precautionary and control measures in order to minimize effects on the community.
- (v) Investigating serious and high-risk complaints concerning unfit, unsound or contaminated food, unacceptable food hygiene practices compromising food safety or allergic reactions within catering premises.
- (vi) Sampling of food produced, sold or imported across the district and/or environmental swabbing of surfaces and equipment within food establishments in accordance with our Food Sampling Policy.
- (vii) Respond to food alerts issued by the FSA in accordance with national and local guidance.
- (viii) Providing food hygiene advice, guidance, coaching and training and development opportunities to businesses, and where relevant consumers. Promoting best practice.
- (ix) Ensuring staff are adequately qualified and competent to carry out food safety work and adequate equipment and resources are in place.
- (x) Developing and improving the service to meet the needs of customers, statutory requirements and to achieve best practice.
- (xi) Tackling food fraud and organised crime by conducting investigations and working with relevant agencies to target criminals.

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- (xii) Giving consumers the right to make informed decisions about where they choose to eat and purchase food and drink with the implementation of the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme.
- (xiii) Promoting food safety and, where appropriate, participating in local and national campaigns.
- (xiv) Working in partnership with other agencies to help secure and promote good food hygiene and safety, including the South West Food Liaison Group.
- (xv) Supporting the Primary and Home Authority Principles.
- (xvi) Providing appropriate responses to public health incidents and emergencies.

1.2 Links to Corporate Objectives and Plans

1.2.1 Our Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028 defines five themes

- (i) Planning, Environment & Sustainability
- (ii) Community, People & Equalities
- (iii) Homes
- (iv) Economy & Assets
- (v) Service Delivery & Continuous Improvement

Under Community, Environment and Equalities, we make a commitment to support the health, wellbeing, and safety of our residents, by keeping the public safe through rigorous public health inspections.

2. Background

2.1 Profile of Mid Devon District Council

2.1.1 Mid Devon covers an area of 353 square miles (914 km²) in the rural, agricultural heartland of Devon, between Dartmoor, Exmoor and the Blackdown Hills. Over half the population of some 83,000 people is scattered in villages in the rural hinterland, with the balance divided between the three main towns of Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton. Although set in a predominantly rural area the towns offer a diverse range of industry and a seasonal tourist trade both within the towns and outlying rural villages.

2.1.2 As at April 2025 there are 960 food businesses registered, an increase of 6% since last year and 18 approved establishments within the District. This includes a diverse range of food businesses from large manufacturers, distributing nationally and internationally, meat and dairy processors, schools and residential care settings, to predominately small to medium sized independent catering and retailing premises.

2.1.3 New food business registrations are steadily received and the rate of closures has slowed so we are now showing growth in the number of registered businesses.

2.2 Organisational Structure

2.2.1 The Council operates under an Executive structure, with a 'Cabinet'. The Council structure and executive member contacts are available on the Internet under <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/your-council/how-the-council-works/>.

Annex A

2.2.2 The food safety team is part of the Commercial Team, led by the Team Leader (Commercial) within the Public Health and Housing Options Service. The Operations Manager for Public Health and Housing Options reports into the Head of Housing and Health at Corporate Management team level. Activities of the Commercial team are covered by the Community Policy Development Group (PDG) and ultimately Cabinet. The portfolio holder for the Community PDG is responsible for this service area.

2.2.3

The food team structure is made up of the following posts at April 2025:

Team Leader (0.4) – occupied

Lead officer (0.5) – currently filled by secondment

Specialist Officer (2.0 FTE) – 1 FTE occupied, 1 FTE vacated to secondment above

Regulatory Officer (1.0 FTE) – occupied

Specialist support (1 FTE)

2.2.4 We have been unable to recruit into the new Lead officer post despite advertising the position twice since August 2024. The post have been filled internally through a secondment, however this has created a temporary vacancy at Specialist Officer Level, which we are partially covering with external support.

2.2.5 A food safety contractor will be engaged during the 2025/2026 to cover some of the vacancy gaps whilst the new posts are being implemented. This has been secured through a direct 12 month contract, with option to extend to 36 months.

2.2.6 The Section employs the following additional support services;

- (i) Public Analyst - Public Analyst Scientific Services, i54 Business Park, Valiant Way, Wolverhampton, WV9 5GB
- (iii) Food Examiner - Public Health England, Food Water and Environmental Microbiology Laboratory Porton Down, Salisbury, SP4 0JG

For other specialist work the services of other analysts may be employed.

2.3 Scope of the Service

2.3.1 The Food Safety Team delivers a wide range of key food-related service functions, which includes:

- Food hygiene interventions of premises, based on risk assessment of business activity and level of compliance, which will dictate the frequency of visits, in accordance with Annex 1 of the Food Law Code of Practice;
- Identifying and determining premises that require approval of specific food products of animal origin. Assessing and inspecting these premises as required to ensure that they are issued with conditional and full approval as necessary;
- Implementing and promoting the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme to encourage businesses to improve and promote hygiene standards and give consumers the information they need to make informed decisions about where they choose to eat and purchase food and drink;
- The enforcement of all aspects of Food Hygiene and Safety in Food business in the District;
- Imported food control as an inland authority for food imported from outside the European Union through safe

Annex A

- Maintaining a register of food premises trading in the district;
- Issuing of health certificates for the export of food products.

2.3.2 The Food Safety Team is also responsible for a range of non-food related work, including;

- Health and Safety at Work enforcement and advice;
- Promoting and enforcing smoke-free legislation in workplaces and enclosed public places;
- Responding to and investigate, as necessary, RIDDOR reported accidents, diseases and dangerous occurrences;
- Responding to and investigating work related safety complaints;
- Supporting local health improvement programmes;
- Commenting on planning and Licensing applications;
- Registration of premises / persons under Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1982.

2.4 Demands on the Food Safety Service

2.4.1 Mid Devon District Council has 905 registered food premises. Under the FSA Code of Practice all food premises are categorised with an inspection rating score that determines the frequency of interventions from 6 months to 3 years. On 1st April 2025, the premises profile according to the inspection risk-rating scores is as follows:

Category	Premises Category	Frequency of Intervention	Number of Premises	Number variance since 2024
A	High	6 months	1	75% ↓
B	High	12 months	36	36% ↓
C	High	18 months	114	5% ↑
D	Medium	24 months	311	12%↑
E	Low	36 months	447	7% ↑
Unrated	Prioritised	Awaiting inspection	40	
Outside programme			11	
TOTAL			960	6%↑

2.4.2 There has been an overall decrease in the number of higher risk premises in the district. Whilst the inherent risk has not changed, this represents higher levels of compliance observed within the premises that were sitting within the higher risk groups at April 2024. Which will be having a positive impact on our objective of ensuring food safety.

2.4.3 There has been a significant reduction in the number of A rated premises since last year. This represents businesses improving their compliance through ongoing liaison with officers of the department.

2.4.4 1.6% (16) of all rated food businesses in Mid Devon are less than broadly compliant. Officers work with all non-compliant businesses to improve standards, and a measure

Annex A

of our performance is movement from non-compliant to broadly compliant between interventions. This performance measure was established during the 2024/2025 year.

2.4.5 Table shows the movement of rating for non-compliant businesses at subsequent interventions during the 24/25 year

Movement of FHRS	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
FHRS improved	89	90	100	100
No change in FHRS	11	10	0	0
FHRS decreased	0	0	0	0

2.4.6 The food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) provides the public with a view of compliance for all food businesses that are in scope of the scheme and that sell to the final consumer. The service aims to drive up food safety standards with businesses encouraged to improve and promote hygiene standards through the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. Currently 96.5% of food businesses that have been subject to an intervention and rated, hold a food hygiene rating of 3,4 or 5.

2.4.7 747 businesses are currently in scope and have been scored under the scheme as follows:

Rating	5	4	3	2	1	0
Descriptor	Very good	Good	Generally satisfactory	Improvement necessary	Major improvement necessary	Urgent improvement necessary
Number *	652	46	33	6	10	0
%	87.2%	6.2%	4.5%	0.8%	1.3%	0%

*taken from FHRS public facing website 20/04/2025

2.4.8 The premises profile highlights manufacturing, catering and retail as being the dominant sectors. Catering premises are typically small to medium and independently owned establishments made up of accommodation services, care settings, restaurants, cafes, takeaways and pubs. We also have many sole traders where individuals cater from farms and domestic premises. Primary production in the area is predominantly in the dairy and meat industry. Food and drink manufacture continues to be a significant sector in Mid Devon with a number of established manufacturers, including tofu, breweries, ice-cream makers and confectioners.

2.4.9 In relation to the production, handling and storage of Products of Animal Origin there are currently 17 approved establishments operating under Regulation (EC) 853/2004 in Mid Devon, summarised below:

Approved Premises Type	Number of Premises
Dairy Products	5
Meat Products	1
Meat Preparations	1
Cold Store	4
Fish Products	0
Egg products	1
Egg Packing Centres	5
Total	17

Annex A

- 2.4.9.1 Officers approved 2 new establishments during 2024/2025, with 1 establishment stopping approved activities.
- 2.4.9.2 Officers who conduct official controls in these establishments require significant specialist knowledge and competencies in the relevant area.
- 2.4.10 New food business registrations are steady, with 134 made in 2024/2025. Approximately 2.5 a week.
- 2.4.11 The food team issue food export certificates to businesses who commercially export food. 33 were issued between April 2024 and March 2025. These businesses include confectioners and chocolatiers and jams and preserves manufacturers.
- 2.4.12 Imported food controls are important to ensure that consumers and businesses are protected from contaminated products. The authority has responsibility for imported food control as an inland authority and imported food control forms part of the overall food safety intervention process. Officers will routinely look for foods imported during visits to premises and carry out imported food examination to check traceability and compliance with standards as necessary.
- 2.4.13 The Food Safety officers are district based and operate under a hybrid working scheme, based either from home or from Mid District Council offices located at Phoenix House in Tiverton.
- 2.4.14 Food Safety officers are available Monday to Friday working hours, and public access at Phoenix House is available Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 9am till 1pm (the offices are closed to public access on Wednesday). Central telephone lines are available Monday to Friday 9am till 5pm. An emergency out-of-hours service is available at all other times.

2.5 Regulation Policy

- 2.5.1 The Public Health Services Enforcement Policy details our approach to the use of enforcement powers to ensure compliance with Regulators' Code and the principles of good enforcement. It also gives clarity as to how the unit will achieve compliance by setting out options and the criteria used to determine the most appropriate, effective and efficient response to breaches of legislation.
- 2.5.2 The Food Law Code of practice defines the interventions and the range of official controls which may be used to ensure that food is safe to eat and that all food premises in the district comply with food safety legislation. This can range from informal action through to the service of formal notices or the issue of simple cautions or prosecutions.
- 2.5.3 All enforcement action will be taken having regard to this Enforcement Policy based on the provisions of the Regulators' Code 2014 (Department of Business Innovation and Skills), the Code of Practice Powers of Entry 2014 (Home Office) and the provisions outlined in the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006 and the Regulatory and Enforcement Sanctions Act 2008. This policy was adopted by Full Council on 6th January 2021.

3.0 Service Delivery

3.1 Premises Interventions

3.1.1 Mid Devon District Council considers programmed interventions of food premises to be essential to ensure consumers are protected in terms of food safety by:-

- establishing whether food is being handled, produced and kept hygienically;
- determining whether food is safe to eat;
- Identifying foreseeable incidents of food poisoning or illness resulting from the consumption of food.

3.1.2 It is the policy of this authority to carry out a programme of planned interventions of food premises in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice using a wide range of interventions to monitor, support and increase business compliance. Such measures are key to ensuring food business operators comply with food law which at the same time embraces the Government's regulatory reform agenda. A risk-based approach will be taken such that resources will be focused on those businesses posing a greater risk whilst adopting a lighter approach to businesses that do comply.

3.1.3 In accordance with this and our own internal Food Hygiene Intervention Procedure, we aim to apply the following risk based approach:

- Assess 100% of category A and B premises which are due a programmed intervention with a full inspection, partial inspection or audit
- Assess 100% of category C less than broadly compliant premises which are due a programmed intervention with a full inspection, partial inspection or audit
- Broadly compliant category C rated premises will be subject to an intervention that is an inspection, partial inspection or audit, alternated with another type of official Control; sampling, monitoring, surveillance or verification.
- Assess 100% of category D premises that are less than broadly compliant which are due a programmed intervention with an inspection, partial inspection or audit.
- Broadly compliant category D rated premises will be subject to an intervention that is an official control, alternated with an intervention that is not an official control.
- Where a D rated premises is assessed and scores 30 or 40 for type of food and method of handling, an inspection, partial inspection or audit will be carried out.
- Inspect premises which are overdue a food hygiene intervention targeting those considered a higher risk to food safety or in circumstances where it is considered necessary to review a premises rating;
- Apply an alternative enforcement strategy to food premises rated category E such as the use of self-assessment questionnaires, mailshots, information gathering exercises, seminars or other targeted campaign;

Annex A

- In any case, where the premises in question is subject to approval under Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 the intervention will be an inspection, partial inspection or audit.
- Interventions for higher risk businesses or those that are likely to be high risk always take priority over interventions for lower risk businesses, unless information or intelligence suggests that there is a need for earlier intervention.

3.1.4 The intervention programme for 2025/2026 includes 575 programmed (including overdue and missed premises), as detailed below:

Food Interventions Due 2025 – 2026	
Premises Category	Number of premises
A	1
B	36
C	82
D	211
E	214
Total Programmed Interventions	544
Unrated	31
Total Inspection Programme	575

3.1.5 Additional areas of non-programmed interventions include:

- Non-compliant premises will receive a revisit or further intervention with an objective of assessing improvements in levels of compliance, and facilitating required improvements through a graduated and proportionate level of enforcement action. All 0, 1 and 2 rated premises would receive at least one follow up revisit. It is anticipated that around 30 revisit interventions will be carried out in addition to the programmed interventions and alternative enforcement interventions.
- The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme also encourages businesses given a 0-4 rating to request a revisit for re-rating purposes once non-compliances have been addressed. In March 2022, the Council introduced a charge for a revisit to re-rate, this has resulted in a slight drop in requests for this service. We delivered 7 re-visits to re-score premises during 2024/2025.

3.2 Food Complaints

3.2.1 Food safety-related service requests requiring a response within 5 working days are received by the food team about the condition of food, food premises, practices or food handlers. A risk-based approach will be taken such that investigations will be carried out on those complaints posing the greater risk to ensure that resources are used effectively. The Service will investigate all such complaints in accordance with our service standards and documented food complaints procedure. There were 47 food complaints received last year.

3.2.2 All consumer complaints are taken as potential indicators of management problems within a food business and prompt a level of investigation. This includes general

complaints relating to cleanliness or waste disposal, as well as allegations of food poisoning. If the business in question is due or shortly will be due a routine intervention, the complaint will trigger this and a visit will be made. The complaint will be investigated as part of the inspection process. If the business has only recently been assessed and is not due a routine intervention, officers' judgement is utilised to determine the most appropriate action to investigate the complaint.

3.3 Home Authority Principle and Primary Authority Scheme

3.3.1 Although this Service has no formal agreements currently in place to act as a Primary Authority for any food business, the Authority does support the Primary Authority Scheme advocated by the Better Regulatory Delivery Office and takes full regard of the relevant principles and guidance when dealing with any food business which is part of a Primary Authority arrangement. The Authority is committed to support local businesses and would welcome discussions from Mid Devon based manufacturers looking to enter into a Primary Authority agreement.

3.3.1 Mid Devon is the Originating Authority for a number of food manufacturers and will provide advice to relevant businesses on legal compliance. In addition we will have regard to any information or advice received from home and/or originating authorities elsewhere, and we will liaise with the home and/or originating authority of any business where identified non-compliance appears to be associated with the business's centrally defined policies and procedures. In accordance with the Home Authority Principle, this authority will respond to all reasonable requests for appropriate information and or assistance from other local authorities about locally produced foods that are the subject of a complaint outside of this district.

3.3.2 It is anticipated that 10 requests for advice from other authorities concerning Mid Devon food producers will be received during the course of a year.

3.4 Advice to Business

3.4.1 This Authority is committed to assisting all Mid Devon based food premises meet their legal obligations and achieve best practice, by offering free advice and assistance, irrespective of their size or scale of operations, through a range of activities and interventions, including;

- Advice during the course of an intervention
- Responding to enquiries from food business operators for advice and information using email and telephone communication
- Proactively commenting on, and providing advice on food safety via planning applications
- Providing food safety advice to food business operators and groups represented on Safety Advisory Group's
- Reference and referral to free Food Standards Agency advice leaflets and guidance such as allergens, Safer Food Better Business
- Maintenance and development of food safety information on the Council's website with signposted links to relevant information providers
- Participation in Food Standards Agency food safety awareness campaigns
- Signposting businesses via letter and questionnaire as part of an alternative intervention

Annex A

- 3.4.1 The Freedom of Information Act (FOI) gives individuals the right to access recorded information and it is anticipated this will generate 5 requests for food-related information for the year.

3.5 Food Sampling

- 3.5.1 Sampling makes an important contribution to the protection of public health and the food law enforcement function of the Local Authority.
- 3.5.2 In addition to routine sampling programmes, food and environmental sampling is considered a valuable tool to support interventions and assessment of food safety procedures and practices. Sampling is routinely carried out as part of wider food safety inspection or audit to validate or verify a part of a process or a HACCP plan.
- 3.5.3 Food sampling is carried out in accordance with Food Sampling Policy that sets out our general approach to sampling and the approach to more specific situations. This policy has been drawn up in consultation with the Food, Water & Environmental Lab (FWEM) at Porton Down and the Public Analyst which undertakes food examination for Mid Devon District Council.
- 3.5.4 A food and environmental sampling programme has been set to reflect local and national priorities and is coordinated with the Devon and Cornwall Food Liaison group. The current sampling programme also provides for routine sampling from producers, retailers and approved establishments across the district.
- 3.5.5 2025/2026 sampling priorities in line with regional studies are:
- Root vegetables with an emphasis on STEC and Yersinia
 - Dried fruit nuts and seeds – general microbiological criteria
- 3.5.6 Last year 86 samples were taken, this included food, environmental swabs from food premises as well as tattoo and piercing premises. The number of samples taken was lower than anticipated, due to ongoing officer capacity. It is anticipated that around 120 samples will be collected during 2025/ 2026, predominantly from our approved premises and as part of work to improve levels of compliance. .
- 3.5.7 There has been a rolling annual agreement in place between Mid Devon District and the Food, Water and Environmental Lab (FWEM) at Porton Down since March 2020 for provision of food, water and environmental microbiology services.

3.6 Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related Infectious Disease

- 3.6.1 Officers in the team investigate notifications of infectious disease including food poisoning and community outbreaks. During 2024/25, 55 notifications of infectious disease were received and dealt with by the service. These included, 29 Campylobacter, 12 Salmonella, 12 Cryptosporidium and 2 Shigella.
- 3.6.2 Outbreak control plans are in place between UKHSA and Public Health for the control of communicable disease. Outbreaks are dealt with as a high priority and will be assigned an officer who will focus on the investigation and work with partners to ensure a fast response to identify the source of the outbreak and deal with the causes.

3.7 Food Safety Incidents

- 3.7.1 This authority has a procedure which explains how to respond to Food Alerts for Action, Product Withdrawal Information Notices and Product Recall Information Notices notified by the FSA, including those received outside office hours.
- 3.7.2 The purpose of the response is to inform businesses and the general public of any potential contamination or risk to food and to advise them of any course of action. The procedure includes receipt of alerts, notices, appropriate actions, closure and record keeping. Alerts and Notices are received by email to the services generic email: health@middevon.gov.uk and direct to the Commercial Team Leader.

3.8 Liaison with Other Organisations

- 3.8.1 Local and National partnership working is pivotal to continuing the drive to improving and delivering better public health outcomes for the residents, businesses and communities of Mid Devon. The scope of work and partnerships outlined below shows the positive impact made by the food team.
- 3.8.2 Food liaison arrangements are in place with neighbouring south west local authorities, Trading Standards, Food Standards Agency, through regular attendance at the Devon and Cornwall Food Liaison Group. The group acts as a discussion forum and shares intelligence, information and best practice to ensure consistent enforcement.
- 3.8.3 Working in collaboration with UKHSA South West Centre, we are actively involved in surveillance, reporting and control of communicable diseases across the south west by participation in regular UKHSA Group meetings and working groups.

3.9 Food Safety Promotional Work

- 3.9.1 Limited resources have impacted on our ability to deliver promotional work. The Regulatory Officer post is now occupied and going forward will take a lead role in promotional work and utilise Food Safety campaigns to share information with our lower risk premises.
- 3.9.2 Officers have delivered a targeted educational intervention, providing a webinar covering key learning points to our Childminders.
- 3.9.3 Officers are shaping a training package to support our Chinese businesses comply with allergen information and management requirements, as it has been identified that this is an area where further support is needed.

4.0 Resources

4.1 Financial Allocation

	Set Budget for the year	Income target		Actual spend	Actual income	
	Includes staff costs, training, management, equipment, ICT and sampling specifically related to food safety	Export Certificates	Re-score visits	Includes staff costs, training, management, equipment, ICT and sampling specifically related to food safety	Export Certificates	Re-score visits
2023/24	£281,590	£500	£0	£212,162.40	£1854.19	£278.34
2024/25	£241,560	£1000	£500	204,430.51	£238	£745.85
2025/26	£262,570	£1500	£500			

4.2 Staff Allocation

4.2.1 The allocated resources within the Commercial Team which are committed to food safety enforcement equates to 2.8 FTE Officers who hold either registration with CIEH as an Environmental Health Practitioner or the Higher Certificate in Food premises Inspection. The new 1 FTE Regulatory Officer does not have food safety enforcement responsibilities but will implement Food Hygiene requirements through alternative interventions, and is authorised to deal with enforcement of other legislation, such as Licensing and Environmental Protection

4.2.2 1 FTE support roles have been in place since October 2023.

4.2.3 The System Administrator is responsible for the FHRS upload and supports with the provision of management information essential for delivering and also assessing the effectiveness of the service. The System Administrator works alongside the Team Leaders to deliver data quality checks to ensure that the database is up to date, accurate and compliant with data standards.

4.3 Resource assessment against demands

4.3.1 Number of new premises remain high, with an average of 2.5 new food registrations a week, so this demand is factored into the resources required to deliver the food service.

4.3.2 The structure detailed in section 2.2.3 would provide adequate resource to ensure compliance with the Food Law Code of Practice.

4.3.3	Team Leader	Focus on higher risk and approved establishments
	Lead Officer	Focus on higher risk and approved establishments
	Specialist Officers	Focus on premises rated C and D
	Regulatory Officer	Premises rated E, D rated with a score of 10 for type of food and other educational campaigns

4.3.4 The ability of the service to deliver against this plan has been determined with consideration to the input from the System Administration.

Annex A

4.3.5 The continued use of a contracted Food officer will be required until the full structure detailed in section 2.2.3 is in place.

4.3.6 Whilst working towards the full structure and compliance with the Food Law Code of Practice, the focus will remain on the higher risk premises and processes, and new registrations, there will be insufficient capacity to complete interventions with lower risk D and E rated premises.

4.4 Staff Development Plan

4.4.1 This authority has a clear commitment to maintain and develop staff competencies to ensure we continue to deliver a high quality service to our community.

4.4.2 Specialist Officers are assisted in achieving 20 hours continuing professional development training. Chartered practitioners have a requirement for 30 hours CPD.

4.4.3 All training needs are identified through the appraisal process and incorporated into a service training plan, all CPD training is recorded and certificated. Ad hoc training needs will also be considered and fulfilled outside of those on the training plan, as the need arises.

4.4.4 The service utilise the Food Standards Agency Competency Framework to support with the assessment of officer competencies and identify gaps in knowledge and skill that then feed into future training plans.

4.5 Information Technology

4.5.1 A Uniform database is maintained to keep the register of food businesses, facilitate risk rating and upload of Food Hygiene Rating data to the national database. Details of interventions and other contacts between businesses and the service are managed on the platform.

5.0 Quality Assessment

5.1 Quality Assessment and Internal Monitoring

5.1.1 The following monitoring arrangements are in place to assist in the quality assessment of the work carried out by the food team:

- Local scoring consistency discussions are carried out routinely at team meetings
- National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme national consistency exercises are carried out and reviewed
- Quality management procedures are delivered through monitoring arrangements including through team meetings, reviews of inspection paperwork, monthly case review meetings (new April 2024), one-to-ones, staff appraisals and development plan reviews, as well as accompanied interventions
- Uniform database and National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme data analysis and cleansing exercises are carried out regularly by System Administrator and Team Leader
- Statistical performance monitoring including inspection and complaint monitoring
- Returns of Mid Devon District Council food law enforcement activities are submitted to the Food Standards Agency as requested

Annex A

- We continue to review our systems and procedures in accordance with the Food Standards Agency Food Law Code of Practice and to ensure compliance with the enforcement framework requirements

6.0 Review

6.1 Review against service plan

- 6.1.1 During 2024/2025 63% of due interventions with established businesses were carried out in accordance with Food Law Code of Practice timescales.

6.2 Review against internal performance indicators

6.2.1 % of interventions due at each risk category carried out

	Qrt 1	Qrt 2	Qrt 3	Qrt 4
Band A	100%	100%	50%	100%
Band B	100%	100%	77%	94%
Band C	100%	100%	53%	88%
Band D	74%	50%	16%	34%
Band E	2%	1%	0%	23%

- 6.2.1.1 The service have been unable to deliver 100% of interventions at each risk rating. Wherever possible, higher risk premises have been prioritised. The drop in quarter 3 was a result of a combination of factors, including the secondment of a food officer to cover essential licensing service delivery, the retirement of a part time food officer, and a gap in support whilst moving from an agency food officer to a direct contract through a procurement process.

- 6.2.1.2 The number of interventions carried out in the lowest risk group has increased with the start of the Regulatory Officer, and this will continue to increase. There is a significant list of those overdue that will be worked through over the coming year.

- 6.2.2 Improvement in Food Hygiene Rating Scheme score (FHRS) for premises rated 0, 1 or 2, at subsequent food hygiene interventions.

2024-2025	Qrt 1	Qrt 2	Qrt 3	Qrt 4
Percentage %				
Improved	89	90	100	100
No change	11	10	0	0
Decrease	0	0	0	0

The movement in hygiene rating represents improved compliance levels with food safety requirements, indicating a direct positive impact on food safety standards following officer interventions.

- 6.2.3 In addition to the measures defined above, the % of new businesses inspected within 28 days of registration/opening is being monitored. This was an average of 43% over the year. This is due to officer capacity issues, as well as a theme of difficulty contacting some newly registered businesses.

Annex A

- 6.2.4 From an operational perspective the Commercial Team Leader will review the key performance measures and service improvements contained in this plan on a quarterly basis.

6.2 Service Audit

- 6.2.1 An internal audit was carried out during the 24/25 financial year covering Food Safety. The draft report has been made available and gives reasonable assurance about the delivery of statutory food safety functions.
- 6.2.2 The authority has been identified for participation is an FSA audit for the financial year 2025/2026, covering official controls at Primary Production.

6.3 Deviation from service plan

- 6.4.1 Recruitment into the Lead officer role was not successful, we are therefore not operating within the structure as detailed in section 2.2 and internal movement of staff to cover other areas of vacancy have had further impact on the service delivery.
- 6.4.2 There was a period of 6 months between August 2024 and March 2025 where we were not utilising the services of an external food safety contractor, this was mainly due to procurement processes taking place.
- 6.4.3 The deviations above have resulted in us not meeting the inspection targets at the higher risk bands as detailed within the service plan.

6.5 Areas of Focus

- 6.5.1 There are a number of areas where we are working to improve the service, with the key aim of building resilience and capability to ensure compliance with the Food Law Code of Practice. We are continually seeking to improve service delivery and look to smarter ways of working to ensure that we are utilising the resources available to us to achieve our overall objective of ensuring Food Safety within the District.
- 6.5.2 As we have been unsuccessful to recruit into the planned new Lead post, a further review of the team structure and vacancies will be carried out during 2025/2026. The aim will be to ensure that we design a role that has the best chance of recruitment success and ensure the service has adequate capacity and resource to deliver against the service plan.

COMMUNITY, PEOPLE & EQUALITIES PDG WORK PLAN 2025 - 2026

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	Election of Chair To elect a Chair for the municipal year		David Parker	
	Election of Vice-Chair To elect a Vice-Chair for the municipal year.		David Parker	
	Start Time of Meetings To agree the start time of meetings for the municipal year.		David Parker	
	Community Alcohol Partnership Presentation from Regional Adviser for SW England (Annie Ashford-Barnden)		Director of Place and Economy David Parker	
	Performance Dashboard - Quarter 4 To consider the Dashboard		Director of Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) Steve Carr	
	Community Engagement Strategy (Including Action Plan) Community Engagement Strategy		Director of Place and Economy Jane Lewis	

Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Theme	Officer Responsible	Comments
	Public Health Food Safety Service Plan To consider the report.		Director of Place and Economy Simon Newcombe Harriet Said	
	Meet the Funders Event Report back from Working Group formed to discuss practicalities of holding such an event.		Director of Place and Economy David Parker	
	Work Programme - 2025/2026			
16 September 2025				
	Performance Dashboard - Quarter 1 To consider the Dashboard		Director of Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) Steve Carr	
	Unauthorised Encampment Policy To consider the report		Deputy Chief Executive (S151) Paul Deal	
	Work Programme - 2025/2026			

Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Theme	Officer Responsible	Comments
11 November 2025				
	Performance Dashboard - Quarter 2 To consider the Dashboard		Director of Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) Steve Carr	
	Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act Annual Report To consider the report.		Director of Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) Maria De Leburne	
	Corporate Anti-Social Behaviour Policy To consider the report.		Director of Place and Economy Simon Newcombe	
	Strategic Grants Review 2025 To consider requests from external organisations for grants.		Director of Place and Economy Zoë Lentell	
24 March 2026				
	Performance Dashboard - Quarter 3 To consider the Dashboard		Director of Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) Steve Carr	

Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Theme	Officer Responsible	Comments
	Single Equalities Policy and Equality Objective To consider the report.		Director of Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) Matthew Page Steve Carr	
	Community Safety Partnership Policy To consider a report on the Community Safety Partnership and the planned activities for the coming year.		Deputy Chief Executive (S151) Simon Newcombe Tanya Wenham	
Page 86	Chair of Community, People and Equalities PDG Annual Report To receive the Annual report from the Chair		Director of Legal, People and Governance (Monitoring Officer) David Parker	