

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 21 March 2016 at 2.00 pm

Present

Councillors

F J Rosamond (Chairman)
Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs C P Daw, R M Deed,
Mrs G Doe, R Evans, Mrs S Griggs,
T G Hughes, J L Smith, T W Snow and
N A Way

Apologies

Councillor(s)

Mrs A R Berry and Mrs J Roach

Also Present

Councillor(s)

Mrs B M Hull and R F Radford

Also Present

Officer(s):

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Nick Sanderson (Head of Housing and Property Services), Stuart Noyce (Waste and Transport Manager), Catherine Yandle (Internal Audit Team Leader) and Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

142 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr Mrs R Berry and from Cllr Mrs J Roach who was substituted by Cllr J L Smith.

143 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from the members of the public present.

144 **MEMBER FORUM**

There were no issues raised under this item.

145 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Subject to the changing of the word 'constitution' to 'constituency' on page 9 paragraph 6 the minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

146 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET**

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet at its last meeting had been called in.

147 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman informed the Group that as Cllr Mrs J B Binks had left the Committee there was a vacancy on the Partnership Working Group. It was **AGREED** that Cllr R Evans would join the Group.

The Chairman also informed the Committee of the contents of a letter that he had received from Mel Stride MP, in which he thanked the Committee for making him welcome at the previous meeting and offered to attend again, provide information requested or raise any issues if required.

148 Q & A WITH THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chairman welcomed the Chief Executive (CE) to the meeting.

The Chief Executive explained that he had been in post for five weeks and in that time he had been establishing 'the lie of the land' from both a technical perspective and from how functions were discharged, looked at competency and performance and had discussions with Heads of Service. From an organisational point of view he had looked to see if the right things were being done and was forming judgements regarding where the organisation was. He explained that in due course he would reflect on this to make recommendations for different directions of travel.

The CE informed the Committee that since he had started in post he had been lobbied by officers, Members and local organisations and that he was taking this information on board. He had not yet finalised those judgements but was already working on a report for this Committee regarding planning enforcement and considered that the authority would benefit from improving communications. In the last few weeks he had met with people from the private and public sectors and what had become apparent during these discussions was that fact that whilst each organisation had its own organisational priorities everyone was clear that they loved the area and wanted to take it forward to preserve and enhance it. The message seemed to be that Mid Devon was a great place to live and work and that this should be built on and not sacrificed along the way.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Management Team and a recent redundancy:- the CE confirmed that on a temporary basis the IT service would sit under another Head of Service but that he was looking at the overall structure of Management Team for the future;
- Implications of the budget: - The CE explained that revisions to the Local Government Settlement had meant that the authority was not as badly off as expected, but that savings would still need to be made. He reminded the Committee that local authorities had until October to decide whether or not to accept the four year financial settlement. He anticipated changes to the New Homes Bonus and Business Rates, both of which were under consultation at the current time. Indications were that local authorities would get to keep Business Rates, but he said that the 'devil would be in the detail' and it seemed unlikely that this authority would get to keep the whole amount.

Regarding the New Homes Bonus he anticipated that it would reduce, but he would update Members as soon as anything was known.

- Removal of Business Rates for small businesses: - the CE explained that if Business Rate income was devolved and then reduced there would be less to be distributed and that the government needed to ensure that there was an effective mechanism in place to share this. The Local Government Association (LGA) had been tasked to find a formula to suit all. Areas of concern for this authority were historical rate re-evaluations and back dated appeals, which had to be funded by MDDC. The CE stated that there had to be gains from local growth in order for it to be worth local authorities promoting it.
- Staffing:- The CE agreed that staffing levels in some services were at a level whereby officers were working as fast as they could to do the 'day job' but there was no room for establishing better ways of working or to put procedures in place to free up staff for other duties. Areas such as planning performance agreements could prove beneficial in the long run but staff needed the time to implement them. Capacity could also affect the work of other services, such as backlogs in legal work.
- Improving the local economy: - the CE explained that in the past councils had not taken the business community into consideration enough and that devolved business rates would make this an important area.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for his time.

149 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK (00:38:00)**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Head of Communities and Governance providing Members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2015-16 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The Audit Team Leader outlined the contents of the report. Information regarding complaints could not be verified and required further investigation. It was **AGREED** that this information would be presented to the May meeting of this Committee.

Discussion took place regarding:

- IT systems being implemented and the perceived lack of follow up support for users;
- Levels of sickness and reporting methods;
- The number of empty homes in the district and the reasons why they could be empty;
- Improvements from last year to performance regarding food premises inspections but further improvements were still needed;
- The Leisure Service not meeting income performance targets;

- Work that was being undertaken with the Town Centre Manager to look at empty premises above shops and whether they could be brought into use for housing;
- The need for a named Head of Service to be identified as responsible for each risk.

Note: - Report previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

150 **POLICY FOR THE REMOVAL OF GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS FROM LAND (01:06:37)**

At the request of the Committee, the Head of Housing and Property Services, presented a briefing paper * regarding the removal of gypsies and travellers from land.

The officer explained that the purpose of the briefing paper was to inform Members of the processes and responsibilities for the eviction of Gypsies and Travellers from private land where permission from the owners had not been given.

He explained that the Council recognised and accepted the rights of travellers/gypsies and also those people on whose land unauthorised camping took place. Gypsies and travellers were protected from discrimination by the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998, together with all ethnic groups who had a particular culture, language or values.

The officer went on to say that there was no policy or protocol in place regarding this matter and that the officer that used to handle Gypsy and Traveller liaison had not been replaced when he left the authority. The officer considered that some coordination could help to ease the situation, for example the waste service should collect domestic waste from the site which may help reduce the cost of cleaning the site afterwards.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The benefits of having an identified officer responsible for coordination;
- Devon County Council's involvement with those living on the sites, when children are involved, for educational purposes;
- The need for dialogue with the Police;
- The importance of communication with partners;
- Pitches being provided on the Tiverton and Cullompton urban extension sites.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that the Managing the Environment Policy Development Group consider a policy and procedures document on unauthorised encampments and facilities available within the District for Gypsies and travellers.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: - * Briefing paper previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

151 **WASTE UPDATE (01:24:00)**

At the request of the Committee the Waste and Transport Manager presented a report * from the Head of Finance detailing the roll out of phase 2 of the new recycling scheme and its performance during the first months of operation.

The Officer outlined the contents of the report, which provided details of the roll out of containers for recycling and the delivery of food waste caddies. Performance data was included in the report which showed positive results. The officer also explained that targets had been met for the sale of garden waste permits and that the target for next year was likely to be met, now that the gardening season was starting.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Cardboard, which would be accepted if it was beside the bin;
- Waste from dustbins had to be contained in sacks;
- Total waste arisings had reduced due to the separate collection of garden waste;
- Garden waste and kitchen waste were being collected on the same vehicle at the current time but this would change when DCC implemented new contracts in 2017;
- Textiles put out for collection needed to be kept dry;
- Dog waste could be put in normal litter bins and the 'just bin it' campaign encouraged this;
- Plans to revise the scheme for the emptying of dog waste and litter bins would be revised in the autumn.

The Chairman thanked the officer for his report and congratulated the team on a successful implementation that delivered on time and within budget.

Note: - * Report previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

152 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Cabinet Member for the Working Environment
Council Website
RIPA update
Communications Working Group update
Planning Enforcement update

(The meeting ended at 4.00 pm)

CHAIRMAN