

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP**
held on 10 January 2017 at 2.00 pm

Present Councillors

D R Coren, R Evans, F W Letch,
Miss C E L Slade, Mrs E J Slade, J L Smith,
J D Squire and R Wright

Apologies Councillor(s)

R F Radford and Mrs C P Daw

Also Present Councillor(s)

K Busch and C J Eginton

Also Present Officer(s):

Andrew Jarrett (Director of Finance, Assets and Resources), Steve Densham (Development Services Manager), Stuart Noyce (Waste and Transport Manager), Suzanne Kingdom (Auditor), Jan Norman (Environment and Enforcement Manager) and Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

45 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllr Mrs C P Daw who was substituted by Cllr Ms C E L Slade and Cllr R F Radford. Cllr D R Coren took the Chair.

46 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the last meeting were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

47 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public in attendance.

48 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Ms C E L Slade to the meeting.

49 MOTION 532

The Group gave consideration to the following Motion that had been referred by Council.

Motion 532 (Cllr D R Coren – 5 December 2016)

That this council lobby the Government's Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee to work diligently and quickly to seek a more effective and sustainable

flood protection policy by looking at the use of natural systems such as leaky dams, tree planting and improved soil management and seek to support the creation of a new English Rivers and Coastal Authority to take over responsibility of the threat of flooding from the Environment Agency.

Cllr Coren explained the background to his Motion. Cllr Coren was a farmer and had experience with streams and rivers on his land and in the past had worked with the Rivers Authority. All authorities had been amalgamated into the Environment Agency who had been given permission to enter land and walk the stream. He said that some excellent projects had taken place and that wetlands, ponds and nature reserves had been developed. However he felt that they had now taken their 'eye off the ball' regarding flood projects. Cllr Coren considered that the Environment Agency had got too big and was not concentrating on flooding. Cllr Coren had seen an article in the newspaper which was with regard to setting up another department to look after rivers and coastal areas, repairing dams and planting trees. He considered that this would allow a focus on flooding in local areas. A similar plan had been put in place in the Somerset Levels where the Environment Agency, Local Authorities, farmers and other bodies were working together to protect the levels. Cllr Coren asked that Members support this Motion.

Consideration was given to:

- Concerns that the Environment Agency had become too big;
- The advantages of local knowledge;
- The condition of local river beds;
- Works that the Environment Agency had undertaken in the Exe Valley, at Stoke Cannon and in Exeter city centre to reduce flood risk from the River Exe;
- The number of authorities involved with flood work and confusion regarding who did what;
- The need for planners to give regard to flood risk;
- The need to encourage farmers to manage soil better;
- The need to build catchments for water and plant up stream as well as schemes such as rewetting the moors.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to Council that Motion 532 be supported.

(Proposed by Cllr F W Letch and seconded by Cllr Mrs E J Slade)

50 **BUDGET (00.27.50)**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources outlining options available in order for the Council to move towards a balanced budget for 2017/18.

The Director outlined the contents of the report explaining that the formula grant had been confirmed shortly before Christmas and that it confirmed a four year settlement. The Council Tax referendum limit had been set at 2% as in previous years but District Councils could increase band D by up to £5, which was around 3%.

Changes had been made to the New Homes Bonus grant which now stipulated that Councils must build a baseline number of properties before they would become eligible to receive the bonus. In Mid Devon this was likely to mean that a claim could only be made after the completion of 130 – 140 new homes. New Homes Bonus was currently paid as a dowry for 6 years but this was reducing to 5 years and then to 4 years.

The Director explained that the budget was an evolving process and that the gap was currently £231K, which had been a move in the right direction since the previous report. The authority had a statutory obligation to set a balanced budget.

The Director outlined movements within the budget, highlighting areas of improvement and areas of pressure.

Discussion took place regarding Business Rate re-evaluation and the impact this could have on the budget and concern was expressed at the impact of the reduction in New Homes Bonus.

Note: - Report previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

51 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK (00.52.00)**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Director of Affairs and Business Transformation.

The Audit Officer outlined the contents of the report, informing Members that the Performance and Risk report would be generated on a monthly basis in the future.

Discussion took place regarding the waste and recycling service that was performing well.

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

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

Performance and Risk
Street Cleansing Review
Waste Update (verbal)
Financial Monitoring
Street Scene Enforcement

(The meeting ended at 3.00 pm)

CHAIRMAN