

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP**
held on 29 November 2016 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors B A Moore (Chairman)
Mrs E M Andrews, Mrs H Bainbridge,
Mrs A R Berry, R J Dolley, F W Letch and
Mrs E J Slade

Apologies

Councillor(s) Mrs C P Daw and Mrs G Doe

Also Present

Councillor(s) C R Slade

Also Present

Officer(s): Andrew Jarrett (Director of Finance, Assets and Resources), Simon Johnson (Legal Services Manager), Simon Newcombe (Public Health and Professional Services Manager), Dawn Harris (Benefits Manager), Rob Fish (Principal Accountant), Nicky Chandler (Auditor) and Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

47 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Mrs C Daw and Mrs G Doe.

48 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

49 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

50 **CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

51 **FINANCIAL MONITORING**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.

The Principal Accountant highlighted the projected overspend which was currently £140k, 1.6% of the net budget, which was an improvement on the projection at the end of quarter 1.

Discussion took place regarding Leisure Service income which had increased significantly but was still £90k down on a challenging budget. Additional costs to the management restructure would result in significantly reduced running costs in the future.

The forecast variance of £91k for Planning was due to lower than budgeted income for Development Control charges.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Savings made due to vacancies not filled in Housing Services;
- Delays to building projects;
- Spend on the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan and Forward Planning works at Junction 28;
- Leisure Services were scheduled to be cost neutral by 2020.

Members praised the new Leisure Service website which they considered to be a vast improvement, commercially minded and easy to use.

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

52 DRAFT BUDGET

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources considering options available in order for the Council to set a balanced budget for 2017/18 and agree a future strategy for further budget reductions for 2018/19 onwards.

The Director explained that the current budget for the General Fund showed a deficit of £419k. In addition there was a predicted funding deficit of just under £1m on the General Fund by 2020/21. This highlighted the need to take steps to plan for further reductions to ongoing expenditure levels.

The Director reminded Members that the authority had recently applied to the Department of Communities and Local Government for a four year fixed funding settlement which would see the complete removal of the remaining Revenue Support Grant of £1.0m by 2019/20. It was a statutory requirement for the Local Authority to set a balanced budget each year.

Consideration was given to the following table:

Reconciliation of Major 2016/17 Budget Variances

Variances	Amount £k
<i>External items outside of our control</i>	
Reduced formula grant settlement	609
Decrease in Housing Benefit Grant	25
Pay award	100

Pension provision	35
Price inflation	50
New Apprenticeship Levy	40
Subtotal	859
Other changes	
New apprentices	20
DCC sharing of waste	(200)
Market Walk income	(20)
Increased income from CCLA investments	(38)
Increase in Collection Fund surplus	(45)
Contributions from town and parish councils	(8)
Increase Council tax income (£5 rise + new 200 properties)	(176)
Department of Work and Pensions rent	(45)
Additional election monies	(29)
Various additional fee income	(60)
Other net cost pressures (including reflection on 16/17 budget pressures)	161
Draft budget gap for 2017/18	419

Discussion took place regarding:

- The areas of responsibility that fell under the remit of the Group and how the Group could best look at them in further detail;
- The impact of a 1% increase to Council Tax;
- Rental income from the Department of Works and Pensions;
- Contributions from Towns and Parishes;
- Several years of ‘salami slicing’ service budgets that had taken place;
- The potential to invest in order to raise income;
- Possible land sales and how the funds would be accounted for;
- A number of assumptions that had been made in the draft budget.

It was **RESOLVED** that a Working Group be put in place to look at areas within the budget that fell under the remit of the Group and to identify areas for priority and areas that Members considered could be put forward for reduction. Members of the Working Group would be Cllr B A Moore, Cllr Mrs E J Slade and Cllr R J Dolley.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs E J Slade and seconded by Cllr R J Dolley)

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

53 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK (0:43)**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation which provided Members with an update on

performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2016-17 quarter 2 to the end of September, as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The Audit Officer outlined the contents of the report and Members thanked officers for changing the colours used within the report following previous concerns that had been raised.

The officer provided an update regarding leisure centre visits for quarter 2, which were 216,000, making a cumulative total of 452,000 which was above target. She also explained that a number of risks regarding Leisure Services within the report were not currently scored as they were under review and in future would be consolidated rather than being listed for each Centre.

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

54 **COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME (0:46)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources providing Members with details of proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme from April 2017.

The Benefits Manager outlined the contents of the report explaining that Council Tax Reduction (CTR) also known as Council Tax Support was introduced on 1 April 2013 and replaced Council Tax Benefit, which was fully funded by the Department for Work and Pensions.

CTR was a local reduction scheme. The scheme for working-age customers (those below the age to claim State Pension) was set out in the CTR Scheme Policy. Funding for the CTR scheme was now included within the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). The Government reduced the level of funding by 10% when responsibility was transferred and had effectively reduced the funds available to support the scheme each year as the level of RSG had been reduced. On 15 April 2016 a report submitted to the Devon Local Government Steering Group asked Chief Executives and Leaders to consider the future strategy for CTR.

It was agreed that the CTR scheme for working age customers should change to align with recent changes to Housing Benefit and Universal Credit to keep the schemes more closely aligned and reduce any ongoing administrative burden. Officers from all Devon billing authorities and the major precepting authorities had been working closely in setting the proposals and to maintain a common approach. Consultation had been predominantly web-based and was hosted by Devon County Council. The consultation period ran from 27th June 2016 to 4th September 2016.

The officer highlighted the Exceptional Hardship Scheme that was in place to help those that were severely affected by the changes implemented and that officers would ensure that those in need knew that this was available.

Members were asked to note the Equality Impact Assessment.

The officer informed the Group that other authorities had adopted this scheme and that adopting it would bring the authority in line with them.

The officer highlighted that those of pensionable age were not affected by the proposed changes.

The Benefits Manager walked through the proposed changes as outlined within the report.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that Cabinet note the reasons for the proposal, the consultation process and requirement to approve a revised scheme by 31 January 2017.

And they subsequently:

- a) Approve the proposed changes to Council Tax Reduction Scheme from 1 April 2017 as detailed in Appendix 1 subject to the amendment shown in para 4 of this report
- b) Approve the updated Council Tax Reduction Exceptional hardship Policy (Appendix 4)
- c) To continue with delegated authority to the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources to make any minor amendments to the scheme where there appears to be ambiguity in relation to the wording of the scheme and the Councils intent for the scheme.
- d) Members note the requirement to read and consider the Equality Impact Assessment and consider the impact of the proposed changes.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: - Report * previously circulated and attached Minutes.

55 **REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS (1:04)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation regarding a review of the Council's updated RIPA policy.

The Legal Services Manager outlined the contents of the report, explaining that the Council's RIPA policy was considered by a Surveillance Inspector of the Office of Surveillance Commissioners during an inspection in April 2015. The comments of the Surveillance Inspector were that the policy was 'a succinct and thorough guide which would be of assistance to applicants and authorising officers alike'.

The Office of Surveillance Commissioners had stated that it was good practice to review and update the RIPA Policy on an annual basis. Therefore the policy had been reviewed in light of the Office of Surveillance Commissioner's report and in accordance with good practice.

The officer explained that minor amendments had been made to the report with regard to the recent management restructure and named responsible officers.

The officer informed the group that RIPA powers had not been used since March 2014 but that it was a useful tool to have in the enforcement tool kit.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that Cabinet:

- a) Approve the updated RIPA policy as attached as Appendix 1;
- b) Note that the Council had not used its powers under RIPA since March 2014.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs A R Berry and seconded by Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge)

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

56 **FUTURE POLICY (1:07)**

At a previous meeting of the Group the Chairman had requested that officers propose possible future policy development for areas covered by its remit.

The Public Health Manager proposed that the Group look further into the issue of air quality. He explained that air quality was an area of concern with 30,000 recorded deaths in the UK a year being attributed to it. The officer explained that there were currently two air quality management areas within Mid Devon and that the authority was obliged to produce an Air Quality Action Plan. Government funding was available to help improve air quality and a bid had been submitted, in partnership with other authorities, which would be looked at by the Minister in January.

It was **AGREED** that the Public Health Manager report back to the Group at its January meeting with proposals for an Air Quality Strategy. A further detailed report to include a proposed policy would be presented to the March meeting.

Note: - Cllrs Mrs E M Andrews and R J Dolley declared a personal interest as they and their families lived in areas affected by air quality.

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

Public Health 6 monthly update
Active Devon
Anti-Social Behaviour Stats
Budget
Air Quality

(The meeting ended at 4.03 pm)

CHAIRMAN