

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP**
held on 22 January 2019 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors B A Moore (Chairman)
Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs A R Berry,
Mrs C P Daw, Mrs G Doe, R J Dolley,
F W Letch and Mrs E J Slade

Apologies

Councillor(s) Mrs E M Andrews

Also Present

Councillor(s) Mrs J B Binks and C R Slade

Also Present

Officer(s): Joanne Nacey (Group Manager for Finance), Rob Fish (Principal Accountant), Michael Lowe (Health & Safety Officer), Kevin Swift (Public Health Officer) and Carole Oliphant (Member Services Officer)

58 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00.01.22)

Apologies were received from Cllr Mrs E M Andrews.

59 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

There were no declarations made.

60 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00.01.38)

Cllr Mrs J B Binks, as the outside representative for Citizens Advice, addressed the Group in relation to item 9 on the agenda the Draft Budget and said that in March 2017 the Community PDG had proposed a reserve of funds for agencies struggling with the implemented Service Level Agreements.

She explained that due to the reduced funding from MDDC Citizens Advice had cut back the hours when their offices were open to the public in Tiverton and Crediton.

She asked what had happened to the reserve fund agreed by the PDG in March 2017 and if a formula had been agreed for agencies to gain access to additional funding over and above their Service Level Agreement.

The Chairman advised that the questions would be addressed and discussed during the Draft Budget item.

61 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (00.07.25)**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th November 2018 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

62 **CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS (00.08.22)**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

63 **GRANT FUNDED AGENCY (00.08.46)**

The Chairman introduced Molly Holmes, Chief Officer from Age UK Mid Devon. She explained that they were just coming to the end of the first year of funding through the Service Level Agreement.

Giving a presentation to the Group she explained that the most popular topic that clients contacted them about was Attendance Allowance (a non-means tested disability benefit) and that Age UK had helped residents of Mid Devon to claim £572K in benefits during 2017/2018.

With the funding received from MDDC they had introduced home visits and had supported 263 clients in their own homes. They had also been able support an additional 718 clients with benefits and welfare information and advice via their telephone advice service or drop in hubs in Cullompton and Tiverton.

They had hosted 5 information 'Free Cream Tea' events in rural parishes across Mid Devon, which had been very well attended and had enabled access to clients who they had not been able to engage with before. Ms Holmes asked if Members could recommend further communities where additional events could be hosted to encourage more residents to engage with the services that Age UK Mid Devon offered.

She then gave the Group an overview of the positive feedback and comments received from some of their clients.

In response to a question about there being no drop in hub held in Crediton, Ms Holmes explained that the hub they had there wasn't supported by the community and that they found it more beneficial to clients to be visited in their own homes. She pointed out that there was an Age Concern hub still available in Crediton.

The Chairman thanked Molly Holmes for her presentation.

64 **PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES COMMUNICATION STRATEGY (00.22.25)**

The Group received a verbal report from the Public Health Officer on the communication strategy for public health initiatives and he explained that discussions had taken place about how best to communicate major public health initiatives to residents.

He explained that at the suggestion of the Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing the Communication Team were currently making amendments to the MDDC website so that relevant information could be communicated and people could be signposted

to further information. He confirmed that a mock-up of the new web pages would be brought to the next meeting.

In response to a question regarding printed information for residents who did not have access to computers he said that resources were not currently available to print leaflets but he would bring some additional information on this approach to the next meeting.

65 HEALTH & SAFETY POLICY REVIEW OF INCIDENTS AND NEAR MISSES (00.26.50)

The Group received and **NOTED** a *report from the Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation presented by the Health and Safety Officer outlining the numbers of health & safety incidents and near misses reported to the Council and the reasons for them.

The officer explained that his role was to monitor accidents and incidents and report them quarterly and that Group Managers had a responsibility to ensure that any instances were reported. He had the authority to investigate serious incidents and make recommendations to ensure processes and working practices were amended if required.

He explained that year to date there had been 23 minor incidents, which were mostly slips, trips and falls. There had been 5 instances reported with members of the public but when these had been investigated they were found to be no fault of MDDC.

In response to Members concerns about a MDDC refuse lorry which had spilled hundreds of litres of diesel in Crediton the Health and Safety Officer said that he had no knowledge of this but would investigate.

The Chairman stated that although it was unlikely that there would be zero incidents it was encouraging that the trend was downwards.

Note: *Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

66 FINANCIAL MONITORING (00.035.33)

The Group received a verbal report by the Principal Accountant giving a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.

He explained that the overall General Fund variance was £94K in November which was an improvement of £74k from £168K reported in October. The improvement for Community PDG related services was £138k. The main areas of improvement were Revenues and Benefits at £75K and Planning at £63K. He explained the improvements in housing benefit subsidy, additional annex tax, new burdens grants from Government and additional council tax benefit.

67 DRAFT BUDGET (00.40.12)

The Group received and **NOTED** a *report of the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) presented by the Group Manager for Financial Services outlining the draft budget for 2019/2020.

She explained that the forecasted budget shortfall of £662K had been reduced to £253K. She stated that officers had gone into a great deal of detail and had been pragmatic in order to produce a robust budget. She confirmed that the Government settlement had come through in December and that the figures rarely changed.

She explained to the Group that a budget shortfall of £253K was not a great place to be in and if more savings could be found they would be but it would be unlikely. She stated that the budget gap would be plugged with the council's reserves and New Homes Bonus for 2019-2020 but this would mean that the 2020-2021 budget already had a gap of £253K and this could rise to as much as £1m.

In response to a question from the Chairman she confirmed that the overall budget was £10m and that the £253k shortfall represented about 2.5% which was favourable compared to other local authorities.

She explained to the Group that the Council were lobbying the Government hard to acknowledge that rural areas could be as or more deprived than urban ones and deserved the same level of funding.

She confirmed to the Group that the provisional Capital Programme was currently being completed and would be forwarded to all Members.

In relation to the questions asked by Cllr Mrs J M Binks at public question time she reminded the Group what had been agreed by them in March 2017:

1. The Citizens Advice was granted an additional £3k per annum over the agreed £12.5K Service Level Agreement taking their annual amount to £15.5K
2. The Tiverton Market Drop in Centre was granted £3k over the next 2 years to transition from a guaranteed yearly grant to Service Level Agreements

She explained that in March 2017 there was a forecasted £18K underspend in grants funding which was to be earmarked to assist struggling agencies transition to Service Level Agreements. However this had been used, in part, to grant the additional funding to the Citizens Advice and the Tiverton Market Centre agreed by the PDG at the March meeting.

She further explained that in 2017/2018 the council had ended the year with an overspend of £72k on the budget and that the remaining reserves for grant funded agencies had been used to plug the council's budget funding gap. She confirmed that there were now no funds left in the council's reserves specifically earmarked for grant funded agencies and that if the Group were minded to grant additional funding to the Citizens Advice this would need to be added to the forecasted £253K budget gap facing the council in 2019/2020 and be taken directly from the council's reserves.

The Chairman explained to the Group that although they had the best intentions in March 2017 to create and make available a reserve fund for grant funded agencies that because of budget pressures the council were no longer able to offer this fund.

There was a general discussion regarding the pressures on all grant funded agencies due to reduced funding from County, District and Town Council's and that the Service

Level Agreements brought in by MDDC gave agencies some clarity about how much funding they would receive over a three year period.

The Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing explained that the Service Level Agreements were confirmed for the remainder of the year and work would begin again in the autumn for agencies to apply for ongoing funding through new agreements due to commence in 2020.

He explained that he had attended the open sessions recently run by the Citizens Advice and had been able to confirm that all the grant funded agencies supported by MDDC worked together to refer clients. He stated that the Citizens Advice had recently been awarded the contract by the Department of Work and Pensions to give Universal Credit advice and this would be a substantial revenue stream for them moving forward.

Note: *Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes.

68 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK (01.12.54)**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation presented by the Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security providing Members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

Discussion took place regarding the risk severity explanations and the Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security said she would circulate them onto members. She explained that the Risk Management Policy was being reviewed by the Audit Committee in March 2019.

Note: * Report previously circulated attached to the minutes

69 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETING (01.16.24)**

The Group requested that the Public Health Officer communicate the equipment and supplier used for the Trim Trail due to be completed shortly in Tiverton to the Town and Parish Council's so that this could be replicated by them if required. It was agreed that this would be added to the next Town and Parish newsletter.

(The meeting ended at 3.37 pm)

CHAIRMAN