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MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP**
held on 26 September 2017 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

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

Also Present

Councillor(s)

Mrs M E Squires

Also Present

Officer(s):

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Jill May (Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation), Andrew Pritchard (Director of Operations), Chris Shears (Economic Development Officer), Kevin Swift (Public Health Officer) and Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

23 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

No apologies were given.

24 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from members of the public present.

25 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

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

26 **CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed new Member Cllr A Bush to the meeting.

27 **AIR QUALITY**

The Committee had before it a report * from the Public Health and Professional Services Manager providing the final version of the statutory Air Quality Action Plan 2017-21 for consideration.

The Public Health Officer outlined the contents of the report.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Road infrastructure and the need for improvements:

- The difficulties encountered in a rural area for those that did not have a car and the need for local facilities;
- Local roads weren't always safe for cycling;
- Tiverton Parkway Station being away from the main towns, problems accessing it and possible solutions to this;
- Eco Stars and whether or not school buses and local coach companies complied with this;
- The need for Devon County Council to consider air quality when coordinating school transport;
- The introduction of electrically powered vehicles;
- Devon County Council had been consulted and had commented that there was nothing within the Action Plan that could not be delivered;
- Bus passes for senior citizens and whether they would continue;
- Potential cycle routes from Crediton and Tiverton to Exeter and whether they could be pursued;
- School Travel Plans;
- Greater consideration of enforcement measures.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Air Quality Action Plan be revised to include areas discussed above and be reviewed at the next meeting of the Group.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

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

28 **BROADBAND - PRESENTATION ON RECENT BID SUBMISSION**

The Economic Development Officer provided the Group with a presentation in relation to a recent bid submission regarding rural Broadband provision.

The officer explained that an exciting opportunity existed to apply for funding to enter into a programme to provide a fibre network within Mid Devon. An expression of interest had been made to the relevant funding body as well as details of a discrete project which it was very much hoped if successful could be expanded. The current situation was that whilst some parts of the district received a reasonable service, within other areas, the service provided by commercially, or via the 'Connecting Devon and Somerset' programme provided limited coverage. However, demand was high from residents and businesses and the poor coverage was providing a barrier to growth.

Details regarding the proposed project were as follows:

A loop would be created linking the villages between the Link Road and the A377 as well as the Link Road between Crediton and Tiverton along the A3072. Creating a ring was a very resilient way for building a network to enable wider coverage. The principal villages on the loop between the A361 and A377 would be:

- Withleigh (210m above sea level)
- Templeton (260m)
- Cruwys Morchard (218m)
- Pennymoor (239m)
- Puddington (206m)
- Black Dog (197m)
- Morchard Bishop (173m)
- Lapford (150m)

Who would benefit?

- As well as local residents, approximately 670 tourism businesses and 550 agricultural businesses.
- House prices had the potential to increase by 5%.

Why pick this route?

- The area was currently outside the remit of Connecting Devon and Somerset (the CDS programme).
- The height of each location was relevant.

The process

- Expressions of interest would be considered by late autumn with a full bid needing to be submitted by the beginning of 2018. The team were preparing as though the expression of interest would be successful and were busy considering the options that could be explored.

What happens now?

- Need community buy-in
- Establish route and submission sites
- Identify and contact landowners
- Create a business plan and evidence base

Other key activities

- Explore commercial opportunities
- Working with partner organisations
- Costing the fibre roll-out
- Look at alternative solutions if unsuccessful

Councillor support

- Local knowledge and contacts would be vital.

- Councillors could help in identifying existing infrastructure and could lobby for information from Connecting Devon and Somerset for direct project support.

The Group were asked to comment on the following discussion points:

- Where this project was best placed to sit within the committee structure of the Council. Both the Economy and the Community Policy Development Groups had a keen interest in this area.
- How should the Council engage with the community?
- Was this the right approach or should the private sector lead on this?

Discussion took place regarding:

- Whether or not there was financial capacity to take the scheme forward and funds that were available;
- Other local authorities and the fact that neighbouring authorities were supportive;
- The fact that transmission points could be added to extend the area of the scheme in the longer term.

It was **RESOLVED** that joint working with the Economy PDG be proposed as the matter was of such importance to both Groups.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

29 **CUSTOMER SERVICES AND THE IMPACT OF CLOSING SURGERIES AT CULLOMPTON AND CREDITON**

The Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in July had recommended that Council be asked to look at the idea of diminishing the level of face to face services at Phoenix House to allow for one session a month to be provided at Crediton and Cullompton. At Council on 30 August following discussion and upon a vote being taken, the recommendation was declared to have been carried. The Community PDG were asked to take this forward.

The Group had before it a briefing paper * which provided background to the cessation of the service.

As part of a decision to rationalise council services and meet a balanced budget, the council withdrew its staff and services from the offices in Crediton on 1 April 2016.

A proposed amendment to the budget to retain services at the Crediton Office was put forward at the meeting of full council on 24th February 2016. This proposal was supported by 4 councillors (plus one abstention), with the rest of the council voting against. As such officers implemented the decision as agreed by council.

When this full time service ended the staff employed in Crediton had been made redundant and the budget removed from the Customer First (CF) budget.

Since then, officers had provided a fortnightly 'surgery' in Crediton and Cullompton on alternate Mondays. This was agreed as a transitional arrangement, not least since the council was incurring fixed IT costs in Crediton until August 2017 so it had made sense operationally to utilise the facilities that existed while they were available.

The surgeries had ceased entirely from August 2017 and were no longer provided. The budget had been cut, and the IT facilities no longer existed to access the council's systems from these locations.

Cllr F W Letch, speaking in support of maintaining a presence in Crediton informed the Group that figures identifying numbers using the services in Crediton and Tiverton could not be compared due to the sporadic attendance in Crediton, which meant that the public were unsure of opening times. He queried the differences with the two towns and why Tiverton residents received a different service to Crediton residents. He also outlined difficulties in using public transport to travel from Crediton to Tiverton. Cllr Letch commented that he had witnessed times in Tiverton when there were no members of the public waiting to speak to an officer and proposed that consideration be given to reduce the level of staffing in Tiverton to fund some cover for Crediton.

Cllr Mrs E M Andrews, speaking in support of maintaining services in Cullompton commented that when she had asked residents in Cullompton whether or not they had used the surgery they had replied that they did not know about the service. She asked that residents of Cullompton be treated equally to residents of Tiverton.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Residents in rural areas and smaller towns that did not receive a local service but contacted the Council by other means such as telephone or digitally;
- The 'digital age' and the fact that many organisations now expected the public to contact them by these means;
- Tiverton being the main town in the District and being the main base for the Authority;
- The importance of a reliable broadband provision;
- The fact that the decision to remove the service had been agreed a considerable time ago and the difficulties that would be faced to reinstate.

It was **RESOLVED** that the existing decision to withdraw services be ratified.

(Proposed by the Chairman and seconded by Cllr Mrs G Doe)

- Note:
- i) Briefing paper * previously circulated and attached to Minutes.
 - ii) Cllrs Mrs E M Andrews and F W Letch asked that their vote against the proposal be noted.

30 PERFORMANCE AND RISK

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Director of Corporate Affairs & Business Transformation, providing Members with an update on performance against the corporate plan and local service targets for 2017-18 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The Chairman had raised a question in advance of the meeting regarding Leisure Centre Memberships. The officer had provided a response which clarified the situation, explaining that actions had been put in place to address the matter. It was **AGREED** that this would be discussed in detail at the next meeting. Members requested Zest Memberships be broken down per centre.

Note: Report * previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

31 **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 Chairman had raised a question in advance of the meeting regarding an overspend in the capital programme monitoring report against the development at Exe Valley. The Officer had confirmed the position, explaining that £60k related to a project contingency budget and circa £40k had been spent on additional works, outside of the scope of the project.

Members requested that problems in reading the spreadsheet within the report be noted, due to its size and the amount of information it contained.

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

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

Six monthly update Leisure
Six monthly update Public Health
Community Cohesion
Town and Parish Charter
Devon County Council Public Health
Community Safety Partnership Plan
Corporate Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
Cabinet Member report – Community Well Being
Gypsy and Traveller Illegal Encampments
Draft budget
Air Quality

(The meeting ended at 3.51 pm)

CHAIRMAN