

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 15 January 2018
at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

F J Rosamond (Chairman)
Mrs F J Colthorpe, Mrs C P Daw,
Mrs G Doe, T G Hughes, Mrs B M Hull,
F W Letch, Mrs J Roach and N A Way

Apologies

Councillor(s)

Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs A R Berry and T W Snow

Also Present

Councillor(s)

R L Stanley

Also Present

Officer(s):

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Andrew Jarrett (Director of Finance, Assets and Resources), Jill May (Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation), Kathryn Tebbey (Group Manager for Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), Jane Lewis (Communication and Consultation Manager), Kevin Swift (Public Health Officer) and Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

100 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllrs Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs A R Berry and T W Snow.

101 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public in attendance.

102 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

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

103 DECISIONS OF THE CABINET

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

104 MEMBER FORUM

There were no issues raised under this item.

105 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed the newly appointed Communication and Consultation Manager to the meeting.

He informed the Committee that he had received positive feedback from a member of the public regarding the new leisure facilities at Exe Valley Leisure Centre.

The Chairman provided an update from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration regarding the visit to the Housing Minister and informed Members that a response to the letter he had sent to Lloyds Bank regarding the pending closure of the Cullompton branch had been emailed to them all.

The Chairman also reminded the Committee that an informal workshop was taking place the following week.

The Committee sent their best wishes to Cllr Snow and his wife regarding her ill health.

106 BUDGET

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Director for Finance, Assets and Resources in order that the Scrutiny Committee review the draft 2018/19 budget and make any necessary comments/recommendations to the Cabinet to be considered at its meeting on the 1 February 2018.

The officer outlined the contents of the report explaining that since the first round Cabinet and PDG meetings the Finance team and service managers had been revisiting a range of budgets to deliver more savings or increase income levels. He outlined the table below:

Variances	Amount £k
18/19 Budget Shortfall (Cabinet Report 26/10/17)	617
Further Cost Pressures identified	570
Additional savings identified	(231)
18/19 Revised Budget Shortfall	956
2% Staff Pay award offer (1% previously built in)	116
Business Rate 100% Pilot bid accepted (1 year only)	(230)
Business Rate Growth (Solar & Benefit of Devon Pool)	(150)
Funding from sinking funds & reserves (ICT & Leisure)	(215)
Other additional savings identified	(174)
18/19 Revised Budget Shortfall	303
No reduction in Rural Services Delivery Grant	(86)

3% increase in C/Tax (2.6% previously built in)	(22)
Draft budget gap for 2018/19	195

The officer explained that it was encouraging that the Council had managed to significantly close the budget gap of £617k discussed at earlier meetings, even after the potential pay award adding an additional £116k and new legislation relating to Homelessness Reduction adding circa £50k to the budget.

The officer informed Members that moving forward probably the biggest concern for the future was the New Homes Bonus arrangements that had seen circa £0.7m removed from the funding source on an annual basis, coupled with the threat that further revisions may be made from 2019/20 onwards.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Council house stock and the right to buy scheme which resulted in reduced rental income;
- Grounds Maintenance figures would show an increased income from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) regarding grass cutting on HRA land.
- Staff movements which had resulted in increased efficiency;
- Successful funding bids for the Culm Garden Village;
- Car parking and a pending report from the Economy PDG;
- Expenditure on toilets;
- An increase in the number of apprentices, particularly in the skilled trades area;
- Potential reduction to income from the sale of recycled plastics following changes to the Chinese market;
- Future refurbishment to areas of Phoenix House;
- An assurance that funds highlighted for redevelopment would only be used on receipt of a robust business case;
- The use of external contractors for Legionella checks and future plans to bring this in house.

The officer reminded Members that in order to conclude the statutory budget setting process, the updated draft budget position would go to Cabinet before being agreed at Full Council on the 21 February 2018. During this period officers would continue to identify and examine further savings possibilities that could reduce the current budget gap.

Officers were commended for the thorough work that had been undertaken to date to reduce the budget gap.

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

107 **UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a briefing paper * from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources providing an update on the possible impacts from the rollout of Universal Credit Full Service (UCFS).

The officer explained that Universal Credit (UC) was a national policy change in the way benefits for working age people were claimed, administered and paid. UC would be administered centrally by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The officer further explained that six benefits would be combined: Housing Benefit (HB) which was currently administered by the council, Working and Child Tax Credits, Jobseekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance and Income Support.

The main changes for claimants would be:-

- UC would be claimed and managed online
- Payment would be paid monthly in arrears
- Payment would be to a single member of the household
- The First payment would usually be paid 5 weeks from the date of claim
- The rent element would be paid to the claimant and no longer the social landlord.

There had been some slippage to the timetable for the roll out of UC and it would now be in July for the Tiverton office and in September for the Exeter office.

The officer explained that the main risk to the authority from UC was regarding housing rent collection. Other areas, that had already started UC, had seen rent arrears increase to around 7% whereas this authority was currently at only 1%.

Discussion took place regarding:

- UC could only be claimed online and this could cause difficulties to some claimants;
- Claimants would only move to UC if they made a change to their claim or for a new claim;
- The potential that the Citizens Advice would receive a lot of enquiries.
- Potential impacts on staffing levels.

The officer reminded Members that an officer from the DWP would be providing a Member Briefing on UC at Phoenix House on 1st February 2018 and he encouraged Members to attend.

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

108 **SCRUTINY OFFICER UPDATE**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a report* from the Public Health and Policy Research Officer regarding measures that were in place to cope with the expected demand on hospital and GP services as a result of proposed housing development and for the coming winter.

The officer introduced himself to the Committee, explaining that he had been working full time within Public Health until the end of last year when he was seconded to provide support to the Scrutiny Committee.

The officer outlined the content of the report, explaining that at the last meeting of the Committee concerns had been raised in relation to NHS capacity pressures that could arise as a result of housing development in Mid Devon and also more generally for the winter period. The officer explained that although there was development and there would be an increase in population it was phased and would allow the NHS sufficient time to plan and manage additional demand through ongoing review and modelling. As part of his Public Health role he had been involved in meetings with representatives from the Cullompton surgeries, NHS and planning officers from Mid Devon District Council as part of the Culm Garden Village Project. Devon County Public Health had also expressed interest in assisting in providing expertise and review of any proposed health impact assessment (HIA). It was envisaged that Devon County Public Health consultants would form part of a Working Group with other key stakeholders to look at how best to meet the health and care needs of these new communities.

The officer informed Members that Devon County Public Health were holding a one day workshop in February 2018 to which District Planning Officers were invited. The event would provide a national update on Garden Villages, share learning from the new developments of Sherford and Cranbrook, and discuss the next steps for the Culm Garden Village. Other stakeholders attending included the Culm Valley Integrated Health Centre, Taunton Deane Garden Town, Devon County Council Planning, Sport England and the NEW Devon and Torbay Clinical Commissioning Groups.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Potential issues in other areas of the district as well as the Culm Valley and ongoing discussions regarding the Crediton Health Hub. The Scrutiny Officer would look into attending future meetings regarding this;
- There was a District Council representative on the Devon County Council Health Scrutiny Committee that should communicate on behalf of the Districts;
- Bed blocking and the perception that this was due to the closure of care homes;
- Operations being cancelled to free up beds to allow for winter pressures;

- The Clinical Lead at Castle Place Surgery Tiverton had offered to attend a meeting to discuss local issues;
- The need for accurate data regarding delayed discharges.

It was **AGREED** that the Scrutiny Officer arrange a future meeting with the Clinical Lead at Castle Place Surgery Tiverton and that data regarding delayed discharges be obtained.

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

109 **EFFECTIVENESS OF SCRUTINY**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the House of Commons regarding effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The participation of Cllr Mrs Roach in the consultation process which had begun with the previous government;
- The Committee was already carrying out a number of the recommendations within the report;
- The introduction of the Scrutiny Officer role;
- The use of external experts and the quality of questions put to them;
- The residents survey that had recently been undertaken and would be reported to the Committee in March;
- The public role in Scrutiny;
- Training requirements.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Standards Committee be asked to consider and review the conclusions and recommendations within the report at pages 76 – 79.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs J Roach and seconded by Cllr F J Rosamond)

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

110 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** the Forward Plan *.

Note: - * Forward Plan previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

111 **QUESTIONS FOR MP**

Committee Members were asked to consider some questions to put to the MP and forward them to the clerk in advance of the meeting.

112 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Cornwall Housing – moves to increase the ‘local need’ for council housing applicants
Cabinet Member for Planning
Whistleblowing update
Establishment
RIPA update

(The meeting ended at 4.15 pm)

CHAIRMAN