

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **SPECIAL MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 26 January 2018 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

F J Rosamond (Chairman)
Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs F J Colthorpe,
Mrs G Doe, T G Hughes, F W Letch,
Mrs J Roach and T W Snow

Apologies

Councillor(s)

Mrs A R Berry, Mrs C P Daw, Mrs B M Hull and N A Way

Also Present

Councillor(s)

C R Slade and R L Stanley

Also Present

Officer(s):

Andrew Jarrett (Director of Finance, Assets and Resources), Jill May (Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation), Maria De Leiburne (Solicitor), Kevin Swift (Public Health Officer) and Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

113 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Mrs A R Berry, Mrs C P Daw, Mrs B M Hull and Cllr N A Way.

114 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from the members of the public present.

115 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Subject to adding a bullet point at Minute 109 to read 'Cllr Mrs J Roach requested that the assistance of Mel Stride MP in ensuring the process continued with the new Government be noted' the minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

116 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

117 **MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT NEIL PARISH**

The Chairman welcomed Neil Parish MP to the meeting.

The Committee put questions to the MP.

What is the position in terms of controlling the input and export of material into open slurry pits, especially when neighbours complain of damage to health?

The MP replied that he had spoken with Sir James Bevan, the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency (EA), asking for more regulation. He considered that there was a problem with what was being put into pits and spread on land, especially from bio digesters. He had been informed that the EA were looking at rules and in particular they were looking at the site at Crossparks where they had been making investigations regarding both the pit and the spreading on land. They may be taking action and it had reached legal stages, the matter was being taken seriously. He considered that if a farmer was spreading slurry there shouldn't be a problem, it was mixing it in open slurry pits and spreading it that caused problems, and only a certain amount per season should be spread, which could also be an issue. The EA were checking and testing the land and the pit. They had apparently found something in the pit that they didn't like and were checking to see if the land was saturated. This matter was being taken seriously but the EA could only work within the rules that they had.

How will the government address the need for better infrastructure to counter the pressures on existing roads and hospitals caused by the growth in house building?

The MP replied that both himself and Mid Devon District Council were trying to deal with this matter by saying to developers that they must pay more infrastructure costs 'up front' so that roads came before the development. They were also looking for funding up front from the Garden Village scheme. The MP also considered that given the uplift from the value of agricultural land to building land some of the extra value could contribute towards infrastructure.

With regard to hospitals, there was extra demand and he considered that the closure of beds in community hospitals such as Honiton and Seaton had contributed to this problem. He felt that figures quoted where questionable, that the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital at Wonford (RDEW) was overstretched and that local hospitals could take some of the strain. He informed Members that he had made strong representations but that the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) had the final say. Social care services had been looked at again by Government to try combining the delivery of social care and looking after people in their own homes but resources were needed in order to do so. This appeared to be working but some people would still require care in hospital.

The MP considered that care packages in his constituency were currently providing services well and he had been assured that there would be improvement. He asked that incidents of care packages not being put in place satisfactorily in his constituency be reported to him in order that he could make specific enquiries. He added that although he considered being cared for at home was the right thing for some patients, he was not convinced it would save money and that enough people were needed to undertake the work. With an aging population it was essential to ensure that the resource was in place.

Section 106 Contributions put housing prices out of the reach of local people, should tax money be put back into the system to help with this?

The MP responded that the Treasury needed resource and spent it how it saw fit. Agricultural land could be valued at £10k - £15k an acre and building land at £250k an acre so even after tax there was a lot left. There had to be a balance and some infrastructure costs had to be reflected in land values.

Homes for older people needed to be provided in the towns so that they could move in from the countryside and could more respite care be provided?

The MP responded that the type of housing provided in the District was the responsibility of the Local Authority and that whether or not to move into town was a personal choice. He was however prepared to speak to Ministers regarding how much Councils were allowed to build. It would be up to the Local Authority whether or not it chose to build accommodation such as one bedroom units for the elderly.

The MP agreed that more respite care was needed and that caring for patients with dementia could be an awful strain. He extended condolences to Cllr Snow who had recently lost his wife.

Could the MP comment on the state of play regarding extending a railway service to Cullompton? What is the timeline for such a development?

The MP considered that this project was 'getting somewhere' and informed the Committee that Great Western Trains and Network Rail had looked at the feasibility and had found that they could run small trains. They were considering both Cullompton and Wellington for this project. He felt that this was moving in the right direction, that his neighbouring MP was also on board and that it was now a case of making sure that it stacked up financially. He stated that these things could take a long time but that progress was being made.

The 111 out service claims to give fast access to help for serious ill health, but it is not fit for purpose and needs to be changed if it is to fulfil this aspiration.

From personal experience call back promised within an hour can take up to five hours even in a very serious situation. Too often it takes multiple phone calls over hours to receive even a phone call from a doctor.

The MP asked for specific details with regard to this individual case so that he could look into it further.

Another Councillor in attendance reported having received a very good service from 111.

Is there any clear indication via an impact assessment of the effect of Brexit on economic and environmental activity in Devon?

The MP responded that he had been looking into this matter a lot with DEFRA on the agricultural side and that figures were being looked at by Government. He informed the Committee that we currently exported lamb to Europe and imported lamb from New Zealand. He stated that we needed to ensure we maintained exports and didn't increase imports. We needed to maintain very high animal welfare standards and not allow imports that did not meet the same standards. A report was about to be launched outlining the effects of this. We needed to keep trade routes open and the MP reported that 40% of new cars sold in the country were German and he thought

the Germans would want to keep this market. This was an example of a trade relationship. Impact assessments were being undertaken. Borders and being able to move about without being held up was another matter that EFRA was considering.

He stated that we were on the road to BREXIT and that in his view in a few years we would be pleased, but it could be challenging along the way. We needed to get as good a deal as possible.

The digital revolution is marching on but in its wake it is leaving behind people who do not own or want to own a computer.

The MP stated that we were living in an age where more and more was being done on a computer. He had sympathy with those that did not want to use it but technology was moving in that direction. He suggested that if Councillors came up with ideas for helping local people to access and understand computers he would go to Ministers to enquire about access to funding. He said that we could not stop the roll out of new technology but he accepted that some people would struggle and we needed to look at how help could best be provided.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Computer training and access to computers that was currently available at libraries and with local charities;
- The roll out of Universal Credit, which could only be claimed online and assistance that the Authority was putting in place;
- Anticipated rent arrears following the roll out of Universal Credit.

The MP asked to be kept up to date on the roll out of Universal Credit in order that he could take issues forward.

What progress is being made to the development of a ring road/ bypass for Cullompton, which is urgently needed before major housing construction begins?

The MP replied that it would take Government funding to fund the new roundabout and junction and that a decision on the final route of the bypass had to be made. He was mindful that the road was needed and offered to write to Devon County Council regarding their proposals for a bypass.

Given the shortage of nurses in the NHS and difficulty retaining them, would it be sensible to re-instate free training with more practical on-the-job experience leading to an Apprenticeship Degree? Practical skills, experience, plus empathy and TLC can be more useful than academic prowess, when dealing with sick people.

The MP responded that he had been to the Royal College of Nursing in Exeter to discuss training needs and was lobbying the Government hard on this matter. As the country left the EU there would be even more pressure on nursing. He had visited PETROC and spoken to trainee nurses there, a number of whom were entering

nursing at a later stage, to find out what help could be provided. He was mindful that bursaries and how they were targeted needed to be looked at.

The MP was asked if military medical staff could be asked to help out and he said he would look into this.

What is the position in respect of the delivery of a new building for Tiverton School?

The MP had attended a meeting at the High School, along with Devon County Council Members, with regard to the new site and planning permission which should be passed shortly. The group was in place and ready to move forward to go to Ministers for funding. The current building was on a flood plain, the buildings were deteriorating and there was a need to move site.

What is the MP's reaction to the closure of banks leaving two important settlements - Cullompton and Crediton, without permanent banking facilities, especially in the light of major housing development planned in both towns?

The MP responded that the banks would always make commercial decisions regarding their branches and that he considered the best way forward to be to make better use of Post Offices. Banking services could be accessed at Post Offices and they could pick up local banking business. It was important that as many post offices as possible were kept open and that the public were made aware of the services on offer.

The MP concluded by informing Members that he ran a surgery on Friday afternoons if they had political concerns that they would like to raise with him.

The Chairman thanked the MP for his attendance.

118 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

HR and people having to work longer.

(The meeting ended at 3.25 pm)

CHAIRMAN