

Community PDG Chairman's Report 2017-18

It's now been 2 years since I took over as Chairman of the Community PDG. I am pleased to say that further progress has been made in consideration of the well-being for the District. For that I'd like to thank all Members and Officers for their constructive contributions in the past year.

As before, much of the work of the PDG has centred around checks and balances based on regular reports from officers and outside organisations. Some of these have been routine from financial monitoring, risk reviews through to public health plan performance and anti-social behaviour statistics. Through Member suggestions, such routine reports are no longer formally presented at meetings: Members are expected to read them with questions being addressed via email. This exception-driven approach has allowed the PDG to concentrate its energy on less mundane topics.

Other regular but less routine reports have included updates from leisure services which have triggered considerable discussion. On-going marketing initiatives and updates on the refurbishment plus extension to the Exe Valley Leisure Centre have been of interest. The PDG also carefully reviewed and agreed annual leisure service price increases combined with a fairer approach to concession pricing / availability.

Some policies require regular review to ensure currency against current legislation and guidance. These have included the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy with recommendations to Cabinet being made and subsequently ratified. Similarly, the management plan for Parks and Open Spaces was reviewed and comments provided to the Environment PDG. Equally, one-off decisions have been scrutinised, notably the controversial closures of the Customer Service surgeries at Cullompton and Crediton.

As in 2016/17 the budget was a challenge with further reductions in government funding to the District. The majority of activity for which the PDG is responsible is mandatory with economies already taken such that further reductions in staffing would be counter-productive. Where possible, charging regimes will be optimised as far as government rules permit (eg planning) or in line with market benchmarks (eg leisure services).

Perhaps the main achievement of the PDG was the issue of a Statutory Air Quality Action Plan for 2017 to 21. Whilst the District is more fortunate than many this important plan sets out various ideas to ensure that air quality is maintained or improved for the benefit of its residents. However, the committee also recognised other important topics need review. There was a presentation by the Director of Public Health from Devon County Council. The PDG also looked at the results of a community survey undertaken under the auspices of the Scrutiny Committee and will be leading similar exercises to improve Community Cohesion. At time of writing other topics of interest are in the pipeline for review including a review of Devon County's approach to cycling and multi-use trails as applicable to Mid-Devon and progression of the development of a Trim Trail in the District.

Finally, I would like to thank Julia Stuckey our Clerk for keeping us in order. Julia leaves at the end of March and we wish her well for the future.