

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 5 August 2019 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

F W Letch (Chairman)
W Burke, R J Chesterton, Mrs C P Daw,
R Evans, Mrs S Griggs, Mrs I Hill,
B Holdman, C R Slade, Ms E J Wainwright,
B G J Warren and A Wilce

Apologies

Councillor(s)

B A Moore and R L Stanley

Also Present

Councillor(s)

R M Deed

Also Present

Officer(s):

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Kathryn Tebbey (Group Manager for Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), Maria De Leiburne (Solicitor), Simon Newcombe (Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services), Matthew Page (Group Manager for Human Resources), Lisa Lewis (Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement), Joanne Nacey (Group Manager for Finance) and Carole Oliphant (Member Services Officer)

28 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00.01.00)**

Apologies were received from Cllr A Moore who was substituted by Cllr Mrs S Griggs and Cllr R J Stanley who was substituted by Cllr C Slade

29 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (00.01.14)**

There were no declarations made.

30 **VICE CHAIRMAN (00.01.25)**

In the absence of the Vice Chairman the Chairman requested that a Member of the Committee take the role of Vice Chairman for the meeting.

The Committee **AGREED** that Cllr R Evans act as Vice Chairman for the meeting.

31 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00.01.52)**

There were no members of the public present.

32 **MEMBER FORUM (00.02.03)**

There were no issues raised under this item.

33 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (00.02.11)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2019 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

34 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET (00.02.38)**

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet on 25th July had been called in.

35 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00.03.07)**

The Chairman explained to the Committee that he would be meeting with the Leader, the Leadership Team and the Monitoring Officer in September to discuss and agree the direction of the Scrutiny Committee.

He reminded Members that Stephen Bradford, Mid Devon Sector Police Inspector, would be attending the next meeting of the Committee and asked them to provide written questions before 9th August 2019 so that these could be sent onto the Inspector.

36 **LEADERS ANNUAL REPORT (00.05.34)**

The Leader of the Council gave apologies for not attending the previous meeting of the Committee and then presented Members with a *report giving an update on performance against the corporate plan and local service targets for 2018-2019.

In response to questions, the Leader confirmed he would provide further information with regard to the weed spraying initiative giving details of where the team had already completed works, where future locations had been identified and the process for the public to highlight areas of concern and request weed spraying be carried out.

He explained that waste collection costs per household had reduced by 20% from the 2014/2015 outturn and was now just outside of target at £45.31. Members requested that the collection costs per commercial premises were provided.

There was a general discussion about allocated employment sites and the Chief Executive explained that officers were proactively visiting all allocated sites, but that the Council had an obligation to manage the relationship with any landowners who came forward regarding both allocated and non-allocated sites. He explained that there was a framework for the allocation of employment sites and officers had been in contact with many landowners across the district as part of that process.

With regard to Town Centre Improvements, Members voiced concern about the 21 empty shops in Tiverton. The Chief Executive explained that as landlords of the units in Market Walk the Council had a wider discretion on rents versus costs and therefore had more opportunities to ensure that all the units were occupied as part of that direct relationship as landlord, but in privately-owned units it would be the private

landlord weighing that decision on rent levels vs occupancy. He explained that the Economy team were working to ensure that Tiverton was a welcoming place for businesses but there was a limit on the ability of the Council to fill all vacant shops which they were not directly responsible for.

Members requested that they be provided with the timeframes for the next phase of the Tiverton Town Centre Masterplan and for an update on the status on the regeneration works.

The Leader confirmed that the current administration would continue to encourage houses and living spaces to be part of the Tiverton Town Masterplan.

In response to questions about CCTV cameras being installed in Crediton and Cullompton the Leader confirmed that the Cabinet would be having discussions with regard to the provision of CCTV and the possibility any further expansion to the service. The Chief Executive explained that the challenge would be identifying who could fund additional services. There were currently conversations taking place about who should be funding this, the Police, the Town Councils or the District Council. There were also ongoing debates about the level of surveillance that should be expected in rural market towns.

The Leader confirmed that the Premier Inn in Phoenix Lane was due for completion in October 2019.

There was a general discussion about the National Apprenticeship Service and the Group Manager for Finance explained that this was a national scheme with mandatory involvement through the 'Apprenticeship Levy' for businesses exceeding a certain threshold.

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

37 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT (00.30.19)

The Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services outlined the contents of the *report and gave an overview to new members on what the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) was and who the key members were. He explained why the partnership was required and how it was funded.

He explained that the report was retrospective annual review on the activities and performance of the partnership during 2018-19. Nonetheless, it also outlines and the ongoing challenges of embedded behaviours and the issues with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and continuing priorities to consider high threat issues including drug networks, child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and modern slavery in addition to anti-social behaviour

He informed Members that updated legislation would put further legal responsibilities on the CSP with regard to violent crimes such as knife crime and these must be incorporated within the future strategy for the partnership.

Members were interested to know how the CSP dealt with the issue of county lines and he explained that a key area of the work of the CSP was intelligence sharing. He explained that there were issues of county lines activity within Tiverton and sharing of

intelligence across agencies such as housing, environmental health at MDDC and the police were helping to combat this.

With regard to the budget he explained that the Council looked to deliver the CSP within budget, however there was a small ear marked reserve to enable the Council to fund unexpected issues.

Members discussed the tensions within Cullompton in recent months and the Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services explained that the focus of the CSP had been on rented properties with a high turnover of tenants and the rogue landlord initiative.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in delivering activities against partnership priorities and action plan for 2018-2019.

Note: Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes.

38 **WHISTLEBLOWING 6 MONTH UPDATE (00.44.03)**

The Chairman stated and the Committee **NOTED** that there had been no whistleblowing instances in the previous 12 months.

39 **ESTABLISHMENT 6 MONTH UPDATE (00.45.31)**

The Committee **NOTED** the Establishment update presented by the Group Manager for Human Resources who outlined the contents of the *report and stated that sickness absence was at 7.92 days lost per FTE employee and a target of 7 days per FTE employee had been set for the financial year 2019/20. In the first quarter of 2019/20 the Council had recorded a total of 1.59 days being lost per FTE employee which, if repeated, would see us hit 6.36 days lost per FTE employee. He explained that with winter coming this figure was likely to become more of a challenge in terms of the target being hit (e.g. levels of sickness would be likely to increase).

Members felt that the sickness absence figures were unacceptably high and asked what the Council would do to get this down.

The Group Manager for Human resources explained that all local authorities were dealing with high sickness rates and that officers were currently looking at how this was reported. He explained that supporting genuine absence but also reducing it across the board (particularly in light of long term absence) was a very real challenge. In addition to the measures that had been implemented in the last six months (new return to work interview practice, monthly workforce data reports) he stated that he wished to have new guidance around how sickness was reported, certified and the guideline for where the amount of sickness should become a matter of concern.

The Leader stated that the sickness rates usually reflected the happiness of the staff and that this should be being looked at.

The Group Manager for Human Resources agreed that ensuring the Council had best practice in terms of its supervision and wellbeing support was a very real priority and would be looked at in the coming weeks and months ahead.

Members felt that the Council should not just be benchmarking itself against other local council's but be looking at the lower sickness rates in the private sector as well to see how this was maintained.

The Chief Executive explained to Members that this was about understanding what was 'genuine' sickness and looking to address any areas of concern. He highlighted that while the report and subsequent discussion was focusing on the number of days being taken as sick leave, the Council should be remember that the health and wellbeing of staff is the focus of much of the HR policy and that it's not just a statistical discussion about minimising time off when it comes to supporting those staff who were genuinely sick.

Members felt that the Council should introduce more robust exit questionnaires and interviews to understand why staff chose to leave.

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

40 **REVIEW OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE (00.58.37)**

The Chairman proposed to establish a Working Group to review the customer experience and asked for Members to agree membership of the Working Group.

The Committee agreed to establish a Working Group and agreed membership of the group as Cllr R J Chesterton, Cllr Mrs C P Daw, Cllr B G J Warren and Cllr A Wilce

The new members of the Working Group indicated that they did not require the first meeting to be until at least September/October.

41 **FORWARD PLAN (01.00.33)**

The Committee **NOTED** the forward *plan.

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

42 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS (01.01.28)**

In response to questions the Member Services Officer confirmed that the Cabinet Members reports were scheduled into the Scrutiny Committee forward plan and would commence at the end of September.

(The meeting ended at 3.13 pm)

CHAIRMAN

