

## MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 20 July 2020 at 2.15 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

F W Letch (Chairman)  
W Burke, R J Chesterton, Mrs C P Daw,  
J M Downes, R Evans, B Holdman,  
B A Moore, R L Stanley, B G J Warren and  
A Wilce

### **Also Present**

#### **Councillor(s)**

R M Deed, G Barnell, E J Berry, D J Knowles, A White and  
Mrs N Woollatt

### **Also Present**

#### **Officer(s):**

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Andrew Jarrett (Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Jenny Clifford (Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration), Kathryn Tebbey (Head of Legal (Monitoring Officer)), Ian Chilver (Group Manager for Financial Services), Lisa Lewis (Group Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement), Simon Newcombe (Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services), Maria De Leiburne (Legal Services Team Leader), Aaron Beecham (Forward Planning Assistant), Clare Robathan (Scrutiny Officer) and Carole Oliphant (Member Services Officer)

## 40 **VIRTUAL MEETING PROTOCOL**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, the \*Virtual Meeting Protocol.

Note: \*Virtual Meeting Protocol previously circulated and attached to the minutes

## 41 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00.02.10)**

There were no apologies or substitute Members

## 42 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (00.02.20)**

Members were reminded to make declarations of interest when appropriate

## 43 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00.02.29)**

There were no members of the public present.

## 44 **MEMBER FORUM (00.02.58)**

There were no issues raised under this item.

#### 45 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (00.03.07)**

The minutes of the last meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020 were approved as a correct record.

#### 46 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET (00.05.10)**

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020 had been called in.

#### 47 **CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE REPORT (00.05.25)**

The Cabinet Member for Finance highlighted the contents of his \*report and thanked officers for distributing the business grants which had involved many extra hours of work. He wanted to show his appreciation for all the hard work completed.

He addressed the loss of income due to Covid 19 and the fact that Council had received circa £900k in Government funding and confirmed that a revised budget would be brought forward in September 2020.

He explained that there was a budget gap challenge for 2023/2024 and that the Council was exploring more innovative ways of working, looking to increase income, share resources, prioritise budgets and take on new ways of delivering services. This would all help move towards bridging the Council's estimated funding gap.

In response to a direct request to provide more detail on the steps being taken to address the budget gap the Cabinet Member for Finance stated that it was a work in progress but he agreed to attend the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to present that information.

Consideration was given to:

- The restrictions of grants through the Housing Infrastructure Fund
- Whether the circa £900k received from the Government covered the Council's loss of income

The Deputy Chief Executive (S151) Officer explained that in addition to the Government monies already received the Government had announced an income protection guarantee which would include the loss of income from car parking revenue and the leisure centres having to be closed. Initial indications were that the Council would need to fund the first 5% of lost income but the Government would fund the remaining 95% but the full details of the scheme were not yet known. He stated that the Council was currently looking at a shortfall in income of circa £1m but that it was not possible to give an exact figure now.

Note: \*report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

#### 48 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00.24.46)**

The Chairman announced that he would pause the meeting if required if it was still in session after a number of hours.

## 49 REPORT OF THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WORKING GROUP (00.25.26)

Cllr Mrs C P Daw, the Chairman of the Customer Experience Working Group, presented the \*final report and explained that it contained 6 recommendations for the Committee to consider.

She explained that members of the Working Group had agreed that they should explore the end to end customer experience and had visited 11 departments. They felt that the current CRM system was not fit for purpose and found that customers were having to make repeat calls for information and feedback. The Group wanted to stress that MDDC Officers were doing a good job despite the system issues. She explained that the Group had investigated the CRM system used by North Devon District Council and felt this to be the best option for a solution.

The Scrutiny Officer further explained that the CRM recommendation was the key issue as it involved monies for a new system. She explained the North Devon District Council were using the Firmstep system and they had described how it had more than paid for itself by freeing up time and that they had found it good value for money.

The Committee discussed the report of the Working Group and were in agreement with the recommendations but were concerned that there were no timeframes attached for the Cabinet to act upon them.

The Cabinet Member for the Working Environment and Support Services stated that she noted the comments and that this had been a valuable exercise which she was willing to support and take forward.

It was therefore:

### **RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet:

1. That a business case for a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to replace the existing technology is developed and considered by the Cabinet. That any new system be designed with customer need at the centre of the process.
2. That systems work to full capacity and meet the needs of the customer first and foremost. Back offices should carry out service reviews and review business processes to ensure they are customer focused.
3. To ensure customers are at the heart of the Council, a customer focused culture should be promoted across the whole organisation - for all staff from the top down. This could include training (for Leadership Team, Officers and Members), Members/staff workshops or the use of advocates/case studies to promote a new system.
4. That a customer survey is carried out with members of the public regarding their experience and satisfaction as customers of the Council. Results are reported back to the Working Group when available.
5. That the Planning Department consider re-establishing a dedicated phone answering system, to ensure officers have capacity to focus on applications.
6. That the phone waiting times are reduced. A review of why the Service Level Agreement is not being met is carried out.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: \*report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

## 50 **REVENUE AND OUTTURN REPORT (00.39.13)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, the \*Revenue and Outturn report previously presented to the Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

The Group Manager for Finance explained that this was a generic report which detailed the performance against budget. He explained that in December 2019 the budget deficit had been predicted at £252k but this had improved to an actual year end deficit of £232k which was very close to an overall budget of £10m.

He explained that the £863k utilised from the Ear Marked Reserves indicated the progress of projects and that funds had been set aside for future projects.

In response to a question asked about the usefulness of the Scrutiny Committee being presented the report after it had been seen by the Cabinet. The Deputy Chief Executive (S151) Officer explained that it was a statutory requirement that the budget was brought before the Scrutiny Committee and that it was Scrutiny's role to scrutinise it.

Consideration was given to:

- Monies would only be released for a replacement CRM system when a successful business case had been presented
- Impairments on loans to 3 Rivers Developments Ltd

Note: \*Revenue and Outturn report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

## 51 **COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP (00.57.54)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, a \*report from the Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services detailing the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) activities during 2019-2020.

The Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services explained that this was a retrospective report which detailed the activities of the partnership over the 2019-2020 period and outlined the partnership funding and Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR's). He explained that a DHR was a multi-agency review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over had, or appears to have been as a result of violence, abuse or neglect.

In response to a question asked about the role of the CSP in investigating these deaths when the Coroner already carried out this work he explained that there was a statutory duty of all the agencies to investigate these deaths to see if lessons could be learned going forward.

He explained that self-help guides for user of the Devon Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Support Services provided by the CSP whilst victims wait for 1:1 support from the services. Unfortunately, these services, not funded by the CSP, had been

oversubscribed and had been a victim of their own success, that unfortunately resulting in up to a 9 months delay for people needing to obtain the guides. He explained that the funding for this project was currently being reviewed by those agencies that support it directly.

Members expressed concerns regarding the wait times and felt that the Community PDG should look at additional funding for this project. They requested an update report be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee to assess the resolution.

Note: \*report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

## 52 **STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT REVIEW 2020 (01.07.50)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, the \*Statement of Community Involvement Review from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration.

She explained that the report detailed how the Council would consult on local plans, supplementary planning documents and planning applications.

The Forward Planning Officer then went on to explain that a review had been undertaken to take account of the revised National Planning Policy Framework and outlined the temporary solutions and key changes.

He outlined the new section which set out area's in which the Council could provide additional support on Neighbourhood Planning processes.

In response to a questions asked as to why S106 Governance arrangements had been removed from the original Statement the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration explained that the arrangements would form part of a separate governance paper which would be brought before the Scrutiny Committee before it was presented to the Cabinet. She further explained that S106 was not part of the planning process and therefore should not be included within the Statement of Community Involvement and required its own governance arrangements.

Note: \*report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

## 53 **GREATER EXETER STRATEGIC PLAN (01.21.48)**

The Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration explained that the Committee had two reports before them the \* Joint Statement of Community Involvement for the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) and the \*\* Greater Exeter Strategic Plan Draft Policies and Site Options consultation document.

She informed the Committee that the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan Draft Policies and Site Options consultation document was being presented across all four authorities and had previously been considered by Exeter City Council and Teignbridge District Council.

The Forward Planning Officer then gave an overview of the GESP by way of a presentation which highlighted:

- Maintained Member engagement in formulating policies

- Sustainable development
- High level strategic plans
- Site options
- Evidence documents

Members then discussed the GESP in detail and raised various concerns including:

- The relevance of GESP to the Local Plan which was due to be formally adopted
- What was the definition of a larger development
- Why a Statement of Common Ground could not be considered in the place of GESP
- If signing up to GESP would address employment opportunities in Mid Devon
- GESP was too Exeter centric
- That Okehampton was not included as it fell outside of the district boundary of the GESP
- The effect of the GESP on property prices within Mid Devon and that the GESP appeared to be to solve Exeter's housing problems
- The numbers of new houses proposed by the GESP seemed to high to sustain employment opportunities
- Not enough time for Members to consider the documents and to make comments and that the GESP would take precedence over the MDDC Local Plan
- Previously rejected development sites had reappeared on the GESP
- The lack of provision for increased secondary education in Tiverton
- The current capability of digital networks and could it cope with more development
- The 8 week timescale of the initial public consultation was not long enough and how this would be presented to the public

In response to the concerns raised the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration and the Forward Planning Officer provided the following responses:

- The GESP plans sat alongside the Local Plans and dealt with cross boundary issues such as climate change and how people lived and worked in the area
- GESP was focussed on development of 500 houses or more. As part of the GESP local landowners and developers had been asked to identify possible future development sites
- The Council had a duty to co-operate and would always need to engage with neighbouring authorities but the GESP could tackle the wider picture such as climate change, transport policy and the economy. It was an opportunity to coordinate the big issues and there was strength on working together
- There were more opportunities for employment in Exeter but the plan sought to address local employment across the districts
- A number of the districts had a rail network but Okehampton was not included as it fell outside the plan. However, there was still a duty to co-operate with neighbouring authorities and the GESP would be working with local authority partners
- House numbers included were not all new homes and included existing commitments and allocated sites. Exeter City Council were taking a

responsible approach and looking across the city and brownfield land opportunities

- The Local Planning Authorities had the power to reject planning applications even if they were brought forward by the GESP and that the Joint Statement of Community Involvement detailed the proposed consultation
- Education requirements were considered as part of any process of plan making and evidence was taken from the education authority based on projected numbers and the need for additional education infrastructure
- The GESP strategy and proposal made a greater digital connectivity a key element of the GESP vision, especially in rural areas. A number of policies had been introduced to improve home working
- The GESP team would need to think carefully about the presentation to the public and this would be the first of a series of consultations. There would be a range of different options which would ensure communication with the public

Members then went on to discuss the recommendations in the reports and specifically the recommendation that Cabinet give delegated authority to the Leader, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and Chief Executive, to agree changes to the above documents arising from decisions by the other GESP authorities before they are published for consultation.

The Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration explained that the recommendation was to ensure that each of the local authorities could make amendments to the plan or debate changes without the need for full consultation each time. She confirmed that Teignbridge District Council Scrutiny Committee had also considered this point and had amended the recommendation so that the delegated powers only related to 'minor editorial amendments'.

Therefore:

It was **AGREED** to **NOTE** the recommendations to the Cabinet contained within the Joint Statement of Community Involvement for the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan and the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan Draft Policies and Site Options consultation document, subject to the following comments which the Scrutiny Committee asked to be brought to the attention of the Cabinet:

- That the Cabinet recognised the concerns with the GESP expressed by the Scrutiny Committee on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020 including:
  - The democratic process
  - Lack of scope including neighbouring authorities
  - Over complexity
  - Overly Exeter focussed
  - Hierarchy of plans
  - Infrastructure concerns
- That any delegated authority given should be for minor editorial changes only

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Notes:

- i.) \* Joint Statement of Community Involvement for the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan previously circulated and attached to the minutes

- ii.) \*\* Greater Exeter Strategic Plan Draft Policies and Site Options consultation document previously circulated and attached to the minutes

#### 54 **HOUSING INFRASTRUCTURE FUND (03.14.29)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, a \*report from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration detailing the housing infrastructure fund and the funding agreement with Homes England.

Members discussed the report and consideration was given to the following:

- A planning appeal allowed by an Inspector which did not award S106 funds towards the funding of the relief road in Cullompton
- Concerns of Members that there were risks with refunding the housing infrastructure fund
- The road infrastructure arrangements and timings for the Tiverton Urban Extension

Therefore;

It was **RECOMMENDED** that the Housing Infrastructure Funding risks were investigated by the Audit Committee.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: \*report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

#### 55 **FORWARD PLAN (03.43.45)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, the \*Forward Plan

Note: \*Forward Plan previously circulated and attached to the minutes

#### 56 **SCRUTINY OFFICER UPDATE (03.43.49)**

The Scrutiny Officer updated Members on the Scrutiny Committee Menopause Working Group and the fact that they welcomed more female Members getting involved.

#### 57 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (03.46.15)**

The following items were identified for the next meeting:

- The Cabinet Member for Finance was asked to attend and give more detail on the income, shared resources, prioritised budgets and new ways of delivering services to bridge the £1.4m funding gap
- The Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services would provide a further update on additional funding for the self-help guides for service users of the Devon Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Support Services

(The meeting ended at 6.13 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**