

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 18 January 2021 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

F W Letch (Chairman)
G Barnell, W Burke, L J Cruwys,
Mrs C P Daw, J M Downes, C J Eginton,
Mrs S Griggs, S J Penny, R L Stanley,
B G J Warren and A Wilce

Apologies

Councillor(s)

E J Berry

Also Present

Councillor(s)

R M Deed, R Evans and Mrs N Woollatt

Also Present

Officer(s):

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Andrew Jarrett (Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Jill May (Director of Business Improvement and Operations), Lisa Lewis (Corporate Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement), Matthew Page (Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste), Catherine Yandle (Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security), Maria De Leiburne (Legal Services Team Leader), Sally Gabriel (Member Services Manager), Clare Robathan (Scrutiny Officer) and Carole Oliphant (Member Services Officer)

133 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (0.03.47)**

Apologies were received from Cllr E J Berry who was substituted by Cllr C J Eginton

134 **REMOTE MEETINGS PROTOCOL (0.04.05)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, the *Remote Meetings Protocol.

Note: *Remote meetings protocol previously circulated and attached to the minutes

135 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (0.04.41)**

Members were reminded of the need to make declarations of interest when appropriate.

136 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (0.04.47)**

There were no questions from members of the public present.

137 **MEMBER FORUM (0.05.19)**

There were no issues raised under this item.

138 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (0.06.13)**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a true record

139 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET (0.08.31)**

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet on 7th January 2021 had been called in.

140 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (0.08.44)**

The Chairman stated that a recent joint briefing for the Scrutiny and Audit Committees was very useful and gave a steer on the remits for both Committees with regard to 3 Rivers Developments Ltd

141 **CABINET MEMBER FOR WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND SUPPORT SERVICES (0.10.03)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, a *report of the Cabinet Member for Working Environment and Support Services presenting services within her portfolio.

The Cabinet Member outlined the contents of her report and asked for questions from the Committee.

The Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste explained that the reasons for increased challenges with staff conduct was that there were now formal mechanisms for staff to raise issues. A new Conduct policy had been agreed but there were a number of learning points including:

- Informal communications could be improved
- Building confidence in staff to raise issues
- More issues were coming forward as staff were recognising that the organisation would deal with their concerns

He explained that agency spend had increased slightly as the Council had to deal with staff shortages in key areas due to the effects of the pandemic.

The Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security explained that all instances of verbal abuse against staff were investigated by the Health and Safety Officer and the line manager. Staff were offered counselling if the event was traumatic and procedures were put in place if required. This could include 2 person visits only to properties where abusive and threatening behaviour were an ongoing issue. She confirmed that the Council had and would continue to take action against offenders who abused staff.

The Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement explained that although the out of hours service was outsourced to Taunton Deane there were instances where issues needed to be escalated above their remit. These escalated issues were dealt with by the Customer Services Managers within MDCC.

The Cabinet Member for Working Environment and Support Services confirmed that she was holding regular meetings with her management team.

The Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement explained that although face to face contact with customers had reduced due to opening restrictions at the offices, the on line contacts had increased. A customer satisfaction survey was currently being undertaken using on-line and telephone contact.

Note: *Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

142 **DRAFT BUDGET (0.40.28)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, a * report of the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) requesting that the Cabinet review the revised draft budget changes identified and discuss any further changes required in order for the Council to move towards a balanced budget for 2021/22.

The Deputy Chief Executive (S151) outlined the contents of the report stating that the figures before members were a current snapshot of where the Council was at the current time, the deficit was down to £490k but that there was more work to do.

He stated that work was ongoing and outlined the key movements and assumptions shown within the report highlighting the Government income protection, the Autumn Statement, the funding settlement, the New Homes Bonus and the Lower Tier Service Grant.

He explained the Capital Programme for 2021-2022 which showed an initial total of £17.3m (including the HRA) and included significant projects including the Housing Infrastructure Schemes, 3 Rivers Development Projects and Housing Development Schemes.

In response to a question asked about the pooling dividend, the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) explained to Members that the Council had been part of a Devon wide business rates pool for a number of years. The aim of the scheme was that Devon authorities pooled the benefits and losses to mitigate individual authority exposure. Although MDCC had always realised a small benefit from the scheme in the past he had not factored in a benefit for 2021-2022.

Consideration was given to:

- That all FiT payments were recycled into additional renewable projects
- How the £490k budget gap may be bridged
- That there was public consultation on the Council's budget
- That there was a cap on the amount that Council Tax could be increased

Note: *Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

143 **ANNUAL REPORT OF COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (1.03.57)**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a *report of the Corporate Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement providing information on compliments, comments and complaints received as part of the 2 million plus contacts with customers in 2019/2020.

The Corporate Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement outlined the contents of the report and explained that during the pandemic there had been a significant reduction in telephone contact with the Council. There had been an increase in on line contact and more compliments had been received.

In response to questions asked she explained that the number of compliments had not been detailed to service level and that Member compliments to staff were only included if details had been received by the Customer Services team.

Members then discussed the number of complaints which had been escalated to the ombudsman and noted that only one had been upheld. They acknowledged that the Council was comparing well to other authorities and that there did not seem to be an issue with complaint resolution.

Note: *Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

144 **3 RIVERS DEVELOPMENTS LTD BUSINESS PLAN (01.18.30)**

Members requested that the 3 Rivers Development Ltd Business Plan was brought in front of the Scrutiny Committee.

The Chief Executive explained that the Business Plan would need to be presented to the shareholder in the first instance as this was in the Shareholder Agreement however the plan could be brought to Scrutiny once it had been initially reviewed by the Cabinet.

The Leader confirmed that the Business Plan could be brought to Scrutiny after it had been presented to the Cabinet on 4th February 2021.

The Committee therefore **RESOLVED** that:

- The 3 Rivers Developments Ltd Business Plan be discussed by the Scrutiny Committee after it had been presented to the Cabinet on 4th February 2021

(Proposed by Cllr A Wilce and seconded by Cllr Mrs C P Daw).

Note: Councillor R L Stanley declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest with regard to his involvement with 3 Rivers Developments Limited and left the meeting for the discussion and vote

145 **SCRUTINY OFFICER UPDATE (1.27.55)**

The Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee on items she had been working on and stated that:

- The Final report of the Menopause Working Group would be presented to the February Meeting
- The Planning Enforcement Working Group would now move forward and steps had been instigated to obtain details of actual cases which Members had wished to raise
- Neil Parish MP would be attending a special meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in February and Members would be requested to submit any questions in advance.

146 **FORWARD PLAN (01.30.03)**

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

The Chief Executive explained the Policy Framework and confirmed that the Teckal Company implementation would be considered by Council.

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

147 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (1.36.02)**

Members requested the following items be brought to the February Meeting:

- 3 Rivers Developments Ltd Business Plan
- A report on the processes used for the Public Spaces Protection Order

(The meeting ended at 4.02 pm)

CHAIRMAN