

Community Annual Report 2020-21

The first meeting of the year took place on 28 July, at which Cllr Colin Slade was elected Chairman. Shortly after, Cllr Slade was appointed Cabinet Member for the Environment, and as such I was duly elected Chairman of the Community Policy Development Group (PDG) in the September meeting.

Throughout the year the Group has heard regular updates from the Leisure Manager, outlining the health and wellbeing activities in the three leisure facilities at Exe Valley, Culm Valley and Lords Meadow. This year we discussed the impact that Covid 19 was having on the Leisure Centres, and discussed processes for re-opening when they could. We also received a detailed presentation on the electronic booking system used and a demonstration of the mobile app. Members discussed whether the current system was user friendly, and that there are funds held in the capital programme for 2022/2023 for an improvement to the system. Members agreed they would support a case to increase funding for an enhanced IT offering, and at our January meeting we discussed the possibility of setting up a Working Group to help establish a procurement exercise when the time is right.

In October I chaired a joint special meeting of the Community, Environment and Homes PDG's to review the Operations Directive Enforcement Policy. The policy is a key enforcement policy which covers all the enforcement functions of the Council, except planning enforcement. The policy was brought back to the Groups for adoption due to a number of legislative changes and a change to the reporting framework of the Council. Discussion in the special PDG took place on how legislation changes were reviewed; how recycling enforcement impacted on recycling rates; and other issues, including stray dogs. The joint meeting then recommend that the Cabinet adopt the revised Enforcement Policy subject to some minor amendments.

We had two Working Groups during this year. The first reviewed the processes and level of funding to individual grant recipients for 2021-2024. Throughout discussions, members recognised the effect of the pandemic on the stability and finances of our strategic partners in the voluntary and community sector. In recognition that this has been an extraordinary year, the group recommended that the current funding settlement should run for a 12 month period from 2021-2022, after which a further review would commence, and that the scheme should be closed to new applicants for 2021-2022. The Group presented its final recommendations to the Community PDG in January 2021, at which we heard a representation from the Museum of Mid Devon Life. Consideration was given to the saving from Age UK Mid Devon which the Group agreed should be offered as a saving to protect grants for other partners. We therefore recommended that: a one year grant award be made for 2021-2022, with a review in the autumn of 2021; grants be made on a one year settlement basis, to be reviewed annually each autumn; that the £9,650 previously offered to Age UK Mid Devon be identified as a saving; and that the grant payments for 2021–2022 to the Council's other strategic partners should remain at the same levels as 2020-2021. The Cabinet subsequently approved our recommendations.

The second Working Group reviewed the MDDC Communications and Engagement Strategy, before it was brought back to the Committee for approval. The Group

discussed issues including: how the strategy was helping to reach hard to reach people; the use of local media; and the proposal for Councillor Champions. The Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan was reviewed by the Working Group and recommended approval subject to a reference being added to the Strategy of the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations. The Group agreed that the issue of Communications and Engagement would be revisited towards the end of 2020.

An important part of the yearly activity is to review routine reports and receive regular financial updates, including performance and risk and the revenue and capital outturn figures. As ever, the Group received a number of regular standing items, including the annual review of the Corporate Health and Safety Policy, and the Single Equalities Policy and Equality Objectives. We also considered: the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) priorities and the planned activities of the partnership for the coming year; the Devon County Council Joint Safeguarding policy and MDDC Guidance and Procedures; and the revised Contaminated Land Cost Recovery Policy.

The PDG also received the annual CCTV update, and reviewed the use of CCTV policy. During the annual update the Group heard how the CCTV system will be upgraded in the refurbished multi storey car park, and the group requested that consideration be given to installing CCTV cameras in the stairwells. In November the group reviewed the CCTV Code of Practice, the CCTV Policy and the Action Plan and discussed the ongoing financial pressures, and the ongoing capital bid. The PDG then recommended to the Cabinet that the CCTV Code of Practice, Policy and Action Plan be adopted.

This has been my first year as Chair of the Community PDG and I have found it both challenging and rewarding. As we look forward, I hope the Group will consider an ambitious programme for the following year that continues to promote the health, safety and wellbeing of people within Mid Devon. I am keen that the Group now considers reviewing issues including community engagement, air quality and community public health. I would like to thank the Members and Officers for their contributions, as well as our Clerk, Carole Oliphant, for keeping us on track.

Cllr Christina Daw