

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 11 October 2021 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

B G J Warren (Chairman)
Mrs F J Colthorpe, L J Cruwys,
Mrs S Griggs, S Pugh, R F Radford,
Mrs E J Lloyd, A Wilce and B Holdman

Apologies

Councillor(s)

G Barnell, E J Berry, P J Heal and F W Letch

Also Present

Councillor(s)

Mrs C P Daw, R M Deed, B A Moore 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), Karen Trickey (District Solicitor and Monitoring Officer), Lisa Lewis (Corporate Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement), Clare Robathan (Policy and Research Officer) and Carole Oliphant (Member Services Officer)

62 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (0.03.58)**

Apologies were received from Cllrs G Barnell, E J Berry, P J Heal and F W Letch who was substituted by Cllr B Holdman

63 **HYBRID MEETINGS PROTOCOL (0.04.32)**

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

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

64 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (0.04.40)**

Members were reminded of the need to make declarations where appropriate.

65 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (0.04.55)**

There were no questions from members of the public present.

66 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (0.05.15)**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

67 DECISIONS OF THE CABINET (0.06.44)

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet on 28th September had been called in.

68 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (0.06.54)

The Chairman welcomed the new Monitoring Officer, Karen Trickey and thanked Members who had attended the recent Scrutiny Training.

The Chairman deferred item 13 until the November meeting.

69 CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE (0.09.06)

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, a *report from the Cabinet Member for Finance outlining area's within his portfolio.

The Cabinet Member explained that the previous 6 months had been a busy period for the Finance teams and that they had recently completed the annual closedown of accounts. Early indications were that the Audit was a sound report. He acknowledged the work of the teams in distributing the Governments Covid grant related schemes.

He explained that all Members were vital to contribute to the Council's budget setting process as they were currently looking at a £1m shortfall and may require reductions to make ends meet.

The Deputy Chief Executive (S151) explained that there were challenges over the late advice from Government on what level of funding the Authority would receive.

Consideration was given to:

- The measurable plans to increase revenue and decrease overheads
- The Leisure services actively looking at ways to stimulate growth
- The Waste service continued to exceed revenue expected
- The building rationalisation programme
- Healthy revenue stream from Market Walk, Tiverton which was now at 100% occupancy
- Car parking machine breakdowns were reported remotely and were repaired on a timely basis, ensuring any loss of revenue was mitigated
- Participatory budgeting where communities could build into the budget setting process to be investigated
- Labour shortages and the need to use agency staff on occasions
- The Housing Strategy was ambitious and some significant borrowing would need to be sourced along with contributions from Homes England
- The Medium Term Plan would be presented to the Cabinet which would set out the Council's ambitions over the next 5 years and the Policy Development Groups would be tasked to prioritise them
- The 3 Rivers Development bi monthly update would be reported at the next Cabinet

Note: *Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

70 **UPDATE ON CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS (0.45.58)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, a *report from the Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement on progress against the Customer Experience Working Group recommendations.

The Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement gave an overview of the original recommendations and an update on the actions taken.

She explained that a recent customer survey was very positive and although the CRM had not progressed due to significant resourcing issues in the IT service, that a Project Manager was being recruited to enable the project to progress and develop a business plan.

Consideration was given to:

- A Member workshop held in March focused on customer service and Members would be surveyed on what additional workshops would be useful to them
- The Planning Service had reinstated the telephone line for customer queries
- Call waiting times had not improved due to ongoing staff vacancies and staff being redeployed to assist with the payment of Government Covid Grants during the pandemic but there were no high levels of abandoned calls

Note: *Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

71 **ANNUAL REPORT OF COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS (0.58.43)**

The Committee had before it, and **NOTED**, a *report from the Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement on Complaints and Compliments.

The Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement explained that the number of complaints were now at pre pandemic levels and had not risen significantly since then.

In response to a question asked about the correct level of officers looking at complaints she explained that the Complaints Policy was coming to the Cabinet in November which would detail the level of senior officer involvement.

Note: *Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

72 **FORWARD PLAN (01.08.23)**

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

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

73 **SCRUTINY OFFICER UPDATE (1.10.28)**

The Scrutiny Officer provided the following update:

- An update on the S106 project would be provided shortly
- The recommendations of the Planning Enforcement Working Group would be going to a future Cabinet
- The spotlight review was being held on 28th October and more Member input was required
- Connecting Devon and Somerset would be attending the November meeting

74 BIO ENERGY INDUSTRY PROPOSAL FORM (1.12.31)

Item deferred until November meeting.

75 WORK PLAN (1.12.37)

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

It was **RESOLVED** that:

Scheduled Cabinet Member reports were no longer required and would be removed from the Work Plan.

(Proposed by Cllr A Wilce and seconded by Cllr L J Cruwys)

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

76 ACCESS TO INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (1.30.42)

The Chairman indicated that discussion of the following item, may require the Scrutiny Committee to pass the following resolution to exclude the press and public having reflected on Article 12 12.02(d) (a presumption in favour of openness) of the Constitution. This decision may be required because consideration of this matter in public may disclose information falling within one of the descriptions of exempt information in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. The Scrutiny Committee would need to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption, outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

(Proposed by the Chairman)

77 CONTRACT DISPUTE SETTLEMENT 2020-2021 (1.34.24)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the information provided and were satisfied that the matter had been correctly dealt with at the time.

(Proposed by Chairman)

(The meeting ended at 4.17 pm)

CHAIRMAN