

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 13 December 2021 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

B G J Warren (Chairman)
G Barnell, Mrs F J Colthorpe, D R Coren,
L J Cruwys, P J Heal, F W Letch, S Pugh,
R F Radford, Mrs M E Squires and A Wilce

Apologies

Councillor(s)

E J Berry, Mrs S Griggs and Mrs E J Lloyd

Also Present

Councillor(s)

R J Chesterton, Mrs C P Daw, R M Deed, R Evans,
D J Knowles and R L Stanley

Also Present

Officer(s):

Andrew Jarrett (Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Richard Marsh (Director of Place), Jill May (Director of Business Improvement and Operations), Dean Emery (Corporate Manager for Revenues, Benefits and Recovery), Lisa Lewis (Corporate Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement), Matthew Page (Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste), Maria De Leburne (Operations Manager Legal and Monitoring), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader), Jason Berry (Economic Development Project Manager), Clare Robathan (Policy and Research Officer), Sally Gabriel (Member Services Manager) and Carole Oliphant (Member Services Officer)

91 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (0.04.17)

Apologies were received from Cllrs Mrs S Griggs and E J Berry who were substituted by Cllrs Mrs M E Squires and D R Coren respectively and apologies were received from Cllr Mrs E J Lloyd.

92 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (0.04.47)

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

93 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (0.05.00)

Mr Paul Elstone referring to agenda item 12 stated:

‘Given the seriousness of these allegations will the Scrutiny Committee now ensure that an unconstrained plus comprehensive and importantly a fully independent investigation is conducted? An investigation with all the available evidence available being considered including statements from the key parties.

That the full findings of this investigation are made public. This to ensure full transparency.'

The Chairman responded and advised Mr Elstone that complaints about the conduct of the Council or any of its Officers should be directed through the Complaints Procedure.

94 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (0.10.08)**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman subject to the following amendments:

- Nick Sanderson being removed as an officer from the attendance list
- Minute 88 amended to read 'loans outstanding for 2020/2021'

95 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET (0.13.00)**

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet on 30th November 2021 had been called in.

96 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (0.13.08)**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

97 **BROADBAND (0.13.32)**

The Committee had before it a *proposal form from Cllr Mrs F J Colthorpe requesting that AirBand work directly with Members to understand where the hard to reach areas are in the District.

Cllr Mrs F J Colthorpe explained that she had raised the proposal as she was not happy with the answers that Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) had provided about roll out of broadband to hard to reach areas.

In response to the proposal AirBand had been invited to attend the meeting to discuss the hard to reach area's in the District.

Paul Nethercott and Andrew Smale explained the remit of AirBand by way of a presentation and explained that the company had been contracted by CDS to provide broadband in parts of the District.

They gave an overview of 'in contract' and 'out of contract' premises and explained the different solutions available for remote properties where pole mounted fibre cables were not possible.

In response to questions asked about residents having to fund new infrastructure to enable fibre broadband to be installed the representatives from AirBand explained the Governments current voucher schemes available for both residential and commercial customers.

The AirBand representatives explained to Committee that they wanted to encourage individual Members, Parish Council's and the public to be involved in the roll out and highlight properties that had not been earmarked for connection in the CDS contract. In addition other providers were installing fibre optic in hard to reach areas but they had no obligation to inform CDS or AirBand where they had or intended to install a service. This was proving to be difficult and there was an element of duplication.

Members felt that the presentation and overview given was very informative and it would be very useful for Parish Council's to be provided with the information. AirBand confirmed they would be happy to attend Parish Council meetings and give an overview and they encouraged Members to contact their Parish Councils to take up the offer.

Members agreed that the proposal by Cllr Colthorpe should be supported and it was **AGREED** that two Member representatives, Cllrs Mrs F J Colthorpe and R Radford would act as Member Liaison alongside the Scrutiny Officer and the Project Manager (Economic Recovery) to facilitate individual conversations with AirBand by Members and Parish Councils to identify hard to reach properties.

Note: *proposal form previously circulated and attached to the minutes

98 **NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING (1.03.11)**

The Vice Chairman provided a verbal update and stated that there had been very few responses received from the Parish Council's about concerns with the standard of Neighbourhood Policing. It was therefore assumed that this was not an issue causing concern amongst local residents.

It was therefore **AGREED** that this would be removed from the Work Plan for the time being.

99 **FORWARD PLAN (1.16.04)**

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

Note: *Plan previously circulated and attached to the minutes

100 **SCRUTINY OFFICER UPDATE (1.16.45)**

The Scrutiny Officer informed Members that she had sent the Bio Energy proposal to neighbouring district Scrutiny Chairmen on behalf of the Chairman and that she was in the process of collating the replies.

101 **CABINET MEMBER FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT (1.18.16)**

The Cabinet Member for Continuous Improvement provided the following update and explained the remit of her portfolio as:

1. To eliminate inappropriate communication between Members and officers
2. To establish the totality of timely decision making across the Council and to eliminate any backlog

3. To work with Directors to realise the opportunity for improved Member and officer relationships

She explained that since her appointment in March 2021 she had looked to bring in a continuous lessons learned culture into the Council so that the key issues and challenges of public concerns could be addressed and practices improved.

She went on to explain voids and reminded Committee that a briefing had been provided to all Members which explained the reasons for them and the issues which prevented properties returning to useable housing stock in the time that Members wanted to see. She informed Members that a recent House Market audit had been good and highlighted how the Council were proactively working on reducing the amount of voids.

In response to Members questions about her portfolio and if it was to implement new processes or just look at individual cases it was explained that in the first instance the amount of outstanding cases needed to be established and the reasons for these. The Leader confirmed that in the New Year the portfolio would develop to look at processes to see where these could be improved to minimise outstanding cases.

102 **WORK PLAN**

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

Consideration was given to a proposal form which had been submitted by Cllr G Barnell regarding the resourcing and timings of the Council's Masterplans.

Cllr Barnell acknowledged that the Director of Place was due to attend the next meeting and give an update and he requested a conversation with him, the Chairman of the Planning Committee and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration about the Masterplan process. This was **AGREED** and the proposal was deferred.

Note: *Workplan previously circulated and attached to the minutes

(The meeting ended at 4.20 pm)

CHAIRMAN