

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 17 January 2022
at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

B G J Warren (Chairman)
G Barnell, E J Berry, Mrs F J Colthorpe, L J Cruwys,
Mrs S Griggs, P J Heal, F W Letch, S Pugh, R F Radford,
Mrs E J Lloyd and A Wilce

Also Present

Councillor(s)

Mrs C P Daw, R M Deed, B Holdman, B A Moore and
R L Stanley

Present

Officer(s):

Andrew Jarrett (Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Richard Marsh (Director of Place), Jill May (Director of Business Improvement and Operations), Catherine Yandle (Operations Manager for Performance, Governance and Health & Safety), Maria De Leiburne (Operations Manager for Legal and Monitoring), Carole Oliphant (Member Services Officer) and Jessica Watts (Member Services Apprentice)

103 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (0.03.55)

There were no apologies or substitute Members.

104 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (0.04.07)

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

105 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (0.04.19)

Mr Elstone, referring to item 4 on the agenda, asked the following questions:

1. He had raised a complaint on 1st November 2021 and stated he had not received a reply and requested a response
2. He had raised an allegation of fraud against a MDDC Senior Officer and was advised by the Monitoring Officer that he should contact the police and felt that the decision not to investigate internally required oversight by the Scrutiny Committee.

In response the Operations Manager for Legal and Monitoring advised that his standards complaint was being investigated and that he would receive a written response in due course.

Members expressed concern that allegations of fraud did not appear to be investigated internally and asked for clarification of the process.

The Operations Manager for Performance, Governance and Health & Safety advised that the Council did have an internal escalation process for allegations of fraud and these could be referred to the Devon Audit Partnership if the allegations were substantiated. Allegations of fraud should also be referred to the police.

106 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (0.16.18)**

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

107 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET (0.17.41)**

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet on 4th January 2022 had been called in.

108 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (0.19.00)**

The Chairman made the following announcements:

- The disputed 3 RDL finance figures would be presented at the next meeting
- He had agreed that an urgent item regarding HIF funding for the Cullompton Relief Road could be brought to the next meeting of Cabinet under the General Exception Clause
- Responses had been received from other authorities regarding Anaerobic Digesters
- That Catherine Yandle, Operations Manager for Performance, Governance and Health & Safety would be leaving the authority and he thanked her for her service to the Council.

109 **DIRECTOR OF PLACE (0.22.12)**

The Director of Place gave an overview of his remit by way of a presentation which highlighted his remit, the purpose of the role, objectives and goals and how those would be achieved.

The Officer stated that this role was intentionally not a like-for-like replacement for the former Head of Planning and Regeneration role.

In response to questions he explained that engagement was key and that the people who knew a place best were those that loved and worked there. Fundamentally it was engaging early and at a local level and that Members could help with engagement of their communities.

He explained that to overcome the biodiversity crisis that the Council would need to try to plan methods to tackle this as part of the planning process.

With regard to questions regarding Masterplans he informed the Committee that there were touchpoints during developments which could take years and that Masterplans needed to be adaptable over time. In the first instance a conversation was required on where the Council was now and how it moved forward.

Consideration was given to:

- Junction 27 possibilities were being discussed by the Economy PDG who had requested further information on what development was being considered – Members were able to join the discussion through the PDG if required
- The Council had not been successful with a levelling up grant for the Cullompton Relief Road and this would have an effect on timelines so were not actively looking at land acquisitions at this point in time

110 **WHISTLEBLOWING 6 MONTH UPDATE (0.58.04)**

The Committee **NOTED** that there had been no Whistleblowing instances in the previous 6 months.

111 **BUDGET UPDATE 2022/2023 (0.59.38)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, the revised draft budget for 2022-2023.

The Cabinet Member for Finance explained that, after a lot of consultative discussion with Officers and Members including input from all PDGs, the gap to close at £947k, was still a substantial sum. He explained that this was the Council's budget and not the just the Cabinets budget and he encouraged Members to contribute to the debate. He explained that the Committee may wish to look at the process around budget setting to see if this could be improved for 2023 onwards.

The Deputy Chief Executive (S151) explained that this was the second round of budget discussions and since the initial presentation of the draft budget further savings had been identified along with the Government's Funding Settlement. He explained that the budget had gone through 1.5 rounds of the PDG's and Cabinet and that there was a requirement to scrutinise the budget.

In response to questions asked he explained that the Audit Committee did not look at the budget as it was not a statutory consultee and that the Cabinet evaluated the risk. He explained that there was significant borrowing for the Housing Infrastructure Projects but this had all been included in the Capital Budget and although the full levels of external funding were not available, the budget as presented, included the latest up to date forecast.

The officer confirmed that the increase in Capital Projects was due to the proposed increase in housing stock and that the Authority had not been a housebuilding Council for a number of years but this is what the Members had wanted to see. He explained that it would be funded by a fixed rate loan which was serviceable.

The 3 weekly bin collections, although supported by the Environment PDG, had yet to be ratified by the Cabinet and therefore any savings had not been included in the budget. If the proposal was ratified any savings would be reinvested into the waste service.

He confirmed that the budget included the agreed borrowing for 3 Rivers Developments Ltd as set out in their business plan which was presented to Scrutiny and then approved by the Cabinet in November 2021.

Members expressed support for the Committee to look into a more inclusive budget setting process which included idea's from local community groups. A proposal form would be completed and sent to the Scrutiny Officer who would bring back a full proposal at a future meeting of the Committee.

Note: *Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

112 **FORWARD PLAN (1.40.00)**

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

Note: *Plan previously circulated and attached to the minutes

113 **SCRUTINY OFFICER UPDATE (1.40.10)**

The Chairman advised that this item was deferred until the next meeting.

114 **WORK PLAN (1.41.31)**

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

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

(The meeting ended at 3.58 pm)

CHAIRMAN