

Community PDG Annual Report

Chairman's words

This year has been a busy year for the Community PDG. I would like to thank Members Services who have done a fantastic job during COVID, they have kept us going with technology during online meetings, in particular Carole Oliphant and Clare Robathan for their help. My thanks also to Cllr Elizabeth Slade, the Vice Chairman who has stepped in for me on occasions. The members of the PDG have done a sterling job especially with the working groups that we have had throughout the year. I also thank the officers across the council who have reported to the PDG.

Working Groups on CSP, strategic grants and ASB

The PDG has held three Working Groups this year. The first considered the priorities and activities of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in detail. Members had concerns about violence against women and also wanted to investigate the effect the pandemic had and how priorities of the CSP may have changed. The group saw how during the pandemic support agencies and police have seen a significant rise in the number of victims coming forward to report sexual and domestic abuse and seek support. The group discussed and acknowledged how mental health has been impacted by the pandemic and that it is a thread through many of the priority areas of the CSP work. The group recommended that members have the opportunity to complete Mental Health First Aid Training in order to enhance and support their community liaison role within communities, and that officers review the Council becoming a 'Trauma Informed Council' and potentially adopt a trauma informed approach to future service delivery. Members are due to review this approach at our March meeting.

The second working group reviewed the strategic grant funding for the financial year 2022-2023. There is continuing pressure on local government finances, and the PDG asked the Cabinet to set the level of strategic grants funding as part of the budget setting process. The Working Group received presentations from all Strategic Partners and recommended that the total Strategic Grants budget remain at £138,500 for a period of two years, and that individual awards to Strategic Partners remain at the 2020-2021 levels for this period. We also recommended the level of grant awards to individual partners for 2022-23 and 2023-24.

The third Working Group of the PDG this year is ongoing, and is on anti-social behaviour in the District. Members are reviewing the current policies and enforcement, and how to ensure the Council has a targeted and effective response to anti-social behaviour in the District. This is a prevalent and important issue that has a big impact on communities, and it needs a comprehensive and coherent review and response. The Working Group is looking at the local context, where ASB occurs and any key areas across the District, as well as how the council interacts with partners to develop a cohesive response.

Action on Air Quality

Throughout the year the PDG has reviewed progress on the Air Quality Action Plan. The action plan had stalled during 2020 as Public Health officers had been redeployed to assist with services dealing with the pandemic. In November, the PDG reviewed the updated measures proposed for the plan, including traffic management

and electric vehicle charging. There had been a public consultation, although response had been quite low. Following discussion, the PDG recommended adopting the updated Air Quality Action Plan.

Leisure Centres

Throughout the year the Group has heard updates from the Leisure Manager, outlining the health and wellbeing activities in the council's leisure facilities. We heard the impact that Covid 19 continues to have on the Leisure Centres, and the activities the Leisure team had been involved in, including in shielding hubs by supporting the telephones lines and visits to the vulnerable. We heard how the leisure recovery plan will review the critical phases, including reviewing the staffing structure and introducing enhanced training and development for staff. Future deliverables include an improved leisure app and online offerings and booking system. In November, we discussed the leisure pricing review for 2022-23, and resolved to delegate the decision on fees and charges for Leisure Services to the Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing.

Budget – identifying potential savings

Discussions on the budget throughout the year looked at how to close the current deficit within the council, and to identify any potential savings. We held a dedicated meeting on the Medium Term Financial Plan - General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital Programme in December to look at not just identifying cuts, but also how to improve revenue income. The PDG considered the car parking and leisure revenue and how it had been impacted by the pandemic, and discussed that commercial ventures which provided economic growth for the District should be investigated and long terms plans to realise these should be considered.

In January we reviewed the revised draft budget changes identified and discussed further changes required in order for the Council to move towards a balanced budget for 2022/23. We agreed that retention and growth in the leisure service was a priority and that it would be difficult to reduce Grants to strategic partners in future years. The PDG considered the options for savings and discussed the savings measures which had been suggested by officers.

Regular reports and reviews

An important part of the yearly activity is to review routine reports, policy reviews and receive regular financial updates. The PDG received a number of standing items including the annual review of the Council's Regulation of Investigatory Powers Policy, the three yearly review of the Customer Care Policy, and the Performance and Risk Outturn. We also considered the DCC Strategy for Domestic Abuse Support in Safe Accommodation and heard a presentation from the Crediton Area History & Museum Society on an exhibition that they intended to run in 2023.

Cllr Margaret Squires