

ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

24 MAY 2022

WORK PROGRAMME & POLICY DEVELOPMENT 2022/23

Reason for Report: To identify and prioritise the PDG's work for 2022/23.

RECOMMENDATION: The PDG's work programme (as currently sent out in Appendix A) be updated.

Financial Implications: No direct implications.

Budget and Policy Framework: No direct implications

Legal Implications: None

Risk Assessment: N/A

Equality Impact Assessment: N/A

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The PDG's work programme should be consistent with the Corporate Plan or recommend changes to reflect budget pressures.

Impact on Climate Change: No direct implications for this report.

1.0 **Background**

1.1 Members of the PDG will appreciate that the PDG has a key role in investigating and advising Cabinet on environment policy matters which:

- (a) are pertinent to the Council's existing 'Environment' priorities set out in its Corporate Plan at <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/348008/20200312corporateplan20-2024v6.pdf>
- (b) are pertinent to the PDG's strategic service responsibilities namely:
 - climate change and reduction of carbon footprint;
 - parks and open spaces (including cemeteries, trees, grounds maintenance and grass cutting);
 - waste (including collection, recycling, street cleaning, trade and clinical waste);
 - public conveniences;
 - environmental enforcement (vehicles, animal control, fly tipping, fly posting);
 - flood defence and drainage;
 - miscellaneous (including clocks and monuments; street naming and numbering);and
- (c) look ahead and in that regard continue to be ambitious but realistic (even if demanding) particularly taking account of:
 - the medium term budget forecasts; and
 - the needs of and feedback from, the communities within Mid Devon.

1.2 Given the wide range of such work, the PDG is invited to identify the areas of policy work it would like to concentrate on during 2022/23, being the last year

of the current Council term. The current work programme which contains matters carried forward from 2021/22, is set out in Appendix A. It will be noted that the programme includes budget matters and reviews of existing policy and strategic performance targets. There is one item which if considered by the PDG would potentially duplicate work being undertaken by the responsible working / advisory group. Similarly, if there are areas of work which the PDG would like to consider which potentially overlap with other PDGs or even Scrutiny Committee, such work allocation can be resolved by the Programming Panel. It is anticipated that the Programming Panel will be convened in early July once each PDG and Scrutiny Committee have had the opportunity to discuss their individual work programmes for the year to avoid duplication of work and secure efficient use of resources.

1.3 As indicated in paragraph 1.1 above, when identifying the work to include in its programme, it is strongly recommended that consideration be given to the medium term budget pressures. This is currently included in the work programme for the PDG's January meeting which Members will appreciate is relatively late in the annual budget planning process. For example, in deciding to investigate the potential impact of 2023/24 budget pressures on existing environment priorities as part of its work programme in the first six months of the current civic year, the PDG could:

- effectively engage a range of key stakeholders in helping to identify how lower service priorities could be changed for the better (or reluctantly compromised), in the public interest;
 - provide detailed advice to Cabinet in the autumn and ultimately full Council in February 2023 as part of the budget setting process;
- and
- outline an effective process / path which will highlight the key policy development role of the PDG in promoting the Council's leadership of environment focused projects / services beyond 2022.

1.4 Furthermore, to assist with the identification of areas of work (whether or not as part of a specific project to prioritise environment policy focused projects within the context of the medium term budget pressures), feedback from the 2021/22 residents' survey is set out in the remainder of this report. Section 2 of this report considers general issues. Section 3 covers feedback specific to the environment for more detailed consideration as part of the Environment PDG's work programme.

2. **Residents' Survey**

2.1 There were 1683 responses to the survey. Residents were asked to reply to 33 questions – with a mix of closed 'tick box' questions and open 'feedback' questions. Open feedback questions included:

- What single thing can the Council do to improve quality of life in your community?
- Are there any particular service areas which you feel should *not* reduce their expenditure?

- Is there anything else you think the Council should consider a priority when setting the budget?
- If you have any specific issues not covered in this survey, please comment below.

2.2 When asked how well MDDC keeps residents informed, 8% replied very well informed, 37% well informed, 37% not well informed and 14% not well informed at all; with 'don't know' covering the deficit in the 100% response. There were 48 comments about increased communication, engagement and consultation with residents. Ideas and comments included:

- Provide local written updates from the District Councillor e.g. in neighbourhood magazines;
- Increase interaction with the local community, e.g. community events or walkabouts;
- Greater consultation about forthcoming changes/regularly seek views;
- Allow residents to be more involved in decisions that affect them;
- Enable citizen participation in working groups; and
- Revert to pre-covid opening hours of Phoenix House.

2.3 There were 13 comments requesting the Council ensure focus is wider than just Tiverton. Residents asked for greater focus on rural areas and for other towns to be treated in line with Tiverton.

2.4 In response to the specific question, 67% of respondents said it is very important that the Council tackles climate change. A further 23% said it is fairly important (90% in total).

3. Survey Responses re: Climate Change

3.1 There were 88 comments on climate change, with many residents commenting that this is the single thing that would improve quality of life in their community. Ideas for climate change activity include:

- 'Wilding' local spaces owned by MDDC with wildflowers and trees;
- enhancing biodiversity – e.g. community planting, promoting pollinator friendly plants;
- Trialling innovative ideas in small communities – e.g. going plastic free, community larders;
- Increasing solar panels on Council property;
- Helping residents adopt low carbon heating systems; and
- Increasing EV points in the District.

4 Survey Responses re: Parks and Open Spaces

4.1 46% of people said it is very important to support parks and open spaces and 44% said it is fairly important. There were 10 comments made on parks and open spaces, with requests for an increase in play areas and provision of adult gym equipment in parks.

4.2 42% of people said it is very important to introduce measures to increase cycling and walking and a further 37% said it was fairly important. There were

25 comments on cycling/walking. Residents would like to see action to encourage people out of their cars, they requested:

- An increase in dedicated cycle and pedestrian routes;
- An increase in cycle lanes in rural areas;
- Cycle routes to connect towns; and
- Safer cycling/walking routes to get cyclists off main roads.

5 Survey Responses re: Waste and Street Cleaning

5.1 40% of respondents responded as being very satisfied with the Council's waste collection and a further 41% were fairly satisfied. When asked which one service should not be cut, 36% of people said waste/recycling services. (Incidentally, the next largest answer was housing at 8%).

5.2 With regards to satisfaction of street cleaning services, 14% are very satisfied, 34% fairly satisfied, 15% fairly dissatisfied and 10% very dissatisfied (27% neither). There were 45 comments on street cleaning, with 42 people saying it is the single thing that would improve their community. Residents asked for:

- Increase cleaning of pavements;
- Increase in litter picking;
- Maintenance of weeds; and
- Increase of dog poo bins.

6 Survey Responses re: Public Conveniences

6.1 When asked which discretionary services residents would most like to see protected, 63% said public toilets (there being an option to choose up to five).

7 Conclusion

7.1 Taking account of the matters covered in this report, the PDG is invited to (i) discuss and reflect on specific comments and themes which have emerged from the analysis of the survey results; and (ii) identify work / projects it would like to undertake in 2022/23 as part of its work programme (see Appendix A).

Contact for more Information:

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