

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 13 April 2015 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

Mrs J Roach (Chairman)
Mrs H Bainbridge (substituting for Councillor E J Berry), A V G Griffiths, Mrs S Griggs, T G Hughes, M R Lee, Mrs J Rendle, Mrs M E Turner and N A Way

Apologies

Councillors

E J Berry and T W Snow

Also Present

Councillors

Mrs E M Andrews and R L Stanley

Also Present

Officers:

Liz Reeves (Head of Customer Services), Jenny Clifford (Head of Planning and Regeneration), Catherine Yandle (Internal Audit Team Leader) and Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

164 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Councillor E J Berry, who was substituted by Councillor Mrs H Bainbridge and from Councillor T W Snow.

165 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from the members of the public present.

166 **MEMBER FORUM**

There were no issues raised under this item.

167 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Following the addition of the wording "The matter of £15K being allocated to the Master Plan was raised" under Minute 158 the minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

168 **DECISIONS OF THE CABINET**

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet at its last meeting had been called in.

169 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Inspector Jane Alford-Mole to the meeting.

170 MEETING MANAGEMENT

The Chairman informed the Committee that she intended to take item 12 on the agenda before item 8.

171 POLICE DETECTION RATES

Inspector Jane Alford-Mole thanked the Committee for inviting her to the meeting.

The Inspector explained that over the last few years crime standards had changed. There were strict rules and regulations into the reporting of crime and the HMRC monitored this and regularly undertook audits. This was the case for all forces across the country and strict guidelines had to be followed.

A crime had to be reported within 72 hours but it was expected that this would be changing to 24 hours.

If an offence was alleged, unless it could be disproved, it must be recorded. A lot of low level crime reported to police in previous years could be dealt with on the spot, but even if an Officer on the street was advised of something very low level it still had to be reported. There was a dedicated team in place which looked at all police logs received and they were audited to make sure that they were not closed off if a crime had been committed. If a crime had been committed it would always be recorded.

Crimes were broken down into different categories, for example, burglaries dwellings, burglaries non dwelling, theft, shop lifting and making off without payment. Making off without payment was often simply a mistake but it still had to be logged and proven.

Violence with injury and violence without injury crimes could often be alcohol linked. Violence with no injury could be as minor as someone shouting abuse across a street.

The Inspector explained that part of her job was to break down the crime trends. To do this she met with her team and other agencies fortnightly to identify trends and patterns. This helped her to identify where to put resources and to identify which crimes were going up in which areas.

Records of domestic abuse and sexual abuse were not being logged as violence with injury as the Police were trying to encourage victims to report these crimes. Coverage of Operation Yew Tree had encouraged victims of historic abuse to come forward.

On the subject of rural crime the Inspector explained that she was working to engage the rural community, which traditionally was not known for reporting crime. Farmers were being encouraged to report incidents of suspicious activity in their area and the Inspector explained that they would always follow up intelligence. She explained that she did not have enough officers to cover the area without the public's help.

The Inspector explained that two people were currently on remand and would be in court the following week, accused of large type commercial break-ins. She explained that these were travelling criminals and had been apprehended as part of Operation Snoop. Other ongoing operations included Operation Garmin and Operation Mascot, both of which were targeting rural crime.

The Inspector explained that there had been a move to online crime, which included child exploitation. She further explained that there was now a unit dealing with the M5, but that these officers could be diverted to other work if required.

Discussion took place regarding:

- 20 mph speed restrictions – the Inspector explained that there was a dedicated Officer that looked at requests for speed limits in liaison with the Highways Authority;
- Cyber-crime and the need to report it;
- Incidents of rural crime;
- The number of officers available for the Inspector to respond to incidents;
- The 101 website;
- The processes involved in the recording of crime and the time it took officers to complete paperwork;
- The need to safeguard victims of domestic violence.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee write to the Police Commissioner and the Chief Constable to highlight the amount of time officers were spending completing paperwork.

(Proposed by Councillor Mrs H Bainbridge and seconded by Councillor T G Hughes).

172 **NIGHT TIME ECONOMY (00:42:50)**

The Chairman of the Night Time Economy Working Group outlined the reasons why the Group had been set up.

He explained that last November there had been reports of disorder during the evenings in the town centres and reports that this was affecting the night time economy by deterring the public from using the town centres at night.

Following this a Working Group was set up and the Licensing Committee became involved with a particular premises in the town.

The Chairman of the Working Group was pleased to inform the Committee that there seemed to have been a significant improvement to this situation and that on Saturday 28th March himself and the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee had the privilege of spending an evening with Inspector Jane Alford-Mole, in the town centre hot spots, observing the situation. He was pleased to be able to report that he had been

thoroughly impressed by the manner in which the police dealt with incidents and came away from the evening with the conclusion that, with the resources available to her, the Inspector was dealing with the situation well. He also reported that the Inspector had an excellent relationship with staff at the late night premises and that door staff appeared to be making a difference. He felt that what they witnessed was normal Saturday night behaviour and saw nothing to cause concern.

Discussion took place regarding Temporary Extension Notices and the Inspector confirmed that she had looked into an issue that had occurred while the Councillors were out with her, due to the clocks going forward. Procedures had been put in place to prevent this happening again.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that:

- i. The Waste Service liaise with the Licensing Service to ensure that the litter from late night food premises be kept to a minimum. Should a problem arise with a specific premises a letter be sent to remind them of their duty to keep the area clean.
- ii. The Licensing Officer liaise with the Devon and Cornwall Police with regard to Temporary Extension Notices, to ensure that they are dealt with in a timely fashion and that all of the appropriate people are aware of them.
- iii. The Licensing Officer ensure that measures be put in place to monitor Temporary Extension Notices when offices were closed.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Inspector Jane Alford-Mole outlined an incident that had recently occurred in Cullompton during a weekend, which had been well publicised. The Inspector explained that an argument had started inside a public house but spilled out into the town. This happened to coincide with closing time in the pubs so a large number of people became involved. It was a Bank Holiday weekend and a lot of alcohol had been consumed. She considered that the occurrence had been a circumstance of timing but confirmed that the landlord would be spoken to regarding the amount of alcohol that had been consumed. She said that there had been racial tones within the incident but she did not consider this to be the cause. She reported that Tasers and spray deterrents would only be used in extreme circumstances. She felt that although Facebook could be a useful tool for the Police, in this instance it had proved to be negative. The Police would be using intelligence gained to prevent further issues.

The Chairman thanked the Inspector for attending the meeting and for her time on Saturday 28th March.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee write to the Police Commissioner and the Chief Constable to praise Inspector Jane Alford Mole for the efficient manner in which she went about her job.

(Proposed by Councillor Mrs H Bainbridge and seconded by Councillor T G Hughes).

Note: - Report previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

173 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK (01:01:35)**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a report* of the Head of Communities and Governance providing Members with an update on performance against the corporate plan and local service targets for the 2014/15 financial year, as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The Audit Team Leader explained that the report highlighted performance for each Policy Development Group, Planning Committee and Audit Committee.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The risk regarding chemicals – Members queried why this risk was set at level 2 when staff should be trained and procedures should be in place to reduce the risk. The Audit Team Leader would report this back to the appropriate Officer.
- The risk regarding Digital Transformation and the Local Plan needed to be removed, following the successful transition to the new website.
- Members requested that sickness reporting be broken down to report long term and short term sickness separately.

Note: - Report previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

174 **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE (01:08:05)**

The Committee had before it information regarding Performance Management Guidance from the Head of Communities and Governance.

The Audit Team Leader informed the Committee that the Head of Communities and Governance had asked that Members give feedback or comments on the document. It was proposed that this document be circulated to all Councillors following the election. In particular she asked for comments in relation to section 6 – Members role in performance management. She asked if Members felt that it was useful or were there things that could be added to improve further?

Discussion took place regarding:

- Section 6.2 bullet 3 asked if the information was concise, accurate, balanced and presented in an easily understandable format. Members did not feel that this was the case and reported that they did not consider that it questioned value for money;
- Members requested that more comments be added to performance data to explain variances;
- Reports may have been too simplified resulting in not enough relevant information being given;

- There seemed to be a lack of action taken if performance was not as it should be;
- It was suggested that performance be measured against the new Corporate Plan;
- Members felt that the guide explained the role of Members and Officers well;
- The possibility of looking at other authorities and how they reported performance;
- That a review of the achievement of Corporate Plan targets be added to the time line in October, to identify issues.

The Audit Team Leader requested that any further feedback be forwarded to the Head of Communities and Governance.

Note: - Report previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

175 **PLANNING POLICY PROCEDURES (01:34:31)**

The Chairman asked the Head of Planning and Regeneration to update the Committee regarding the current situation with the Planning Committee Procedures Working Group and their report which was due to go to the Planning Committee

The Officer explained that she was very aware that the report was outstanding but that other priorities had prevented the completion of this work. The Planning Service had prioritised work on the Local Plan and the urban extensions. The required public consultation had taken place but the report to the Committee had not yet been formalised. It was anticipated that the report would go before the Planning Committee in June.

The Chairman explained that Members of the Scrutiny Committee had raised several issues regarding planning in the past and that these had been compiled into a Minute of a meeting of the Committee held on 20 October 2013. Minute 76 had been sent to the Working Group in order that these matters be added to the procedures. Subsequently the Chairman had received an email from the Chief Executive in January 2014 confirming that the procedures would be prepared by Spring 2014. The Chairman expressed her concern that some Members would leave the Council before their concerns had been addressed.

Members also raised concerns regarding enforcement. Members gave anecdotal examples of enforcement that had not been followed up and expressed concerns about the service following the recent departure of one of the Enforcement Officers.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained that the establishment should have 2.5 Enforcement Officers. This had recently dropped to 1 full time officer. The recruitment process was underway and no appointment had been made following internal advertising or through potential secondments from neighbouring authorities. She further explained that the case load of the remaining officer had been prioritised and that it would continue to be managed with the resources to hand.

A total of six vacancies for the Planning Service were being advertised. These vacancies had arisen due to maternity, resignations and a restructure. It was hoped, in the case of the Enforcement Officer vacancy, that an experienced Officer could be recruited.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to Council that the following be **NOTED**;

The Scrutiny Committee expressed disappointment that the report of the Planning Policy Working Group had not been seen by this Committee prior to the election and that Minute 76 had not been actioned.

(Proposed by the Chairman and seconded by Councillor T G Hughes)

(Vote 5 for 4 against – Chairman’s casting vote.)

176 **HIGH STREET INNOVATION FUND (02:00:17)**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** information from the Head of Communities and Governance regarding the High Street Renovation Fund.

The Committee were satisfied that the information provided clarified where the funds had been spent and the remaining funds yet to be allocated.

Note: - Information previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

177 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a draft report * by the Chairman on the work of the Group since May 2014, a final copy of this report would be submitted to Council on 29 April 2015.

Note: - Report previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

178 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Legal Services – six monthly update
Performance and Risk
Whistle Blowing update
Leaders Annual Report
Cabinet Member for the Environment
Election of Vice Chair
Minutes of the meeting of the Joint East and Mid Devon Crime and Disorder Panel

(The meeting ended at 4.25 pm)

CHAIRMAN