

Scrutiny Committee
15 June 2015

Leader's annual report to Scrutiny 2015

Key achievements over the last year in our main service areas:-

Customer Services

- Implemented a new self-service payment kiosk in Phoenix House.
- Increased council tax collection rate by 0.2% to 97.8% (97.6% last year) and collected £1.6m more in council tax over last year.
- Business Rates collection also increased by 1.0% to 99%, (98% for 2014).
- Designed and went live with a new website, saving money and allowing more flexibility for future digital transactions.
- Made savings on postage through the introduction of clean-mail and moving to more digital transactions.

ICT

- Preparing iPads for those members requesting them (should be available for collection w/c 8 June).
- New Exchange email system now live, migration of email accounts to new system will be completed end of June (Outlook is the client).
- New Staff in ICT – Kai Hirst and Amy McNaughton to help with Digital Transformation.
- There have been problems in recruiting web skills so we are investing in additional training for existing development staff.
- About to go live with a new Forward Plans Representations searchable public register (mid-June).
- Leisure have completed their new website w/e 29/05/15.
- Waste - Recycling system migrated from legacy software w/c 01/06/15.
- New Comments/Complaints system go-live w/c 25/05/15.

- About to commence build of Chargeable Green Waste system.
- Gazetteer Management Services received a Gold award again for the high quality of their work.

Environment –

- We successfully relocated our recycling service from Silverton to Tiverton – this was completed on budget and to a very tight timetable. It is also seeing some operational benefits through enhanced synergy as we now have both depots in close proximity. During this busy year (June 2014) we also managed to win a national recycling award for the greatest % increase in beverage carton recycling.
- Much of 14/15 has been spent planning the new changes to the waste collection service (which included a pilot trial). From June we are now collecting an increased range of plastics and cardboard (in accordance with resident requests) and from October we will be collecting food waste from the whole of the District on a weekly basis and introduce a charge for the discretionary collection of green garden waste. It is expected that these changes should significantly increase the level of recycling across the District and reduce the overall cost of the service by around £500k.
- Car parking charges were frozen at the 13/14 level across the District, we introduced a £1 night time charging tariff and we maintained our popular £1 for 5hrs in our long stay car parks. This has seen significantly improved usage levels.
- We are continuing with negotiations with Town & Parish Councils regarding the ongoing provision of Public Conveniences and Play Areas in order to match our property estate with the funding available to maintain them. Clearly this is not something the Council would choose to do – but it is one of the hard choices we are having to make in light of ever decreasing funding levels.

Finance –

- Since 2010/11 we have seen over a £2m cut in aggregate Govt. funding (this includes £1.6m in additional New Homes Bonus from the delivery of extra housing across the District) and we continue to deliver a wide range of well performing services.
- 2014/15 saw a very small overspend of £90k on the General Fund – this position included one-off costs of some staff redundancies and the Recycling move from Silverton which totalled circa £250k. So if you take these amounts into consideration our remaining services under spent their budgets by £160k. This is a very good outcome when bearing in mind that we continue to reduce budgets to match the cuts in Central Govt. funding.

- Towards the end of 14/15 we have purchased a number of commercial units in Tiverton Town Centre in order to both ensure a healthy economic heart to the centre of Tiverton but to also earn an investment return of around 8% - this compares very favourably when compared against the 0.6% we are currently earning on investments made with banks/building societies on any surplus funds.
- During 14/15 we received another very positive audit from Grant Thornton who also referred to our demonstration of delivering value for money across our services and having good levels of financial control and reporting.
- We have ended 14/15 with a healthy level of financial reserves/balances which will undoubtedly help us cope with the ongoing financial challenges of the next 4 years.

Future –

- On the 8/7/15 there will be an emergency budget and the Chancellor has stated his desire to see another circa £13bn reduced from public sector budgets. This will undoubtedly flow down to further cuts to the local authority family. Most public sector commentators are estimating further year on year cuts of at least 10-15% per annum for the next 3-4 years.
- We are already looking at ways to balance the 16/17 budget. This will need to include a portfolio of measures: further reducing costs, looking at alternative means of service delivery, raising income where possible, looking at more commercial opportunities and revisiting service delivery in terms on quality/frequency.
- It is clear that current and future Govt. funding has moved towards a “payment by results” system. i.e. the old style fixed Formula Grant is being cut year on year and Councils will only receive additional funding if they accept more house building and commercial businesses within their boundaries.

Leisure Services

- Increased membership base
- Culm Valley Sports Centre ground floor refurbishment
- New internet connected
- New equipment at Culm Valley gym
- Increased variety of training courses offered (swimming, first aid etc.)
- Consultant’s report

- Recommending development at Exe Valley regarding a building extension

Community Development

- We have awarded funding from the Town and Parish (TAP) fund totalling £70,982 in respect of 70 applications. A number of applications have already been received for the 2015/16 financial year.
- In 2014/15 we paid £185,000 of grants to external organisations. We are continuing to support these organisations in 2015/16 with a grants pot of £170,000
- As reported in the last Grants report in November 2014 we had allocated £23,500 from the Seed Fund to various projects across the District meaning that since starting the seed fund in 2012 we have awarded £79,700
- Continued to provide support and assistance to Town and Parish Councils. This includes 'Parish Matters' a monthly newsletter and meetings with Town and Parish Clerks. Shortly a number of training sessions will be run for Town and Parish Councillors on the Standards Regime and Planning.
- We have been actively involved with the Targeted Families Programme helping approximately 150 families in Phase 1. We are likely to engage with 450 in Phase 2. Work being done now to link with Early Help – which is to prevent families getting to the stage of social care intervention.
- Actively involved in the Devon Youth Games, which takes place on Sunday 12th July in Paignton. This large Olympic style sporting event is sponsored by the South West Rotary Clubs and will see over 1000 young people compete. There are various different sporting categories where Mid Devon is hoping to field a team at this year's Games from hockey, rugby, football, badminton, netball, athletics and more including para-sports. We are currently holding trials and training sessions in the build up to the event across Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton.

HR

- Increased in-house development around Lone Working, MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicators) relating to personality profiling, NLP (Neuro linguistic programming) using different skills to communicate and soft skills, ie communication skills.
- Successful year with the in-house coaching programme which continues to develop and offers team coaching, team events and team MBTI.
- WRAP (Working to raise awareness of prevent) trainers qualified in house to deliver mandatory to employees and external bodies and support the government's anti-terrorism prevent campaign.

- HRBP's (Human Resources Business Partners) continuing to support and work with service areas on workforce planning (recruitment of staff, redundancies), consultations, restructures, disciplinaries, budget constraints
- Implementation of MyView (employee self-service system) and Etarmis systems (time management system)
- Implementation of new recruitment system
- The payroll system still has a lot of potential but this does need the time being spent on it
- Successful completion of the year end process once again
- Currently still going through our HMRC inspection
- Payroll Manager to leave at the end of June 15 which will have an effect on the service
- New apprentice in HR (Molly Deslandes) who has fitted in very well and has been a big help to all in the department

Housing

- Performance across all areas of the service continues to match the best in the country in many areas, e.g. rent arrears, void turnaround times.
- Increased levels of investment continue: - 100% Decent Homes standard achieved on the 31 March 2015
- Completed building 6 new council homes in Fir Close Willand, completion of a further 14 properties at St Andrews Street, Tiverton due in September. Tenders are being prepared for 4 one bedroom flats in Tiverton and a planning application has been lodged for 26 properties at Palmerston Park, Tiverton and others being planned.
- Successfully bid and awarded £400k by the Homes and Community Agency for Mid Devon affordable housing projects
- In total 58 affordable homes provided across the District. We continue to negotiate for more affordable housing where this is viable.

Property

- Acquisition of Market Walk and 32/34 Fore Street, Tiverton

- Additional car parking Exe Valley Leisure Centre
- Construction of new skateboard park adjacent Exe Valley Leisure Centre

Planning and Economic Regeneration

- The Proposed Submission Local Plan Review was published in February 2015, with consultation taking place February - April 2015. Consultation responses are currently being analysed by Planning Staff. Plan submission and examination is expected later this year. This sets out ambitious plans for future development within the District that will deliver economic growth and investment, new homes and safeguard the environment of Mid Devon.
- At the same time a Draft Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule has been prepared to ensure that developers make a fair and reasonable contribution towards local infrastructure. Once adopted, Parish and Town Councils will receive a proportion of this levy from developments in their area to spend on their own local priorities. Consultation on the Draft Charging Schedule has also taken place, responses to which are currently being assessed. Examination of CIL will take place in conjunction with the Local Plan Review.
- Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension: Outline planning applications for Area A of the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension have been considered and subject to legal agreements, will be granted permission. Planning permission has been granted for the new junction onto the A361 North Devon Link Road and up to £7.2 million funding for it has been secured from the Local Enterprise Partnership on a match funded basis. Developer financial contributions will also fund this junction together with other infrastructure. Initial work has started on the masterplan for Area B of the Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension and consultation has taken place on the proposed traffic calming and environmental enhancement scheme for Blundell's Road. A brief for a design guide for the urban extension is also being drawn up. Funding has also been secured from the Homes and Communities Agency to assist the Council in the delivery of this project.
- Scoping stage consultation on the masterplanning of the North West Cullompton has taken place. A draft masterplan setting out how the development could come forward is currently being prepared. Further consultation will take place in 2015.
- Improvements, in part funded by development, have taken place at junctions 27 and 28 of the M5.
- An additional Conservation Area has been designed in the area of Blundell's Road, Tiverton and appraisals/management plans for a further 5 Conservation Areas have been undertaken. The Article 4 Direction in Cullompton Conservation Area has been reviewed

- A review is taking place of the Building Control Service in order to identify service delivery opportunities.
- Business Forum Mid Devon continues to enjoy a good turnout at the bi-monthly meetings at the Tiverton Hotel with between 50 and 80 attendees at each meeting.
- Our Business Advice Scheme provided by Business Information Point (BIP) has helped 117 businesses in the last financial year.
- Working with Devon County Council we have successfully secured LEADER funding worth €1.788 million (£1.43 million) for a five year programme up to Dec 2020 available for small and micro businesses in Mid Devon. The Economic Development team will work with businesses to help them bid for funding.
- Appointed a new Economic Development Officer who has been working proactively with businesses across the District to help them grow and expand
- Actively working with other Councils and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to draw down funding into the District for Economic Development
 - Continuing to work with the town teams and various business groups in the District.