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## MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP**  
held on 27 June 2023 at 2.15 pm

**Present  
Councillors**

S Chenore, C Connor, A Cuddy, A Glover,  
B Holdman, H Tuffin, C Harrower, J Cairney  
and M Farrell

**Apologies  
Councillor(s)**

E Buczkowski and G Cochran

**Also Present  
Councillor(s)**

D Broom, R Gilmour, J Lock and D Wulff and S Keable  
(online)

**Also Present  
Officer(s):**

Paul Deal (Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and  
Climate Change), Lisa Lewis (Corporate Manager for  
Business Transformation and Customer Engagement), Lee  
Chester (Operations Manager Leisure Services), Angie  
Howell (Member Services Officer) and Sarah Lees  
(Member Services Officer)

**1 ELECTION OF CHAIR (00:25)**

**RESOLVED** that Cllr B Holdman be elected as Chairman of the Community PDG for  
the municipal year 2023/2024.

(Proposed by Cllr A Glover and seconded by Cllr A Cuddy)

**2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR (06:04)**

**RESOLVED** that Cllr C Connor be elected as Vice Chairman of the Community PDG  
for the municipal year 2023/2024.

(Proposed by Cllr J Cairney and seconded by Cllr M Farrell)

**3 CONFIRM START TIME OF MEETINGS (08:03)**

It was **AGREED** that the start time of meetings for the remainder of the municipal  
year continued to be at 2.15pm.

#### 4 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (08:30)**

Apologies were received from Cllr G Cochran - Cllr M Farrell attended as his substitute and Cllr E Buczkowski – Cllr J Cairney as her substitute.

#### 5 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (09:03)**

Nick Quinn – local resident

A long term court case has ended with the agreement that payments for Council Leisure Sessions are VAT free.

Your Finance Officers are in the process of claiming a refund of the overpaid VAT on Leisure sessions, going back to 2011.

An estimate of the amount being claimed is shown on the Corporate Management Table, on page 28, of your papers, where there is an entry for “Corporate VAT Refund” (under 'Major Changes to Income Levels').

The total shown is £2,998,700.

There will, no doubt, be debates over how this Leisure Refund is used, if it ever arrives, but my question relates to whether this Community PDG wishes to consider how the removal of this VAT requirement should affect Leisure session payments.

As Cllr Holdman might remember, in November 2022 after excluding the public, the previous Community PDG voted to give away its delegated authority to set the Leisure Pricing Strategy, for the remainder of 2022 and for 2023/2024, to the Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing.

But, there is no longer a Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing and the removal of VAT will produce a significant (20%) reduction in session prices.

My question is: In the light of the change in Cabinet responsibilities and the removal of the requirement to charge VAT on Leisure sessions, will this Community PDG consider taking back the responsibility for the Leisure Pricing Strategy and the setting of Leisure Session Charges?

It was confirmed that a written response would be provided and attached to the minutes of the meeting.

#### 6 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (13:39)**

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### 7 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (13:56)**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 March 2023 were **NOTED**.

## 8 CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS (14:34)

The Chairman thanked the two outgoing Chairmen – Cllr Mrs C Daws and Cllr Mrs M Squires for all their time and effort working on this Policy Development Group (PDG) over the last four years. He also hoped to bring in some constructive policies moving forward.

## 9 REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN REPORTS FOR 22/23 (15:45)

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a report\* presented by the Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change which provided Members with the Revenue and Capital Outturn figures for the financial year 2022/2023 for both the General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The contents of the report were outlined with reference to the following:-

- This was an historic report for noting which showed the outturn achieved for 2022/2023.
- Outturn position for the General Fund was an overspend of £190,000 and for the Housing Revenue Account an underspend of £312,000 – both were considered good achievements in the relevant economic circumstances.
- There were variances to note – the cost of living crisis which had had an effect on staff pay. Much higher staff turnover and sickness in the year 2022/2023 which resulted in higher staffing costs. Additional grant payments have been awarded such as the Home for Ukraine Scheme and also had to account the VAT refund which was currently being audited by HMRC.
- There were 4 services that report through this PDG
  - i) Customer Services which had an underspend due to staff vacancies
  - ii) Public Health – significant amounts of grant funding for Homes for Ukraine Scheme and some funds had rolled forward and were earmarked for reserves in 2023/2024.
  - iii) Planning - there was an additional grant income – £180,000 feasibility works on Junction 28 and Section 106 Air Pollution earmarked for 2023/2024.
  - iv) Leisure Services had shown an overspend. The Salix funding trying to decarbonise Leisure Centres was slippage in terms of maintenance work. Income remained lower than budget.
- Capital outturn position the bulk of this was leisure spend and the Salix project. A considerable achievement largely on budget and timeframe and benefits would be seen shortly being brought into the two Leisure Centres and would make a significant difference to the carbon used on these sites as well as a significant financial difference.
- A lot of the capital programme was not planned for 2022/2023 as it spanned over a number of future years.
- Bidding for a grant for Culm Valley Leisure Centre was also underway.

The following was discussed by the Committee:-

- Welfare of staff to ensure retention. The Performance Report was due to go to Cabinet on 4 July 2023.
- It was commented that the Council should be applauded for having the foresight to go ahead and make these changes at the Leisure Centres to keep costs down for our residents.

Note: \*Report previously circulated.

## 10 **COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY (31:12)**

The Group had before it a report\* presented by the Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement with the revised Communication and Engagement Strategy and accompanying Media and Social Media Policy and highlighted the following:

- The report was a review of the Policy which took place every 2 years and this Group was being asked to recommend to Cabinet the revised content of the Strategy and the Policy.

It was therefore **RECOMMENDED** to the Cabinet that the content of the revised Communication and Engagement Strategy and Media and Social Media Policy be approved.

(Moved by the Chair).

Reason for decision: As set out in the report.

Note: \*Report previously circulated.

## 11 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING 33:27)**

The following items were identified by the Group for items to be brought to the next Meeting:-

- Leisure Pricing Strategy and VAT
- Vulnerability Statement – the Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement would bring a report for discussion at the next meeting.
- Customer Service Front Desk – the Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement would bring a report to the next meeting to outline the current usage of customer services for calls and how the Council's services were utilised. It would also include a Community Survey.
- Climate Emergency – a standard item for the Environment PDG, the Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change would look into arranging a briefing for this Group.

(The meeting ended at 14:56pm).

**CHAIRMAN**