

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP**
held on 24 October 2023 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors B Holdman (Chairman), D Broom,
G Cochran, A Cuddy, C Harrower,
S Robinson and J Cairney

Apologies

Councillor(s) C Connor

Also Present Councillor(s)

J Buczkowski, G Czapiewski, G DuChesne, R Gilmour,
J Lock, D Wulff

**Also Present
Councillor(s)
online** E Buczkowski, A Glover, H Tuffin

Also Present Officer(s):

Dean Emery (Corporate Manager for Revenues, Benefits and Recovery), Paul Deal (Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change), Lisa Lewis (Corporate Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement), Kelly Lee (Leisure Business Manager), Haley Walker (Leisure Business Manager), Angie Howell (Democratic Services Officer) and David Parker (Democratic Services & Policy Research Officer)

23 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00:06:06)

Apologies were received from Cllr C Connor - Cllr Jim Cairney attended as her substitute.

24 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00:06:27)

There were no members of the public present.

25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (00:06:39)

Members were reminded of the need to make declarations of interest where appropriate.

There were no declarations of interest.

26 **MEETING MANAGEMENT (00:07:15)**

It was **PROPOSED** by the Chairman that Cllr J Cairney be elected as Vice-Chairman for this meeting only.

This was **AGREED**.

27 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (00:08:09)**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 August 2023 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

28 **CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS (00:08:37)**

The Chairman made the following announcements:-

- Due to the success of the Members visiting the three Mid Devon Leisure Centres we would look to arrange another in the new year.
- Mid Devon Leisure were runners up, out of 27 academies, in the STAr Swim Academy of the Year. The award reflected how the Leisure Service implemented innovative learn to swim strategies that have expanded the opportunity for people of all ages and abilities to learn a key life skill. The judges also looked at how best practices in swimming teaching through training, education and career development were delivered.
- The Open Day on 14 November 2023 held at each Leisure Centre was a great success with 45 new members joining on the day.
- Reminded Members that the meeting must finish by 4.30pm today due to Audit Committee starting at 5pm.

29 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (GENERAL FUND) (00:10:32)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) presenting the updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which covered the period 2024/25 to 2028/29 for the General Fund (GF) and considered initial savings options.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- This was a 5 year plan with figures in relation to years 2 – 4 being best guesses.
- The previous budget gap for 2024/25 of £1.5m had now increased to over £2m partly as a result of stubborn inflation and the Government's indicative increase in planning fees not transpiring.
- Assumptions had been made in terms of not using any reserves and the need to revise the capital programme.

The Group considered the savings options outlined in Appendix 2 and discussion took place regarding:-

- The Council was not intending to achieve savings by imposing compulsory redundancies but rather it would consider not replacing people automatically when they left and would undertake a thorough review of the risks involved in each case.
- What the green, amber and red risk categories meant. –
GREEN : – a saving which did not significantly impact upon service delivery.
AMBER: - savings would impact on service delivery but that impact would be manageable.
RED: - savings would impact upon service delivery and would require changes to the levels of services offered.
- How staff sickness could best be managed and what the Council was already doing regarding this.
- The savings did not add up to £2.1m and there would need to be a further round of cuts.

The shortfall covered two aspects;

- £1m in year savings targets – a £400,000 staffing saving and £625k to avoid drawing from General Reserves.
- Hopeful if not confident that the Council would be able to absorb this - recommendations would be fed back to the Cabinet.
- £1m inflationary pressure across pay, utilities and supplies and services.

Consideration was given to:

- The impact on planning advice and planning applications.
- Training and development for staff to encourage staff retention.
- Setting up a Community PDG working group to invite organisations to present a business case for grant support.
- The costs of agency staff particularly in Waste and how this can be reduced by increasing the establishment budget to reduce reliance on agency support.
- Energy costs and where savings can be made to Leisure Centres.
- Fuel saving costs with introduction of electric vehicles.
- Staff savings and the welfare of staff when posts were not replaced.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet:-

- Items rag rated as green were APPROVED.
- Items rag rated as amber were further broken down into:-
 - a) Community grants were APPROVED with Cllr B Holdman and Cllr D Broom abstaining.
 - b) All other items were APPROVED with Cllr C Harrower and Cllr S Robinson abstaining.
- Items rag rated as red were APPROVED

It was **NOTED** that there could be possible cost reductions in relation to Business Rates, energy costs and fuel costs during 2024/25

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Reason for the decision

By undertaking an annual review of the MTFP the Council could ensure that its Corporate Plan priorities were affordable. The implications of the revised budget gap were set out within the paper. Many areas require greater clarity, particularly around national funding and the possibility of additional funding to offset the implications of the Cost of Living Crisis. Therefore a number of key assumptions underpinned the reported position, which would be refined as greater clarity was received through the budget setting process.

Notes

- (i) * Report previously circulated.
- (ii) Cllr S Robinson declared an interest.

30 **LEISURE POLICY AND PRICING STRATEGY (01:01:54)**

The Chairman indicated that discussion with regard to the next item, may require the Committee to pass the following resolution to exclude the press and public having reflected on Article 12 12.02(d) (a presumption in favour of openness) of the Constitution. This decision may be required because consideration of this matter in public may disclose information falling within one of the descriptions of exempt information in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. The Committee would need to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption, outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

(Proposed by the Chairman)

The Corporate Manager for Council Tax, Business Rate, Benefits, Corporate Recovery, Planning and Leisure outlined the report of the Leisure Policy and Pricing Strategy and informed the Community Policy Development Group of proposals to change the Leisure fees and charges strategy and recommended that the Community PDG recommends that Cabinet approve the strategy to change fees and charges as proposed in this report.

Having returned to the open session the Community Policy Development Group:-

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the strategy to change fees and charges as proposed in the report be approved.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: *report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

31 **PUBLIC ACCESS TO PHOENIX HOUSE (PART B - 00:00:39)**

The Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement updated the Members as follows:-

- A working group was set up to address public access to Phoenix House for vulnerable residents.
- The working group met on 18 September to look at the impact of the reduced opening hours for vulnerable residents.
- Cllr Connor also requested to join the working group – which was agreed by all Members present.
- The Terms of Reference had been agreed with specific reference made to homeless people accessing services when the building was closed.
- The provision of telephone numbers and an intercom were also being looked into – however after speaking to the Property Services Manager there was an agreement to delay this for the moment as the door security system for the building was also currently being looked into.
- Customer Surveys would be sent out to vulnerable customers or residents to identify any issues they may have – this would also include partner agencies such as CHAT, Citizens Advice Bureau to look at the impact the opening times of Phoenix House had on them when sign posting people to us.
- The next meeting of the working group would take place in November 2023 where work on the survey would begin with the hope that by Christmas a survey would be sent out.
- The next update to be presented to Community PDG would be on 23 January 2024.

32 **WORK PROGRAMME (PART B 00:05:13)**

The Chairman wished to add the following items to the Community PDG Work Programme:-

- To invite the local Police to give the Community PDG an update on anti-social behaviour.
- To invite Devon Energy Partnership to the next meeting on 5 December 2023 to give a briefing and advice to the Community PDG on how to help residents during the winter and where to signpost them for advice and support.

The group **AGREED** to add both items to the Work Programme.

(The meeting ended at 4.09 pm)

CHAIRMAN