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MINUTES of a MEETING of the COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

held on 23 January 2024 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

B Holdman (Chairman)
C Connor (Vice Chairman), M D Binks,
D Broom, G Cochran, A Cuddy and
S Robinson

Apologies

Councillor(s)

C Harrower

Also Present

Councillor(s)

J Buczkowski, S J Clist, M Jenkins, J Lock and D Wulff

Also Present

Officer(s):

Richard Marsh (Director of Place & Economy), Paul Deal (Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change), Lisa Lewis (Corporate Manager for Business Transformation and Customer Engagement), David Parker (Democratic Services & Policy Research Officer) and Angie Howell (Democratic Services Officer)

Councillors

Online

A Glover
G Czapiewski

49 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (03:47)

Cllr C Harrower sent her apologies and Cllr M Binks attended as her substitute.

50 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (04:11)

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

There were no declarations of interest.

51 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (04:37)

There were no members of the public present.

52 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (04:46)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 December 2023 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

53 CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS (5:18)

The Chairman made the following announcements:-

- With regard to Agenda Item 7 – Town and Parish Charter the recommendation had an amendment as follows:-

That the PDG considers and recommends that the proposed new Charter is sent to the Towns and Parishes for review between February and April 2024.

- The next meeting to be held on 26th March 2024 would have several reports to discuss and the meeting was proposed to begin at 1.00pm rather than 2.15pm.

He also reminded Members and officers of the Committee to address the Chair when they wished to speak.

54 MEETING MANAGEMENT (07:04)

The Chair announced that we would be discussing Agenda Item 7 before Agenda Item 6.

55 TOWN AND PARISH CHARTER (07:10)

The Parish Liaison Officer presented a report with a proposal for a review into the Charter between Mid Devon District Council and the Town and Parish Council in Mid Devon and highlighted the following:-

- The Town and Parish Charter was reviewed every 3 years and was a contract between Mid Devon District Council and Town and Parish Councils. It was last reviewed in 2020 with minimal amendments.
- The proposed changes were shown through “tracked changes” so that the Community Policy Development Group (PDG) could review the current and the proposed wording side by side. If agreed, the document circulated to Towns and Parishes would have the same tracked changes so that they could easily reference the proposed changes made.
- The recommendation on the report was incorrect as there was no requirement for the report to go to Cabinet at this stage.
- Once the review was completed in three months’ time the Charter would come back to Community PDG for recommendation to Cabinet for approval.

The following changes were **AGREED**:-

- Page 15 Number 7 – to add the word “and Members” – therefore to now read:- Encourage officers and Members to attend local Council meetings and speak on issues of concern/interest and provide feedback.
- Page 15 Item 9 – to add and explain all acronyms used. Therefore to now read:- Use plain English in written communications and to explain all acronyms used.

- Page 15 Item 6 – to change the wording so that it says:- Formally add to the role of Chairman of the District Council that of being “Local Council Lead Member” who will encourage better working across the district.

The Chairman also reminded Members to promote the review to encourage their Town and Parish Councils to participate.

The Community Policy Development Group considered and **APPROVED** that the proposed new charter be sent to Towns and Parishes for review between February and April 2024 with the amendments identified above.

(Proposed by Cllr S Robinson and seconded by Cllr G Cochran).

Note: *Report previously circulated.

56 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - DRAFT BUDGET UPDATE FOR 2024/2025 (23:18)**

The Group received, and **NOTED**, a verbal update from the Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change regarding the 2024/2025 budget position. This was based on the Medium Term Financial Plan report being presented to the Cabinet in December 2023 with an update in January 2024.

The following summary was provided:

- Savings of circa £1.644m had been identified as part of the budget setting process during recent months. These had been listed under the RAG rating system so as to identify red, amber and green risks which had left a gap of £418k.
- It was confirmed that staff savings would only be taken if a post became vacant, redundancies would not be a factor as part of this budget.
- An additional net sum of £41,000 had been identified for savings.
- Since December Mid Devon District Council received the Finance Settlement and received grant funding of £85,000. Also, due to the Building Control Partnership where the mix of partners percentage of costs had altered which had resulted in a £78,000 saving.
- Additional savings had been identified due to government announcements in December regarding the local government financial settlement and Council Tax and Business Rate changes.
- It was confirmed that a fully balanced budget would be taken to Cabinet and that it would not be necessary to look to this Policy Development Group for further savings in order to balance the budget. However Members were asked to consider savings that could be developed toward the budget for 2025/2026 over the summer.

57 **CUSTOMER CARE POLICY (29:00)**

The Corporate Manager for Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement presented a report for a review of the Customer Care Policy and Customer Standards of Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) and highlighted the following:-

- The Customer Care Policy was a pre-existing policy which was last reviewed in November 2021.
- The policy remained with little or no change except where acknowledgment was given to vulnerable customers.
- The standards applied not just to Customer Services but to all of the Authority and the required behaviours of all staff and the expectations that our customers should have.
- Those who had concerns about getting in touch with the Council were encouraged to complete a customer feedback report in order that their concern could be fed into the statistics.

Consideration was given to:-

- Whether the public would assume that Councillor response times were included in any statistics. It was confirmed that Councillor response times would differ due to the different relationships they had with their constituents and that reference would be made to that in the report.
- How MDDC compared with similar authorities in terms of opening times and public access.
- How a number of factors had influenced the decision on how services were provided based on budget constraints and to continue to provide the best level of service.
- Due to financial transactions now being online this had also reduced the footfall.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the revised Customer Care Policy and Standards be approved.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: *report previously circulated.

58 **PUBLIC ACCESS TO PHOENIX HOUSE - WORKING GROUP UPDATE (44:30)**

The Chairman gave an update on the Public Access Working Group. He informed the PDG of the following:-

- The next meeting of the Working Group would be held on 22 February 2024 where they hoped to put forward a recommendation to the Community PDG for an intercom to be fitted.
- This would then go to Cabinet for approval. If approved hopefully it would be implemented within a few weeks.
- The intercom would give vulnerable customers comfort and confidence that they could contact us even when reception was closed.

(The meeting ended at 3.02 pm)

CHAIRMAN

