

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP**
held on 12 March 2024 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

M Fletcher (Chairman)
B Fish (Vice Chairman), C Adcock,
G Czapiewski, C Harrower, B Holdman,
J Poynton, S Robinson and G Westcott

Also Present

Councillor(s)

N Bradshaw, D Broom, E Buczkowski, J Buczkowski,
L Taylor and J Wright

Also Present

Officer(s):

Paul Deal (Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change), Matthew Page (Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste), Luke Howard (Environment and Enforcement Manager), Darren Beer (Operations Manager for Street Scene), Jason Ball (Climate and Sustainability Specialist), Sarah Lees (Democratic Services Officer) and David Parker (Democratic Services & Policy Research Officer)

Councillors

Online

S J Clist, G Duchesne, A Glover and D Wulff

56 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no apologies.

57 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Members were reminded of the need to make declarations of interest where appropriate. There were no interests declared under this item.

58 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

59 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 23 January 2024 were considered. Councillor Natasha Bradshaw (Cabinet Member for Climate Change) asked that her apologies for that meeting and the fact that she had briefed Councillor Josh Wright in her place be noted. This was agreed and subject to that comment being added the minutes were approved as a correct record and set aside for signing by the Chairman.

60 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman thanked the Members of the Committee and the Officers for all their support over the past year.

61 CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Climate and Sustainability Specialist.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change stated that the Council was at a key stage of implementing Biodiversity Net Gain. The Planning Policy Advisory Group (PPAG) had Local Plan Review and Members would have a chance to engage on this and many other areas e.g. Climate Change planning policies over the coming months. The support through participative policy making is hugely important. The State of the District Debate was approaching and that would be a good opportunity for partnership working in this area to see if together we could go beyond what was statutory policy. For example the Blackdown Hills National Landscape would go beyond the District's own planning policy.

Biodiversity duty

The Policy Development Group (PDG) consultation was in progress – did Members have any ideas they would like to be considered for the draft Action Plan?

The Council would use the Biodiversity Duty to support good actions e.g. push developers to deliver Dark Skies to benefit people and nature.

Tree Planting

Over 50 standards had been planted. The majority at People's Park and Amory Park at Tiverton, 6 large standard orchard trees at Uplowman and 5 standards and shrubs at Willand wildlife area. Standards are equivalent to 10 whips (50 standards = 500 whips) so effectively the Council had met their annual tree target.

The Climate and Sustainability Officer commented upon the excellent work done by:

- Housing teams working on improvements to social housing stock e.g. studying data to help tackle mould and damp issues as well as energy efficiency, to achieve healthy homes with lower bills
- The Tenant Engagement Teams
- Public Health Teams and Private Sector Home Improvements (in the report).
- There was a Community element to the ongoing work, working in partnership with the private sector in relation to the installation of air source heat pumps, loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and solar PV.

The Council had now achieved most of what they could when it came to trees on Council land. The best opportunity for the Council to develop tree planting, and other biodiversity enhancement measures, was through strategic landscape-scale partnership work, with landowners, agencies and community engagement. For example, large scale nature recovery networks and connectivity; woodland cover; local food; outdoor activity and citizen science with all the health and wellbeing benefits that go along with it; climate adaptation and natural flood management partnership schemes.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- Whether there were targets for tree planting for years to come, and how aftercare is achieved? Aftercare was carried out by the Council's own work force out of the general budget. Where there was sufficient grant aid, aftercare was by contractors.
- Volunteering - had there been any discussion with Town and Parish Councils – it was hoped to use the forthcoming "State of the District Debate" to gather expressions of interest from the Towns and Parishes where they were interested in partnership working.
- Control over hedge cutting was it possible to influence how land owners were managing hedges?
- The Planning Policy Advisory Group were looking at policies in development and Members were able to contribute – could Environment PDG do the same?
- Higher EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) was being achieved for private sector rented homes through MEES (Minimum Energy Efficiency Scheme) – ways to encourage and enforce – grant schemes were available.
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) regulations stated that there must be a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain on site for eligible developments. Where, in some situations, that may not be achievable, biodiversity banking sites might offer an alternative way to secure the uplift. That site did not always have to be within the same district, but within Mid Devon was best.
- Agreed to look into feasibility of raising the local BNG requirement to be above the 10% minimum required by regulation. (Cllr Bradshaw.)
- The Climate and Sustainability Specialist was thanked for his work on Carbon Literacy Education.

Recommendations:

- **The Environment PDG noted and accepted the update on the Council's Climate and Sustainability programme and progress on its response to the Climate Emergency including the Climate Action Plan.**
- **The Environment PDG noted that the Council's Planning Policy Advisory Group would be engaged with ongoing work for the new Local Plan for Mid Devon throughout the plan making programme. (Elected Members were encouraged to join in with PPAG and the Local Plan making process, and might wish to influence policy with regard to the sustainability matters such as the draft policies around climate change, the Biodiversity Duty, Biodiversity Net Gain, etc.)**

- **The Environment PDG noted the Cabinet report and the requirements on the Council to act in relation to the Biodiversity Duty.**

62 PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD QUARTER 3

The Group had before it, and **NOTED** the presentation from the Corporate Manager for Performance and Improvement.

The following was highlighted:

- The Own Fleet CO_{2e} Avoided was red rated due to the fact that the Council did not have its new electric vehicles for the first four months of the year.
- The prices for recycled materials were volatile.
- There was an overspend on agency staff which Management were looking at.
- There was a slippage in percentage terms on capital projects due to the fact that the Council were looking for a new waste site.
- The PDG Chairman asked if the (missing) solar power data could be provided by the end of March 2024? The Corporate Manager for Performance and Improvement hoped that a fresh target for solar panel performance could be set in March 2024 once gaps in our information had been filled.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- Risk. Potential failure to meet our Climate Change obligations rated at 15.
- Whether the Council would have an annual progression of targets to lead up to 2030? – That was not available in the current Corporate Plan but the Corporate Manager for Performance and Improvement would encourage it.

The Performance Dashboard for Quarter 3 2023/24 was **NOTED**.

63 REVIEW OF BIN IT 123

The Group had before it, and **NOTED** the verbal update from the Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste.

The Following was highlighted:

The revised deadline concerning the elimination of side waste for district collections.

In October 2022 Mid Devon District Council brought in three weekly bin collections following a trial the previous year. Three weekly collections aimed to increase the amount of district recycling and reduce its residual tonnage. Both of those aspects underpin a reduction in the Council's carbon footprint and helped it meet its carbon net zero commitment.

To date the results of the scheme had been encouraging. Our recycling rates had risen around 5% and significantly reduced our residual tonnage. In 2022-23 the Council came in the top 10% of all Councils on recycling rate and reduction in residual tonnage. The Council was identified by Office for Local Government for the positive progress and asked to present to other Councils in December of last year on how we had achieved those results and the lessons learned from our experience.

On February 26th of this year we eliminated side waste collections following a 16 month transition period where we had been flexible with all of the district in picking up additional waste left out for collection e.g. that contained in black bins or seagull sacks. We raised awareness of this change through press releases, an online video which showed residents what should be done and also writing to residents who were identified by our crews as still leaving side waste out for collection (this correspondence was shared with Members).

Since the 26th February 2024 the Council had received daily data on households who were still leaving side waste out for collection. At present and from the results we had received we were showing between 96.5 and 97% compliance on average. These households were being identified for visits from either a Recycling Adviser or an Enforcement Officer depending on the nature of the offence e.g. had it happened before, had they been written to and its scale (2 letters and a sticker). Very few were repeatedly putting out side waste, which was around 4 people per day. A big thank you to the vast majority of the District for supporting the scheme to increase recycling and reduce residual waste.

Behind the numbers there was the important context of local challenges and how we best educate residents and enforce where appropriate. This was where the Members could really assist the scheme, both by helping residents understand what was required but also identifying potential challenges and problems which need to be handed over to the Waste Management for attention. Members input was really invaluable as was their steer on the importance of all residents complying with the scheme.

Our District Officers had investigated those more severe and larger deposits of side waste. These investigations had identified households that had left out carpets and other large items from household clearance which should have been taken to the Recycling Centre (and a visit could be arranged if telephone contact had not been successful). It had also identified households taking their waste to the front door of another residence e.g. finding proof of correspondence for the original resident in the black bag. Where appropriate enforcement action was being taken with fly tipping enforcement part of the portfolio of options considered.

Much of the remaining challenge rested on how we get residents to reduce waste and divert what could be recycled of their waste into the recycling containers and food caddies rather than black bins and sacks. This would be a question posed at next week's State of the District debate and was highly pertinent to our current situation. A blend of positive education, engagement and communications was required, augmented by effective and proportionate enforcement action.

The District needed to understand that full compliance with the Bin-It 123 scheme was vital if we were to fully realise the objectives of higher recycling and less residual waste set out at the start of this update. As important was the fact that the District was rewarded financially for recycling more of its waste and the current discrepancy between now and where we want to be would be costing the Council the best part of one million pounds.

In looking at our recycling data for 22-23, if everything in our residual waste collection had been recycled then our recycling rate would have seen our income from recycling credits increase by approximately £230K whilst the sale of these materials

would have brought in an additional estimated £700K. Obviously there was the current volatility regarding prices for certain materials eg plastic but there would be clear financial benefit from achieving maximum recycling for the District.

Discussion took place with regard to;

- Dealing with Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO's).
- Dealing with those properties that did not have facilities to store bins. – In both of those areas education of the public would be involved including sending out advisers to assist with the problems that some householders might have. If people needed additional bins or containers then they should get in touch with Mid Devon District Council.
- Although Food Waste was collected on a weekly basis, too much food was still being thrown into general waste.
- Plastic Film waste was on schedule to be collected in 2027 – would it bring in more revenue by way of Government Funding or would it cost the Council? – The answer was that it should be regarded as positive. Customers were keen for the Council to recycle plastic film.
- Whether the current workforce was sufficient? – This was under constant review with checks being made on a quarterly basis. There had been previously a real shortage of HGV drivers but it is now better than previously reported.
- Request for more publicity as to what could be recycled and how?
- Bulky Waste collections – this was a service that could be requested on-line or through customer services. Bulky waste was a problem for a transient population, the Council would prefer suitable items of furniture to be re-used through a number of the pre-loved shops.
- There was a certain amount of discussion on social media about black bag waste, HMO's and flats – what was the profile of the sort of residents or areas against whom enforcement action was taken? There was no specific profile that had been more prevalent than others.

The Review of Bin it 123 verbal update was **NOTED**.

64 ENVIRONMENT ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS - QUARTER 3

The Group had before it, and **NOTED** the report from the Environment and Enforcement Manager

The following was highlighted:

- The Council were able to complete all cleansing inspections although due to the staffing resource they had completed less inspections that they would have hoped for.
- Only 3 fixed notices had been issued for dog fouling in 2022 and none in 2023. It was commented that people were less likely not to pick up after their dog if the Enforcement Officer was visible. Mid Devon District Council was happy to work in partnership with Town and Parish Councils, The Authority was also willing to link with partner authorities to learn from best practice. Would more “pick up after your dog” signs make any difference?
- Were there fly tipping hot spots and would CCTV be of any use?
- Car Parking – were we a paperless operation? – The Council offered cardless payments and there was a consumer shift towards that but there was still need

for pay and display machines as some customers still wanted a printed ticket.
– This was ongoing work.

- Mid Devon District Council were promoting the “Keep Britain Tidy Week” and the “Great British Spring Clean”.

The Environment Enforcement Statistic quarter 3 were **NOTED**.

65 **WORK PLAN**

The existing Environment PDG work plan was noted and the following items were considered as to whether they should be added to the work plan:

- The option of community municipal bonds as a way to increase revenue for renewable energy projects (i.e. EV Charging Points, wind farms, etc.). **ADDED**
- Workplace parking levies to encourage car sharing in the District / more use of public transport. – This was discussed at PPAG where it was realised that public transport could be an issue. – not added.
- Working with the communications team to create local guides of accredited local business with strong green credentials (carbon neutral / B Corp). **ADDED**
- Increased Solar PV at Council-owned buildings. Reduction in business rates for those that wish to install clean energy solutions. **ADDED**
- Feasibility of community composting schemes – biodiversity. **ADDED**
- Incentivising the use of electric vehicles with lower cost/free parking for electric vehicles at District owned sites. There were restrictions on how much electricity could be drawn off the electricity mains. – This idea was to be sent to the Car Parking Working Group.
- Feasibility of becoming a zero food-waste District. This is something that was happening in Bristol, with campaigns to support education and updates in relation to what happens to food waste (biogas for green buses, etc.). The Corporate Manager would consider this idea in a future report.
- Public Recycling Bins - The Corporate Manager would consider this idea in a future report.
- Food redistribution schemes through the Council to reduce food waste. It was agreed that there needed to be communication and liaison with community undertakings such as the “sustainable” groups to find out what was already happening. - **ADDED**
- Repair cafes and green markets / free business workshops on reducing waste.
- Working with local businesses (i.e. Pipers Farm) on local food growing workshops for residents (reduction in food waste from supermarkets).
- Small electrical donation schemes.

- Did you know what the Council's current tree planting strategy is? Was there a target in mind?
- Did we have a green procurement policy? Should we? - **ADDED**
- Facilitation of the rolling out of EV chargers, like the DELETTI programme in Devon and Somerset. - **ADDED**
- Feasibility of cross-county co-operation on recycling centres. – As this was a County function it would not be appropriate for this PDG to look at the matter.
- Rolling out of refillable water stations in town highstreets / at Council buildings. Possible involvement of South West Water – **ADDED**
- Could we commission and pay for dog poo signs for our Parish Councils? Include the fine and how to report it. Ask officer to cost up for us. - **ADDED**

The four items considered in section 61 Environment and Climate Change Update were also added to the Work Plan:

- Targets for Tree Planting for years to come
- Grant Funding – higher EPC through MEES scheme – ways to encourage and enforce.
- Biodiversity Net Gain – going beyond the minimum 10% in regulations
- Policies in Development - Environment PDG adding its thoughts

66 ENVIRONMENT PDG CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

The Group had before it, and **NOTED** the Chairman's annual report.

In my first term as an elected member of Mid Devon District Council, I've had the privilege of chairing the Environment Policy Development Group (PDG), a role aligned with my deep passion for environmental issues.

Since the change in administration in May 2023, the Environment PDG has effectively embraced its responsibilities.

The Environment Policy Development Group (PDG) acted to further environmental sustainability in the round, influencing both the Council's operational practices and its broader responsibilities to Mid Devon's communities.

The Environment PDG has shaped, scrutinised, and recommended important initiatives brought forward by officers, such as:

- Regular Climate Change and Sustainability Updates.
- Revenue and Capital Outturn Reports.
- Environment and Enforcement Policy.
- Waste and Recycling and a review of the Bin It 123 Scheme, including education for residents in relation to reducing side-waste from the Environmental Enforcement Team.
- The MDDC draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan to support the Council presenting a balanced budget for the financial year 2024/2025.

- Management of Himalayan Balsam & other invasive species.
- Corporate Performance.
- Amendments to the Fly Tipping Policy for a proactive reduction in fly-tipping incidents.
- Green Standards in Planning including renewable and alternative energy, Energy efficiency and Community Energy Projects.
- Renewable Energy in Mid Devon District Council.
- Support for the Council's biodiversity duty.
- Staying up to date with the Climate Action Plan.

Our Environment Enforcement Team has excelled in enforcing best practices, handling diverse cases such as abandoned vehicles, fly-tipping, environment enforcement, and parking. By patrolling town centres, car parks and other key areas of the District to proactively identify any arising issues or concerns. Their efforts have played a pivotal role in our Continuous Improvement program, addressing concerns raised by elected members to maintain the cleanliness of our district.

Our District Officers have been instrumental in transitioning to three-weekly bin collections, resulting in Mid Devon District Council coming within the top 10% of all Councils for our recycling rate and reduction in residual tonnage. I would like to extend my utmost congratulations to all staff and residents that have helped us achieve this.

One of the first actions of the Environment PDG was to reconstitute the Net Zero Advisory Group, which has been expertly chaired by Cllr Beckett Fish as we strive to achieve our Net Zero objectives.

NZAG has been re-established in order to support the Environment PDG identify the most effective ways of achieving zero carbon output in Mid Devon. Members from all PDGs participate in the Net Zero Advisory Group (NZAG) which has helped explore and steer activity on a wide range of topics.

NZAG have identified a number of ways or building reports on the status of carbon output across Mid Devon and are bringing together a number or metrics for regular review so we can track our performance.

The discussions have looked at a wide number of pathways to furthering the council's achievement of net zero, we have looked at these routes against the amount of impact they will have, the time taken, any cost and just how achievable the plan is.

Areas that are being focussed on include:

- "Greener" policy planning.
- Energy saving and decarbonisation.
- Developing more "green" spaces.
- Rivers partnership.
- Council & Communities Action Plan.
- Supporting local energy projects.
- Supporting local food growing.

NZAG are targeting greener policy planning and energy saving/ decarbonisation as areas where we can make the most traction in the shortest time.

We would like to express thanks to officers Jason Ball and Paul Deal for their assistance as we develop our plans. Also to all members who have contributed to our discussions particularly Cllr Josh Wright and Cllr Natasha Bradshaw.

I would like to thank fellow members for their contribution to the debates this year, and officers for their guidance, support and professional recommendations. Particular thanks also goes to David Parker for organising agendas, report packs, and ensuring everything runs smoothly. Your help and support is really appreciated.

As Chairman, it has been an honour to serve, and I look forward to continuing my commitment to the committee. Balancing tight budgets, increasing demands on public services, and fostering sustainable communities remains our generation's greatest challenge. I look forward to being part of the discussions and debates that help that future.

(The meeting ended at 7.26 pm)

CHAIRMAN