

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **CABINET** held on 17 September 2024 at 5.15 pm

**Present
Councillors**

L Taylor, N Bradshaw, J Buczkowski,
S J Clist, S Keable, J Lock, J Wright and
D Wulff

**Apology
Councillor**

G Duchesne

**Also Present
Councillors**

C Harrower and L Knight

**Also Present
Officers:**

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Richard Marsh
(Director of Place & Economy), Paul Deal (Head of
Finance, Property & Climate Resilience), Tristan Peat
(Forward Planning Team Leader) and Laura Woon
(Democratic Services Manager)

**Councillors
Online**

E Buczkowski, G Czapiewski, A Glover, M Fletcher
R Roberts and S Robinson

58. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr G DuChesne.

59. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Steve Rowe

Question 1:

Question 54 on the agenda item 6, could you please inform me what the Councillors are doing to assist SME builders?

Response:

The draft responses that that have been prepared and are before Members make two references to SME builders in relation to the delivery of new homes.

The response to question 54 refers to community land trusts as a way of helping local communities in getting housing to meet their specific local needs. These are

established interventions which the Council would wish to see continue through grant to replenish the community housing fund.

In question 58, a reference is included to SMEs in relation to a choice of sites coming through the planning process. The National Planning Policy Framework requires a minimum of 10% of housing requirement to be met on small sites. This would create an opportunity through the development process to have smaller sites coming through where SMEs had more opportunities to access land for development. On larger sites, SME's may typically be excluded as those are typically developed or land banked by volume house builders. The response suggests that this could be addressed, and opportunities for SME's facilitated, by requiring larger sites to include an element of deliver by SME's.

Question 2:

Is it your Cabinet that hold the executive team to account for their actions or is it the responsibility of another body or Committee? And to whom must I address.

Response from the Leader of the Council:

The usual procedure rules would be that the Council would ask for the questions in advance in order to prepare a response at the meeting and to ensure the correct information would be given. The executive would be the Cabinet and each Cabinet Member would have different responsibilities.

Supplementary Question:

If you have an executive team that then say they are going to do something and they do not do it, who holds them to account?

What Committee or is it Steering Committee? Or is it Cabinet?

Response from the Leader of the Council:

If you have a concern about a Cabinet Member portfolio you could directly go to the relevant Cabinet Member. If it was an operational issue you may also go through the complaints procedure of the Council.

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

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

Cllr S Clist declared his involvement in the Planning Policy Advisory Group with regard to the National Planning Policy Framework.

61. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 August 2024 were **APPROVED** as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Leader.

(Proposed by Cllr S Clist and seconded by Cllr N Bradshaw)

62. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP)

The Cabinet had before it a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) Officer presenting the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The Cabinet Member for Governance, Finance and Risk outlined the contents of the report with particular reference to the following:

- The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the General Fund covering the years 2025/26 to 2028/29.
- The MTFP would normally cover a 5 year horizon, the change in Government and the importance of the Autumn Budget for the future of public services, adding a new year 5 had been delayed until the Council was better informed.
- The report only covered the General Fund, whereas normally the report would also include the Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme. These would be developed and would come through the governance process in due course.
- The latest forecast position was based upon the most up to date information. It was important to agree the underlying principles set out in Section 2.6 of the report.
- The underlying assumptions were included within Appendix 1, along with some sensitivity analysis that gave some scale to the variability of the MTFP and would be refined as the Council progressed through the budget process.
- The headline position for the General Fund was that there was a projected shortfall in 2025/26 of £1.2 million, increasing to £4 million by 2028/29.
- Senior officers have identified a range of budget options to address the budget shortfall using the red, amber and green assessment, which would be presented to the relevant Policy Development Groups for discussion, with the recommendation to support the green and amber options.
- Newly identified budget pressures in Appendix 3 and savings options in Appendix 4A which were relevant to Cabinet only, or Appendix 4B for all saving options.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The figures and comparator data on staff turnover and sickness.
- The annual shortfall decreases in 2027 from £1.6 million to £655k was there a reason for the large decrease?
- The uncertainty of the future Local Government Funding.
- The positive approach to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- The percentage increase in gas and electricity, would there be a decrease when the alternative green energy sources are used?
- The emerging budget pressure in relation to planning enforcement and criticism the Council had received and why it was considered a high risk.
- The engagement figures of the residents that had been involved with Let's Talk Devon or the reduction in the engagement.

RESOLVED that:

1. The updated MTFP's for the General Fund covering the years 2025/26 to 2028/29 be noted.
2. Cabinet agreed the principles and endorsed the approach to balancing the General Fund Revenue Budget outlined in paragraph 6.2.

3. Cabinet seek recommendations from the Policy Development Groups on the Round 1 Budget Proposals and their views on where savings could be sought and to what level.

(Proposed by Cllr J Buczkowski and seconded by Cllr S Clist)

Note: * Report previously circulated.

63. **NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK**

The Cabinet had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Director of Place and Economy on the National Planning Policy Framework.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration outlined the contents of the report with particular reference to the following:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how those would be applied.
- It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans would provide sufficient housing and other development in a sustainable manner.
- The NPPF was first introduced in 2012, it had replaced previous National Planning Policy guidance and statements and had been subject to updates made in July 2018, February 2019, July 2021 and in December 2023.
- The current version of the NPPF included revisions made in response to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to National Planning Policy consultation at that same time.
- In particular, the December 2023 NPPF update removed the requirement for Local Authorities with an adopted Local Plan less than 5 years old to continually demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply.
- The Government published its consultation "proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system", and had made clear that reform was necessary to reverse the December 2023 changes to the NPPF that it considered "were damaging to housing supply, disrupted plan-making and undermined investor confidence."
- The consultation document included 106 questions and comments were invited by Local Authorities and other interested parties by 24th September 2024. There was now an opportunity for the Council to consider the implications of the proposed reforms in relation to plan making and also the determination of planning applications in Mid Devon and submit its own response to consultation. The draft consultation responses, informed through discussions with PPAG, were presented for review and discussion.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The housing issues and the concerns for implications to our environment.
- The gain of land for housing would be a loss to other uses, biodiversity and agriculture.
- Net Zero Advisory Group (NZAG) recommended that the Council sought clarification from the Government on whether the Council's targets could be met through repurposing.
- A decision about housing targets and the ability to balance the new land release with biodiversity and carbon storage opportunities.

- To strategically work on nature recovery with local nature recovery partnerships. When allocating new developments to go beyond the minimum ten percent biodiversity net gain. Including on site and per development application to ensure a more strategic balance was found between development and biodiversity.
- To consider including the following: reference to the renewal of railway infrastructure and renewal of sustainable transport opportunities such as cycle ways on old railway lines. Public transport to reduce additional traffic impacts from meeting new housing targets. River based management plans. The erosion of the open countryside with scattered housing development.
- To seek further clarification on whether Neighbourhood Plans could incorporate renewable energy preferences and plans.
- The references to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be national landscapes.
- In the response could the diversity needs of the community be more widely reflected? (I.e. neuro-diversity/dementia friendly etc.)
- Scope for the response to include reference to how Local Authorities could take on more initiatives to deliver the additional housing needed – i.e. through expanded HRA developments where sufficient funding was made available and legislative regimes proactively supported and encouraged such development and retention of stock

(Proposed by Cllr S Keable and seconded by Cllr N Bradshaw)

Note: *Report previously circulated.

64. **NOTIFICATION OF KEY DECISIONS**

The Cabinet had before it, and **NOTED**, the Notification of Key Decisions *.

The Clerk identified the changes that had been made to the list since it was published with the agenda. This included the following:

- The S106 Governance Framework report had moved from 15th October to 12th November.
- The Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension, Area B Masterplan had been added to 15th October
- Draft Policies and site options for the new Local Plan had moved from 15th October to 4th March 2025.
- The Local Development had been added to April 2025.

Note: * Key Decision report previously circulated.

(The meeting ended at Time 18.32pm)

LEADER