

MINUTES of a MEETING of the SERVICE DELIVERY & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 23 September 2024 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

M D Binks, E Buczkowski, M Farrell,
M Fletcher (Chair), C Harrower, L Knight
and J Poynton

Apologies

Councillors

C Connor, A Glover and M Jenkins

Also Present

Councillors

J Buczkowski, J Lock and J Wright

Also Present

Officers

Andrew Jarrett (Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Matthew Page (Head of People, Performance & Waste), Paul Deal (Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience), Dean Emery (Head of Revenues, Benefits & Leisure), James Hamblin (Operations Manager for People Services), Andy Mackie (Leisure Services Manager), Luke Howard (Environment and Enforcement Manager), Kelly Lee (Leisure Business Manager) and Sarah Lees (Democratic Services Officer)

Councillors

Online

G Czapiewski, G Duchesne, B Fish, S Keable, S Robinson
and L Taylor

Officers Online

D Beer, Dr Stephen Carr and L Woon

18 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllr C Connor who was substituted by Cllr L Knight and also Cllr A Glover who was substituted by Cllr E Buczkowski.

19 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

20 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

No interests were declared under this item.

21 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 24 June 2024, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

22 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair had the following announcements to make:

1. In order to facilitate a better understanding of how the Leisure Centres worked, tours would be arranged for the Policy Development Group (PDG) Members to attend. The clerk would circulate some dates in due course.
2. Any ideas were welcomed for future PDG discussion. He encouraged the Group to be proactive with topic suggestions.

23 **PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD Q1 (00:10:00)**

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED**, summary information * reflecting performance in the Service Delivery and Continuous Improvement areas for quarter 1 2024/2025.

The following was highlighted on the Performance Dashboard:

- The Dashboards were intended to provide an 'at a glance' representation of performance in the Service Delivery & Continuous Improvement area.
- The Dashboards allowed Members to easily see whether service areas were 'on track' and the use of pie charts and RAG (Red/Amber/Green) ratings were used to facilitate this. The Dashboard also included an 'In Focus' box which provided additional information on the performance of relevant services.
- There was one corporate risk in relation to this Policy Development Group (PDG) which was 'Operation of a Waste Management Service' which currently showed no change from the previous quarter.
- The amount of household waste collected higher than slightly up on the quarterly target.
- Staff turnover was showing amber and this was being closely monitored by senior management.
- Council Tax collection was slightly behind target. It was explained that this was quite often the case at this time of year and that the cost of living crisis might be affecting people's ability to pay. Quarter 2 figures would provide a better reflection of the true Council Tax collection position.
- The possible removal of a single person's discount was concerning to all local authorities. More would be known after the Government's Autumn budget was announced on 30th October 2024.
- Capital Outturn and Capital Slippage were also showing as amber.

Note: * Dashboards previously circulated.

24 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2025/2026 (00:20:00)

The Group were presented with a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive presenting the updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which covered the period 2025/2026 to 2028/2029 and took into account the Council's key strategies and demonstrated it had the financial resources to deliver the new Corporate Plan.

The contents of the report were outlined with particular reference to:

- The MTFP covered a period from 2025/26 to 2028/29. Normally this would be a 5 year plan but the Council were currently awaiting greater clarification from the new Government and the Chancellor's budget announcement on 30th October 2024. The 5th year will be added following this.
- The MTFP focussed on a framework of principles those being: (i) General Fund Reserves (ii) Optimise Income Generation (iii) Allocation of Revenue Resources (iv) Allocation of Capital Resources
- The MTFP built on a number of assumptions around inflation which were shown in Appendix 1.
- Overall the result of pressures on the budget left a £1.2m gap rising to 4m by year 4 if the Council took no action.
- Over the summer officers had looked at options which had been RAG rated as red, amber, green in terms of risk and deliverability.
- If the green and amber savings were accepted this would reduce the £1.2m gap down to circa £400,000
- All Policy Development Groups would be asked to look at possible savings which would then be presented to Cabinet.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The need for the Accountants to be realistic when it came to assumptions for the forth coming budget and to err on the side of caution.
- Officers had already identified £800k worth of budget savings over the course of the summer. Even if the suggested budget saving proposals in the report were approved there would still be a budget gap for next year.
- A revised position would be brought to the next meeting.

The Group **NOTED** the following:

1. The updated MTFP for the General Fund covering the years 2025/26 to 2028/29;
2. The principles and approach to balancing the General Fund Revenue Budget outlined in paragraph 6.2;
3. The emerging budget pressures included within Appendix 3;

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

The Round 1 Budget Proposals as set out in Appendix 4a be approved.

(Proposed by Cllr M Farrell and seconded by Cllr C Harrower)

Reason for the decision

As set out in the report.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

25 **ESTABLISHMENT REPORT (00:32:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of People, Performance & Waste and the Operations Manager for People Services providing an update on both the Establishment of the Council together with its performance.

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

- The report ran alongside the annual Pay Policy and other key data.
- The potential risk of industrial action across the Local Government sector during the autumn and winter. Unison were currently balloting members as a result of recent pay settlements in other areas of the public sector. Members would of course be kept updated.
- The number of sickness days per FTE (Full Time Equivalent) per year was currently showing as 10.45 days. This was reflected as a challenge across the sector. Free flu jabs were being offered to staff earlier than normal this year. All 100 vouchers had been taken this up.
- Recruitment and selection training had also been offered to relevant staff during October and these course were already well subscribed.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Absence for dependents was not included within these figures.
- All service areas were reviewing their business continuity plans and ascertaining the core services which needed to be provided should industrial action be a possibility.
- The Group were reassured that a 'Workforce Review Group' met on a weekly basis to monitor staffing levels.
- The Waste area was at particularly high risk should industrial action be threatened however, when the pandemic had hit an emergency plan had been employed to collect waste and a similar plan could be instigated again should it be needed.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

26 **QUARTER 1 ENVIRONMENT AND ENFORCEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT (00:44:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Performance, People and Waste providing a quarterly update on key environment enforcement performance data including fly tipping, Public Space Protection Orders and the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices. It also gave a brief summary of car parking performance and the issuing of Penalty Charge Notices.

The following summary of the report was provided:

- The Group should be reassured by current performance.
- The service had been tackling problematic, hotspot areas. There had been a lot of engagement with residents.
- Comparative figures with last year were provided in the report and the service was performing as officers would hope it to.

Consideration was given to:

- There had been many recent changes with regard to parking charges.
- Patrols were undertaken on a daily basis and enforcement procedures were robust.
- The Car Parking Working Group, which included stakeholders outside of the Council, were looking at a number of proposals for future charging including a possible free 15 minute period for the Market Car Park in Tiverton. These proposals were still in discussion and the Group would be meeting next month to progress a variety of ideas.
- The provision of data in relation to fly tipping. It was explained that the majority of fly tips were quite sizeable and often in repeated locations. There were repeat offenders who the Council engaged with quite regularly.
- The Waste Service was proactively trying to engage with repeat offenders of side waste.
- The content of fly tips tended to be building waste, children's toys and garden debris.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

27 **BIN-IT 123 - VERBAL UPDATE (00:55:00)**

The Group received, and **NOTED**, a verbal update on Bin-It 123 which included the following information:

- Data from the first 4 months of this year showed that 60% of waste was recycled putting the Council in the top 10% of all local authorities. This was testament to the dedication of the team and had been recognised by OFLOG (Office for Local Government).
- A report regarding the feasibility of recycling pots and pans and nappies would be brought to the next meeting.
- Thanks were extended to Members for their continued support of the scheme.
- There were a number of households that continued to leave side waste out but proactive attempts were being made tackle these issues.
- Recent surgeries with Town and Parish Council representatives as well as others had been very positive.
- 'Communication' would be a key focus going forwards in terms of engaging with the younger generation and providing school visits and education. There would also be community activities and the use of a variety of types of communication methods, for example, a greater use of social media.
- The team had written to the new Secretary of State stressing the need to continue with the current scheme given its strong performance and the positive engagement of Mid Devon residents.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- Concern was expressed that it was still not possible at the current time to recycle plastic film.
- The scheme did have its challenges but the team were always happy to talk to community groups to try and find a way forward.
- There were also recycling advisers who residents could approach if they had any issues.
- Moving to weekly collections would cost the Council circa £1.6m.
- A second bin could be applied for if necessary although this would involve an assessment process.
- Some work was being undertaken to assess the feasibility of recycling blister packs but this work was on ongoing.
- The Council was prepared to 'enforce' where it needed to.
- It was not always about focussing on recycling rates, messaging around 'Reduce and Reuse' was also important.

28 LEISURE SERVICE - VERBAL UPDATE (01:19:00)

The Group received a verbal update with regard to the Leisure Service which included the following information:

- The Leisure Service was going through an exciting period of change and was putting in place solid building blocks for a more sustainable future.
- Senior managers were reviewing reporting lines and making sure there were clear lines of communication and with each having strong leadership.
- The digital transformation of Leisure was well underway with the new 'Leisure Management System' (LMS) having gone to open market which would be followed by the app, access controls and swimming lesson software. Digital investment would enable the Leisure service to make access more streamlined, with less waiting time for customers, better recording of usage as well as improved safeguarding measures in the centres. Over time much improved management information would be available and this could be used to better run the service.
- The centres were running off 100% renewable energy which included solar, ground and air source heat pumps. In addition, swimming pools had been converted from chlorine to electro-chlorination and now used 'salt'. This completely removed the risk that chlorine (sodium hypochlorite) presented to team members and replaced it with a natural product. Pools using electro-chlorination had reported many benefits, including enabling people with respiratory and skin conditions to swim without the effects that a chlorine pool could have.
- Leisure was also going through a rebrand exercise to align itself more with the contemporary offerings of today and bring together the services vision and mission, creating a consistent theme and aspiration across all three sites.
- Culm Valley had opened its brand new accessible changing places toilet and changing room, as well as a new sauna. In October the service would also see the investment in the gym equipment and refresh of exercise areas. Opening times had been extended to cater for the 'early birds' from 6am three days per

week. Following the completion of the gym refresh and redecoration a series of open days were being planned to showcase the improvements.

- The service was also working with Active Devon and in early discussions about subscribing to the National 'Wellbeing Walks' scheme which would see it engaging with the community and facilitating healthy and sociable wellbeing walks in Mid Devon. The Community engagement work was something the service was keen to expand on with more outreach work being looked at for the future.
- Leisure was using expenditure, income and participation to identify the cost per user, by using net cost divided by participation numbers to give three direct targets, 1) reduce expenditure, 2) increase revenue and 3) increase participation. In the financial year 22-23, this cost was £2.94 per visit, in 23-24 it was £1.30 and in the current year it stood at £1.05. The Management team were working hard to reduce that further.
- 280 people had taken part in the recent National Fitness Day.

Consideration was given to:

- The summer family memberships had been well received with over 195 families taking advantage of the special offers available.
- Dates would be circulated for PDG Members to visit the Leisure Centres and receive a tour of the facilities.
- Retaining members was a key focus alongside acquisition schemes.
- The current attrition rate was between 3% and 4%.

29 **ACCESS TO INFORMATION - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS & PUBLIC**

The Chair stated that discussion with regard to the next item, required the Policy Development Group 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 was required because consideration of this matter in public would disclose information falling within one of the descriptions of exempt information in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. The Policy Development Group decided, in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption interest in disclosing the information, outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That, in accordance with Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the next item, for the reason set out below:

Information under paragraph 3 (contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person including the authority holding that information).

(Proposed by the Chair).

30 LEISURE PRICING STRATEGY 2025 (01:27:00)

The Group received a report * from the Head of Revenues, Benefits & Leisure presenting a change to the leisure fees and charges from January 2025.

The contents of the report were outlined and discussion took place.

Returning to open session the Cabinet Member for Service Delivery and Continuous Improvement provided the following executive summary:

- He stressed the importance of competitive pricing and the growing costs of the service.
- There had been a very carefully considered review of the pricing structure.
- The review had considered the various discounts and means tested allowances.
- Membership fees had not been increased last year.
- Mid Devon Leisure remained competitive in terms of its fees.
- Member retention campaigns were under way as well as campaigns to attract new members.
- A sensible approach had been adopted towards the proposed fees.

Following this, it was:

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the proposed charges within the report at section 1.22 be approved.

(Proposed by the Chair)

Reason for the decision:

As set out in the report.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

31 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (01:43:00)

In addition to the items already listed, the following was requested to be on the agenda for the next meeting:

- A verbal update with regard to the 'mechanics' of Council Tax collection (this would include an update on the Housing Support Fund following the Government's budget on 30th October).
- A feasibility study in relation to the potential recycling of pots and pans and nappies.

(The meeting ended at 7.14 pm)

CHAIR