

MINUTES of a MEETING of the CABINET held on 8 July 2025 at 5.15 pm

**Present
Councillors**

L Taylor, D Wulff , J Lock, J M Downes,
G Duchesne, M Fletcher, S Keable and
J Wright

**Apology
Councillor**

N Bradshaw

**Also Present
Councillor(s)**

L G J Kennedy

**Also Present
Officer(s):**

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Andrew Jarrett (Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Maria De Leiburne (Director of Legal, People & Governance (Monitoring Officer)), Richard Marsh (Director of Place & Economy), Lisa Lewis (Head of Digital Transformation & Customer Engagement), Simon Newcombe (Head of Housing & Health), Matthew Page (Head of People, Performance & Waste), Dean Emery (Head of Revenues, Benefits & Leisure), Paul Deal (Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience), Darren Beer (Operations Manager for Street Scene), Tristan Peat (Forward Planning Team Leader) and Laura Woon (Democratic Services Manager)

**Councillors
Online**

E Buczkowski, J Buczkowski and M Farrell

Officers Online

Lisa Turner (Planning Officer from Blackdown Hills National Landscape)

14. APOLOGIES (04:30)

Apologies were received from Cllr N Bradshaw.

15. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (04:40)

Barry Warren

In paragraph 1.9 two schemes for MMC modular homes to be installed in Willand: Fir Close, 1 unit underway for completion in November 2025] and Somerlea, 7 units due to commence August 2025.

The Parish Council and some residents are aware that public money, their money, has been spent already on these projects but they can see nothing other than a fenced area in Fir Close which, has been like it for nearly two years. No sign of it being underway.

Question 1:

When are we going to see some positive progress on site?

It was raised at a Parish Council meeting that MDDC have made payments of over £1.1million to Zed Pods for the Somerlea development with nothing to show for it on site. The main concern was about what safeguards were in place for public money should the company fail. As the result of concerns raised, one of our Ward Councillors asked a number of questions to try and obtain facts. The answer conveyed from an officer contained the following:

“There are contractual obligations, as is the case with most development projects irrespective of the contractor, where staged payments are made. Nonetheless, through drawing down a contract via the South West Procurement Alliance (SWPA) framework there are additional protections for all parties whereby our funds are not released until key milestones on delivery are signed off.”

Question 2:

According to accounts seen monies have been paid to Zed Pods - so what key milestones on delivery have been ‘signed off’ and by whom?

In May 2025 the accounts appear to show six payments to Zed Pods in relation to Somerlea namely;140k; 103k; 110k; 140k;103k;103k and 37k.

Question 3:

What is the detail of each of these payments please? Generalisation such as ‘contractual obligations’ will not answer the question.

In 2024/25 so far £1,139,000 has been paid up front to Zed Pods. The risk assessment on page 368 of your bundle refers to the detail being covered in the report. Nowhere does it clearly address what protection the Council has for these monies should Zed Pods fail to deliver on the contract.

Question 4:

As risk owner, will the Chief Executive recognise that there is a potential risk to the Council and include the potential risk in the Corporate Risk report?

Paul Elstone

After the massive financial losses and losses still being incurred due to the 3 Rivers debacle, It is reasonable for the Mid Devon Residents to expect that business plans, budgets and supporting detail would be scrutinised to a completely new level and by this Administration and its various Committees. I contend that the required level of scrutiny is not happening. The Modular Home Value for Money Benchmarking report being a case in point.

This report references two external projects, and which form the major part of the conclusion being projected that the ZED POD's modules are the best value for money. Namely a development at the former Eastleigh Post Office and the other at New Kingsland, Bristol

Reference – Eastleigh Post Office.

Question 1:

Are Cabinet Members fully aware that the report is based on the following and factually incorrect information?

That it's a development of 28 flats with retail units under. A development made up of 2 separate apartment blocks. It is not 10 flats as the report projects.

That the value for money Appendix 'B' does not even get simple subtractions correct for the Eastleigh development this when deducting the £1,050,000 grant funding.

That the net cost should be £1.78 million not £2.7 million as stated. This seriously corrupting the bench marking results.

Question 2:

Are Cabinet Members fully aware that the report is based on the following and factually incorrect information?

Reference – Bristol New Kingsland.

That the net cost calculation is based on a Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA) or Liveable Area. They are the same thing of only 900 square meters. It is not. The true area is 1,350 square meters as the detailed drawings previously provided to you show.

That the net cost per square meter is in fact £2,482. It is not £3,742 as the report says. A huge difference, a reduction of 50%. Yet again very seriously corrupting report results.

That the report says its Traditional Build. It is not. It is a MMC panel system Category 2 development.

Given these facts the Bristol MMC Development is Best Value and by any reasonable measure and not as the Value for Money Report attempts to present.

Question 3:

Will this Cabinet now "tear up" the value for money benchmarking Annex B report this given in the clearest of terms it does not represent fact. It is fatally flawed.

That instead arrange for a proper and fully independent value for money benchmarking exercise to be undertaken and to Royal Institute of Chartered Surveys (RICS) standards?

The Leader stated that Mr Warren and Mr Elstone would receive a written response to their questions. The Leader noted that the Cabinet had received and read the email from Mr Elstone in regards to the Value for Money item on the agenda.

16. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (12:00)**

All Cabinet Members referred to item 9, Value for Money report and declared they had received correspondence from a member of the public in relation to this item.

17. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (13:40)**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 June 2025 were **APPROVED** as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Leader.

18. **ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/25 (14:04)**

Cabinet had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager and the Head of People, Performance & Waste on the Annual Performance for 2024/2025.

The Head of People, Performance & Waste outlined the contents of the report with particular reference to the following:

- This was the first annual Performance Report on the Council's Corporate Plan. It provided performance information for the 2024/25 financial year. The accompanying appendices were structured according to the five themes of the Corporate Plan.
- Section 2 of the covering report provided performance analysis on a theme by theme basis, with the focus on the Corporate Plan performance indicators.
- Further information on the performance against the aims and objectives detailed in the Corporate Plan was provided in Appendix 1 to 5.
- Appendix 6 contained the performance dashboards for Quarter 4. Those contained 100 measures highlighting how services were performing across the Council, and those indicators that were part of the Corporate Plan were highlighted in yellow text.
- The Performance Dashboards had also been reviewed by the relevant Policy Development Groups (PDG's) and the Planning Committee.

Discussion took place with regards to:

- The increase in applicants on Devon Home Choice and there were 57 affordable homes built in Mid Devon with a target set at 94, what were the reasons for not reaching the target?
- How did bio diversity net gain work and how the developers were using those effectively and what were the percentages?
- In Quarter 4 the Pannier Market percentages decreased was this the period after Christmas and were the Council helping with incentives to drive the

economy during those times and in addition to maintaining good level of traders?

- Some of those that were not on target were close. Discussions over the last financial year had been staff turnover and staff sickness at meetings.
- In regards to the waste collections of residual waste, collections and comparisons over the last four years had improved year upon year.

Reason for Decision:

Corporate Plan priorities and targets were managed and scrutinised on a regular basis using appropriate performance indicators as detailed in the report.

Note: *Report previously circulated

19. CORPORATE RISK REPORT (29:00)

Cabinet had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager and the Head of People, Performance & Waste on Corporate Risk.

The Head of People, Performance & Waste outlined the contents of the report with particular reference to the following:

- The Council's current corporate risks with their updated position as of May 2025. Those were the risks which had been identified that may be most likely to impact the Council meeting its objectives.
- This report was produced quarterly and presented to Cabinet for Members scrutiny, comment and feedback.
- At paragraph 2.1 of the report there was a summary table of the 16 corporate risks that the Council was currently managing.
- A risk matrix or heat map was presented at Appendix 1 showing the relative position of the corporate risks. In Appendix 2 of the report, further details were provided for each risk in a standard template.
- Any significant changes to the Risk Register since it was last reported to Cabinet were listed in the covering report, at paragraph 2.3.

Discussion took place with regards to:

- The mitigation around the CR2.7 established supply chain risk management and CR5.3 supply chain management both mitigate the same risk but different functions given the risk extended beyond IT risk such as property maintenance, building suppliers and waste collections. Should these be recorded separately in the future to protect the vulnerabilities and to be recorded and monitored in one place?
- CR17 the Severe Weather Emergency recovery was the amber rating sufficient enough following recent news relating to Texas.
- Culm Garden Village and Infrastructure CR1a and CR1b had there been an update on Junction 28 and the risk around the building works starting in the key area?
- Discussion on the significant housing need had been made available at Junction 28.
- The support of the Economy Growth & Regeneration team and the significant expansion for the town, plus the re-opening of the Cullompton Railway Station.

- For the Council to make their representations known in regards to Junction 28.

Reason for Decision:

Effective risk management was crucial to enable the Council to mitigate risks to achieving Corporate Plan priorities.

Note: *Report previously circulated

20. **MEETING MANAGEMENT (49:40)**

The Leader **MOVED** that he would be bring forward the following Agenda Items:-

- (i) 10– Waste Depot Remodelling to the next item.

21. **WASTE DEPOT REMODELLING (50:00)**

Cabinet had before it a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) Officer on the Waste Depot Remodelling.

The Cabinet Member for Service Delivery and Continuous Improvements outlined the contents of the report with particular reference to the following:

- The Environment Agency (EA) announced it was consolidating its permitting rules, with the aim of streamlining permitting processes and aligning them with modern standards. These changes would come into force on 19 June 2026.
- To comply with and meet the new requirements some significant changes were required to the Waste Depot; the main changes were the certain elements of Waste and Recycling required storing securely undercover with appropriate fire protection and security.
- Therefore the Council must ensure the depot had sufficient capacity and space to ensure service delivery was legally compliant. The Council were proposing a reconfiguration and expansion of the operation and new buildings to house the materials.
- This would enable the Council to build on and sustain the excellent performance it had achieved over the last two years, with Mid Devon now in the top 5% of national performance. With extra storage capacity, the depot would also be able to consider adding additional recycling streams in the future to add to its current collection portfolio. A report would be submitted to the Service Delivery and Continuous Improvement Policy Development Group (PDG) in September 2025 which would then come to Cabinet where future potential recycling options could be considered.

Discussion took place regards to:

- Would those changes outlined allow the provision to start the nappy trial?
- The good news about the ability to take more recycling, were there any ideas of those additional items.
- Some of the issues were around the size of the lorries and the amount that they could take.
- How much extra capacity with this investment?
- For the future proof does this include the growth in housing?

- If the Council were able to meet the deadline, could some of the trials be brought forward?
- Would there be any impact on the existing service delivery during construction work?
- Had the staff been consulted with regards to this proposal in regards to their thoughts?
- Was it correct that the recycling lorries would be weighed in and out at the recycling centre?
- Why were the full costs not included within the report? It was clarified that the full costs were included, but the specific recommendation for the office block was because it was a key decision on its own and the first stage of the process. Any other specific elements that were a key decision would be brought back to Cabinet for approval. How cost effective was this Council in regards to the other local authorities?
- With the extra capacity how much was this in percentages and in comparison to other authorities?

RESOLVED that:

1. Delegated authority be given to the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) to progress the works as planned. Noting that, any subsequent specific spend or contractual awards in line with key decisions thresholds would be brought back to Cabinet for agreement.
2. The purchase of a new Modular Office complex, to be specified, up to the value of £250k be **AGREED**.
3. The alignment of the leases of the various existing units to end on the same date as that recently agreed for the new car park site – 7 November 2039 be **AGREED**.

(Proposed by Cllr J Wright and seconded by Cllr M Fletcher)

Reason for Decision:

The EA published legal guidance that Waste and Recycling services need to both abide to and meet for its collection services to be permitted and carried out. Recycling services that do not comply with this guidance may be disrupted.

Note: *Report previously circulated

22. ADOPTION OF THE BLACKDOWN HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN (1:14:38)

Cabinet had before it a report * from the Director of Place and Economy on the Adoption of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan.

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

- Part of Mid Devon district was situated within the area covered by the Blackdown Hills National Landscape (formerly known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

- The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 required that the Council, together with other relevant local authorities, produced a Management Plan for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and reviewed it at intervals of no more than five years. The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership had performed this duty on behalf of this Council and the other relevant local authorities, which included Somerset Council and East Devon District Council.
- The Management Plan blended national and local priorities and sought to address them in a way that was right for the Blackdown Hills – the landscape, environment, and communities to ensure the very special character of the area was conserved and enhanced for future generations.
- It included a vision, sets out four main themes, each with objectives, guiding principles, policies, targets and priority actions.
- A draft management plan was previously reported to the Planning Policy Advisory Group on 22 July 2024 and the Cabinet on 15 October 2024 (Minute 70) and was subject to an 8 week public consultation from January to March this year.
- Following the public consultation an amended draft of the Management Plan was reported to the Planning, Environment and Sustainability Policy Development Group (PDG) meeting on the 10 June 2025, which endorsed the recommendations in this report.
- Approval was being sought for this draft version as the Chair Foreword, National Landscape Partnership Commendation and pictures were to be added to the final version. Those additions had no material significance to the substance of the document.

RESOLVED that:

1. The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan (Appendices 1, 2 and 3) be **ADOPTED**.
2. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Place and Economy in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration to approve any editorial changes made to the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan.

(Proposed by Cllr S Keable and seconded by Cllr G DuChesne)

Reason for Decision:

There were no direct financial implications from the public consultation and the adoption of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan. The Council made a grant funding contribution each year to the host authority, Devon County Council, to support the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership.

Note: *Report previously circulated

23. **VALUE FOR MONEY REPORT- TRADITIONAL VERSUS MODULAR BUILDS (1:20:37)**

Cabinet had before it a report * from the Head of Housing and Health on the Value for Money Report and Traditional Versus Modular Builds.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Asset and Property Services outlined the contents of the report with particular reference to the following:

- This was a key, well evidenced report setting out the strategic, policy and value for money context regarding this Council's successful, on-going Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA) development programme which had a focus on high-quality, good-value housing that apply modular, modern-methods of construction (otherwise known as MMC).
- The benefits of the Council's modular MMC approach were clearly articulated through the report and supporting annexes, and included important benchmarking information in the context of traditional build and other MMC affordable housing schemes of different types, within the district and regionally.
- The benefits were not only represented through net development costs that compared well to other, sometimes lower specification, build types, but through ability to provide housing that met local needs at pace.
- Feedback from the Council's tenants living in those modular homes had been very positive overall and the completed schemes to date had been widely accessed by other local authorities, registered providers and most recently the Homes England Director of the Affordable Homes Programme as exemplar projects. It was important not to lose sight of the fact these were decent homes, providing essential accommodation where most required for those in priority housing need, who maybe care experienced and may also be homeless.
- The report had received a thorough discussion and debate through both the Homes Policy Development Group (PDG) and Scrutiny Committee in recent weeks who had both supported the report recommendation. Furthermore, each project put forward for Homes England funding was subject to their external, assessment of viability and value for money (VfM) assessment which was further welcome assurance.
- Value for money social housing was vital if the Council were to continue setting an example locally, regionally and indeed nationally in the Council's approach to tackling the housing crisis that was impacting our communities.

Discussion took place with regards to:

- The progress that had been made on providing Social homes houses.
- In regards to the Willand builds and whether there was a completion date on the Somerlea builds?
- The achievement was remarkable, however the concerns about the government housing targets that were being set, as an authority could this Council push back to the Government?
- It was positive that the change of rules from Government around the Right to Buy Scheme.
- Did the Value for Money account for whole life cost such as ongoing maintenance, energy performance and refurbishment.
- The ZED pods seem to exceed the minimum standards in terms of energy performance and carbon emission, could officers provide more details on the expected utility savings and were these monitored.
- Offsite manufacturing and bench marking across the Country and would the efficiency help aim to meet the targets in the corporate plan.

- Whether it was 18 months to complete a traditional build.

RESOLVED that:

1. Cabinet continued to adopt an HRA development programme with a focus on delivering MMC, modular net-zero social housing where possible and viable as part of the Council's future Housing Strategy as recommended by the Homes Policy Development Group.

(Proposed by Cllr J Lock and seconded by Cllr J Wright)

Reason for Decision:

Homes were a strategic theme with specific objectives to increase the delivery of quality designed, well built homes across the housing market to meet identified needs and building of energy efficient and low carbon homes.

Note: *Report previously circulated

24. COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY (1:41:00)

Cabinet had before it a report * from the Head of Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement on the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

The Cabinet Member for Quality of Living, Equalities and Public Health outlined the contents of the report with particular reference to the following:

- This was a revised Communication and Engagement Strategy and the accompanying Media and Social Media Policy, which had been developed by the Communications Manager in collaboration with the Head of Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement, and came to Cabinet following endorsement by the Community, People and Equalities Policy Development Group.
- Those documents supported the Council's commitment to ensuring that communications were effective, inclusive, and transparent, delivering value for money while ensuring residents could easily interact with and understand the work of the Council. They aligned with the Corporate Plan, the Council's values, and its responsibilities under the Single Equality Scheme.
- The strategy promoted a digital-first approach, but with continued support for multiple channels to ensure accessibility for all residents, regardless of how they choose to engage with the Council. This included ensuring that the Council's website and all digital content meets current accessibility standards.
- Since the last update in 2023, the Communications Team had made strong progress across a wide range of service areas. They had supported major elections and civic events, delivered a refreshed presence at the Mid Devon Show, and expanded use of the "Let's Talk Mid Devon" engagement platform, which had attracted nearly 600 new registrations and almost 19,000 visits, with a 20% engagement rate.
- Social media continued to grow, with over 2,300 new followers in the past year, and the e-bulletins now reached over 14,000 subscribers. Two full resident surveys had been carried out, with the proportion of respondents who felt informed about the Council's work increasing significantly. The team has also led or supported communications for a number of priority initiatives,

including Active Mid Devon and the ongoing review of the Council's website content.

- Looking ahead, the strategy provided a strong foundation for communications through the period of Local Government Reorganisation, with an emphasis on keeping residents informed and confident in how to access services throughout any changes. It was anticipated that the Communications Strategy, and accompanying policies would be revised again in three years (or sooner if required) to coincide with any reorganisation.

Discussion took place with regards to:

- What provisions were in place for those residents that were in a rural location or had no internet connection and how would the Council engage effectively?
- How would the Council communicate with those that were not on social media?
- The traditional methods of communication such as hard copy, drop in sessions for those individuals that could attend.
- Did the Communication Team share posts on social media platforms?
- Did the Council share posts on other community's social media pages?
- How does the Council communicate out and sign up with the newsletters.
- Sharing good news stories on the recent achievements of the Council in the post with the yearly Council tax letter that residents received.
- To remove the reference From "Chairman" to "Chair" in the Policy.

RESOLVED that:

1. The content of the reviewed Communication and Engagement Strategy and the Media and Social Media Policy as recommended by the Community, People and Equalities Policy Development Group be **ADOPTED**.

(Proposed by Cllr D Wulff and seconded by Cllr G DuChesne)

Reason for Decision:

To ensure that the Councils customers, staff, members and stakeholders were informed about Council services, news and changes through appropriate and varied channels.

Note: *Report previously circulated

25. NOTIFICATION OF KEY DECISIONS (1:58:00)

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

This included the following:

- Data Protection Policy had been added to September 2025.
- Freedom of Information (FOI) & Environment Information Regulation (EIR) Policy had been added to September 2025.
- Memorial Benches and Memorial Trees had been added to October 2025.

Note: * Key Decision report previously circulated.

(The meeting ended at 19:14pm)

LEADER