

MINUTES of a MEETING of the COMMUNITY, PEOPLE & EQUALITIES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 16 September 2025 at 12.30 pm

**Present
Councillors**

D Broom, S Chenore, A Cuddy, M Farrell,
C Harrower, B Holdman, L G J Kennedy,
A Stirling and H Tuffin

**Apology
Councillors**

A Glover

**Also Present
Officers:**

Paul Deal (Head of Finance, Property & Climate
Resilience) and Laura Woon (Democratic Services
Manager)

**Councillors
Online**

G DuChesne, L G J Kennedy and D Wulff.

Officers Online

Dr Stephen Carr

**Also in
Attendance**

Vicki Rowe (Chief Executive Officer for Citizens Advice)

16 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from: Councillor A Glover who was substituted by Cllr A Stirling.

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

No interests were declared under this item.

Members were reminded that interests could be declared at any point during the meeting.

18 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

19 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 June 2025 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

20 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair had no announcements to make.

21 COMMUNITY ALCOHOL PARTNERSHIP

The Regional Adviser for the Community Alcohol Partnership for South West England was unable to attend this meeting. This item was deferred to the next meeting.

22 CITIZENS ADVICE FOR TORRIDGE, NORTH, MID AND WEST DEVON

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED** a presentation from 'The People's Champion' giving 'Trusted Advice in Times of Change'.

The following was highlighted:

Citizens Advice – The People's Champion:

- Citizens Advice presented their role as a national charity and network of local charities offering free, confidential advice online, by phone, and in person.
- They positioned themselves as champions for the people, helping individuals navigate challenges with trusted, practical advice.

Service Overview (April 2024 – March 2025)

- Between April 2024 and March 2025, Citizens Advice had helped 3,121 people with 10,628 problems.
- Their support had increased family income by £3.6 million.
- They reported unprecedented and growing demand for their services.

Key Issues in Mid Devon:

The main issues brought forward included:

- Welfare benefits inquiries.
- Energy problems.
- Debt concerns.
- Housing issues.

Partnerships and Outreach:

- With funding from trusted partners, they provided specialist advice services.
- Outreach locations included: Crediton (Age Concern) – Wednesday mornings (pre-booked), Cullompton (Community Centre) – every other Friday, Uffculme (Square Corner) – 2nd Friday of the month and Lapford (Ark Community Café) – last Friday of the month

Impact and Value

- Volunteer contributions were valued at £947,860.
- Public value of the service was estimated at £20.5 million.

- For every £1 invested: Fiscal value: £2.37, Public value: £15.84 and value to individuals helped: £12.13
- Estimated savings included: National Health Service (NHS): £395,540, Department of Working Pension (DWP) (keeping people in work): £1.64 million and housing providers (preventing evictions): £644,352

Achievements (2024–25)

- The service had delivered 23,616 volunteer hours. Recorded 38,555 case notes. Held 4,035 in-person appointments. Responded to 1,035 simple queries and submitted 271 evidence forms for policy, research, and campaigns.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The importance of those volunteers that help the community.
- What was the cost of the grant funding that was received by Devon County Council for their service?
- The concerns and uncertainty around volunteers and funding and the impact this would have on the support in the outreach locations and other surroundings.
- Comparison costing of the funding between what the other Councils gave to the service.
- The relationship that the Citizen Advice Bureaux had with this Council?
- How would the income strategy reflect with Local Government Reorganisation on the horizon?
- Was there a training programme for the volunteers? It was confirmed that there was an ongoing programme and for the first 6 weeks this would be supervised and continued support would be provided after that.
- The main cause of the ongoing demand for the service?

It was **AGREED** that:

- A review be undertaken of the funding grants within the Council in comparison with other councils.
- Whether the grant funding that had been allocated for next year could be extended to two years to see this service through Local Government Reorganisation.
- The Vice-Chair of the Policy Development Group (PDG) would liaise with the Homes PDG about the strategic approach for homelessness.
- Discussions would take place in regards to room availability within the Council and if this could be offered to those that may wish to use it and who continued to provide a service for the community.
- Details of point of contact for this Council would be shared with Citizens Advice Bureaux Chief Executive officers to enable communication.

Notes:

- (i) Presentations previously circulated
- (ii) Councillor B Holdman declared a personal interest in that he was the Chair of Tiverton Town Council's Finance Committee.

23 **PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD - QUARTER 1**

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED** slides showing performance information for the area of Community, People and Equalities.

The following was highlighted:

- The Dashboard aimed to give an "at a glance" understanding of how services were performing in terms of performance, finance, and risk. Any measures that were also part of the Corporate Plan were listed in yellow text.
- The indicators were presented with their current performance, the annual target, and a RAG rating to indicate whether the Council were on track to meet their target.
- Overall performance was presented in a pie chart and combined the RAG ratings from both the performance and finance measures.
- Homes made safe under the Housing Assistance Policy (Red) - performance was just below the target position at the end of Qrt 1.
- New Subscribers to Let's Talk Mid Devon (Red) and Engagement rate on Let's Talk Mid Devon (Red) the Council had moved away from focussing on registrations, as this had been fed back as a barrier to completing ongoing questionnaires.
- Support Towns and Parishes to develop their Community Emergency Plans (Red) - No new plans were developed in Q1. However in May, an event was held at Kentisbeare on Community Emergency Plans. There were seven different towns/ parishes in attendance who were updating or writing their community emergency plans.
- Food Service - Total Inspections completed (Red) - performance remained behind target, but there was an overall positive trend with performance increasing.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Clarification around Homes made safe under the Housing Assistance Policy - It was confirmed a glossary would be circulated to the group.
- How would Members find out what Parishes had completed their Community Emergency Plan? – It was confirmed this information was included in the annual report update.
- The figure difference in the performance and annual target of the Red (RAG) rating in regards to the new subscribers to Let's Talk Mid Devon.

Note: Performance Dashboard previously circulated

24 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP) FOR 2026/27**

The Group had before it a *report from Head of Finance, Property and Climate Change presenting the updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which covered the period 2026/27 to 2028/29 and which discussed initial options for cost pressures/savings or income related to the services covered by the Policy Development Group.

The following was highlighted:

- The report was a little different to that provided in previous years. This was due to the raft of changes expected from 2026/27 and the longer term restrictions placed upon the Council by Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The report did not give a forecast shortfall to be addressed. Instead it highlighted the unprecedented level of uncertainty faced by all councils in respect of funding from 2026/27 onwards and estimated a range that the shortfall could fall within.
- The Chancellor's Autumn Budget would not be available until the end of November 2025. This would have a knock on effect of delaying the detail at individual local authority level. The uncertainty regarding future funding could not be overstated.
- Given the potentially extreme reduction in funding within option 1c, and the very limited timeframe for obtaining full clarity, it was highly likely that a degree of flexibility would be required and a draw from reserves might be required.

General Fund Budget Options

- Over the summer officers had identified a range of budget options to address the budget shortfall, using the Red, Amber and Green (RAG) assessment, which were being presented to the relevant Policy Development Groups for discussion, with the recommendation to support the Green and Amber options.
- These included newly identified budget pressures in appendix 2 and savings options in appendix 3, there were options to stretch savings further, for example increasing fees beyond inflation and appendix 4 showed all savings options for context.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Concerns around the ceasing of Community Development grants and how this would impact those affected.
- Clarification around the out of date leases, these were dependent upon market conditions at the time, the income might reduce and may result in the loss of tenants.
- Clarification and confirmation of the when the funding announcement from Government would be and what methodology would be used to distribute those funds.
- How were the Council liaising with Town and Parish Councils?- it was confirmed that the Head of Finance, Property and Climate Resilience would be attending the State of District Debate to give a presentation on Finance and Assets.
- Why this Council had been targeted as part of a minority group of around 50 authorities that would be one of the biggest losers based on their initial draft calculations on funding?

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:

- a) The updated MTFP position for both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account covering the years 2026/27 to 2028/29 be **NOTED**.

- b) The budget proposals as set out in Appendices 2 and 3 and agreed to remove the Cease Community Development grants be approved.
- c) That the Cease Community Development Grant not to be included in the saving options.

(Proposed by Cllr M Farrell and seconded by Cllr H Tuffin)

Reason for the decision

By undertaking regular reviews of the MTFP the Council could ensure that its Corporate Plan priorities were affordable. The implications of the budget gap were set out within the paper. Many areas required greater clarity, particularly around national funding and possible changes to Government Policy. Therefore a number of key assumptions underpinned the reported position, which would be refined as greater clarity was received through the budget setting process.

Notes: * Report previously circulated

- (iii) Councillors: D Broom, M Farrell, B Holdman and A Stirling declared personal interests as they were members of Tiverton Town Council and budget savings were included in appendix 4 regarding CCTV.
- (iv) Councillors: B Holdman and A Stirling also declared a personal interest in that they were members of Tiverton Town Councils Finance Committee.
- (v) Cllr A Cuddy declared a personal interest in that he was business owner.

25 **VOLUNTARY SECTOR NETWORKING EVENT UPDATE**

The Chair advised the group that the Council would be hosting an event for local voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to allow them to network and to meet potential investors and funders.

The drop-in event would take place at Phoenix House, Tiverton on Wednesday 22 October 2025 between 3:30pm and 7:30pm.

This event was designed to create a bridge between the funders and the people funded with the knowledge and resources, and the people making things happen in our communities in order to build stronger partnerships.

26 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The items already listed in the work programme for the next scheduled meeting were **NOTED**.

(The meeting ended at 2.16pm)

CHAIR