

**MINUTES of a MEETING of the SERVICE DELIVERY & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 24 November 2025 at 5.30 pm

**Present**

**Councillors**

J Buczkowski (Chair)  
M D Binks, M Farrell, C Harrower (Vice-Chair), L Knight, S Robinson, M Stratton and G Westcott

**Apologies**

**Councillor(s)**

B Fish, M Jenkins and J Poynton

**Also Present**

**Councillor(s)**

J Wright

**Also Present**

**Officer(s):**

Matthew Page (Head of People, Performance & Waste), Paul Deal (Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience), Dean Emery (Head of Revenues, Benefits & Leisure), Lisa Lewis (Head of Digital Transformation & Customer Engagement), Andy Mackie (Leisure Services Manager), Darren Beer (Operations Manager for Street Scene), Luke Howard (Environment and Enforcement Manager), Kelly Lee (Leisure Business Manager) and Sarah Lees (Democratic Services Officer)

**Councillors**

**Online**

E Buczkowski, G Duchesne, A Glover, L G J Kennedy, J Lock and L Taylor

**Officers Online**

**32 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from:

- Cllr B Fish
- Cllr M Jenkins who was substituted by Cllr G Westcott
- Cllr J Poynton who was substituted by Cllr S Robinson

**33 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

## 34 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

No interests were declared under this item.

## 35 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2025 were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

## 36 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair had no announcements to make.

## 37 **PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD Q2 (00:04:00)**

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED**, a slide \* showing performance information in the Economy & Assets area.

The dashboard aimed to give an 'at a glance' understanding of how services were performing in terms of performance measures, finance and risk. Any measures that were also part of the Corporate Plan were listed in yellow text.

The indicators were presented with current performance, the annual target and a RAG (red/amber/green) rating to indicate whether or not the Council was on track to meet its target. Overall performance was presented in a pie chart which combined the RAG ratings for both the performance and the finance measures.

A summary of the red and amber performance positions were presented as follows:

- The amount of waste collected per household was showing as amber.
- There had been a slight increase in the amount of non-recyclable waste presented at the curb side by householders in this financial year so far. Household recycling rates were also showing as amber. It was explained that the targets in place were extremely challenging.
- Staff turnover was showing as red and generally had been relatively high in the year to date. However, it remained within the range that the Council had experienced in previous years. A new exit interview process was going live and this would involve the line manager a lot more and include retirees. This would be updated in the next Performance Dashboard presented to this Policy Development Group in March 2026.
- The Council Tax collection rate was currently showing as amber, however, performance was exactly in line with last year's performance where the target was exceeded by the year end.
- The public survey engagement rate was showing as red. Performance had improved in Q2 over Q1 and the survey was now being run against a small number of new processes on the Customer Relationship Management system.
- Households on chargeable garden waste was showing as amber, but the service was maintaining a stable customer base and was currently just 20 households short of target.

- Income received from recycled material was showing as amber. This was below budget due to fluctuating prices for recyclate and also slightly lower tonnages of material collected.
- Agency spend versus budget was showing as red. The performance figure presented was actually a year end projection rather than the year to date. This would be corrected on the next Performance Dashboard.
- Projected capital outturn was showing as red. The main underspend reflected the change in approach for the Waste Depot, changing from building a new depot to remodelling the current one. This had saved almost £3m from the 2025/26 budget.
- There were also a number of projects, particularly in Leisure and Waste, with variances which largely offset each other. These included slippage on the replacement of a skate park, additional spend on energy saving projects and the additional cost of a new baler within Waste.
- Capital slippage as a percentage of projects was showing as amber. This affected four out of 22 projects largely relating to parks and open space works where tenders were currently being drawn up.

Note: \* Slide previously circulated.

### 38 **ANNUAL REPORT COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS & COMPLAINTS (00:10:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Head of Digital Transformation and Customer Engagement providing the annual report on customer feedback relating to compliments, comments and complaints received.

The following was highlighted in the report:

- This was the annual report for comments, compliments and complaints, which ordinarily was presented to the Scrutiny Committee only, but as of last year, there had been a request for the report to come to this PDG first for noting and for any comments to be passed back to the Scrutiny Committee.
- The report presented an overview of the customer feedback received from 1 August 2024 to 30 September 2025.
- It was explained that getting customer feedback could sometimes be quite difficult from an engagement point of view.
- Over the last 12 to 18 months, Leisure and Waste were the services that received the highest volume of feedback and that included both positive and negative comments. This was to be expected given the nature of the services provided. It was noted that there was positive feedback as well as a high number of complaints.
- With other services, for instance, Council Tax, Benefits and Planning, there tended to be less feedback.
- Regarding performance, the one area where the Council was experiencing some challenges was within the acknowledgment of complaints within five days. There was a target of 85% and the Council was consistently under achieving on that. In order to address this, in the new year, Customer Services would be reviewing the training and guidance given to other services and working with them to ensure that they were able to quantify the service delivery around complaints based on the nature of how many they were receiving.

- The Council was obliged to review its complaints, particularly under equality and accessibility. The service sought feedback on whether customers believed they had been discriminated against and / or whether some of the decisions or services had been detrimental to them under protected characteristics such as disability or age, etc. Those statistics and findings were reported on a quarterly basis to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Panel which was made up of Members and officers.
- Two complaints had been referred to and investigated by the Ombudsman during the period discussed and one of those had been upheld.

A brief discussion took place as to whether there were any recurring themes in the types of complaints made. It was explained that a common theme in the area of Waste was missed collections, however, as part of a digital transformation project, plans were under way to address this as much as possible.

Note: \* Report previously circulated.

### 39 **2026/2027 DRAFT BUDGET UPDATE (00:17:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) presenting an update on the 2026/27 Budget and the emerging Capital Programme covering the period 2026/27 to 2030/31.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- This was only a very brief budget update since clarification from central Government was still needed. The forecasted position based on a number of assumptions was presented to the last meeting, no greater detail had been received from central Government since then. The autumn statement was due on the 26th November 2025 and that would give, at a very high level, national indications of where funding would go but not at a local authority level. The Council would have to wait until the Local Government Finance Settlement in December for that. Budget proposals had been presented and supported by this Group in September 2025. All the green recommendations were approved subsequently by the Cabinet. The Cabinet was currently awaiting clarification on the amber proposals before reaching a decision.
- In terms of the Capital Programme where there were new proposals or changes to the existing scheme, these were shown in Appendix 1.

A brief discussion took place regarding how the capital programme was going to be funded. Was it going to be a mixture of borrowing, reserves and grants? It was explained that this would be detailed in the February 2026 report to Cabinet. Where the Council could bid for grant's it would do all it could to do so, as very little capital funding came from Government directly. S106 funding would be used where relevant. Borrowing would only be used as a last resort.

Note: \* Report previously circulated.

### 40 **WASTE DEPOT UPDATE (00:23:00)**

The Group received, and **NOTED**, a verbal update and presentation from the Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience on the Waste Depot at Carlu Close, Willand.

This included the following summary information:

- A reminder of the project and the reasons why it was taking place.
- A map was shown illustrating the proposed changes to the site.
- The agreed works included:
  - Securing a new car park and transition into it
  - A new baler
  - The commissioning of new offices into the old car park
  - Extending the existing hanger to accommodate the bale storage
  - Commissioning a new weighbridge, fuelling station and washdown area
  - A review of the welfare block
  - Moving the Grounds Maintenance service into the old car park
  - Four new storage bays
  - Raising the wall heights for all bays including the transfer station
  - Ensuring the fire detecting system was adequate
  - Creating a sample testing area
  - Relocating the bin storage area
  - Altering the traffic route
  - Aligning leases for all units to June 2039.
- The timeline was explained as well as the updated costs involved.

Discussion took place regarding:

- It was pleasing to see such investment in critical infrastructure.
- A report would be brought to the next meeting detailing the additional collections which may be achievable in the future as a result of the changes and enhancements at the Waste Depot.
- The welfare block would be sufficient to accommodate the number of operatives using the site and the improved office space could be used to accommodate some additional officers if they needed to be relocated from Phoenix House, or for business continuity purposes.
- It was confirmed that, by law, there were trained first aiders on site.
- It would not be feasible to install a crash barrier due to the tightness of space but drivers would be reminded of the need to manoeuvre vehicles carefully in order to prevent damage.
- In the event of fire, the sprinkler system was design to flood the whole building with the floor area having a bunding around the perimeter to contain the spread of contaminated water.

#### 41 ENVIRONMENT & ENFORCEMENT Q2 (00:49:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Environment and Enforcement Manager and the Head of people, Performance and Waste providing an overview of the Environment and Enforcement service performance for quarter two of the 2025/20256 financial year.

Note: \* Report previously circulated.

## 42 **ACTIVE MID DEVON - VERBAL UPDATE (00:51:00)**

The Group received, and **NOTED**, a verbal update and presentation from the Operations Manager for Leisure Service on activities within the Leisure Service since it was last report to this meeting.

This included the following summary information:

- The new entry system at Exe Valley Leisure Centre and improved entrance area at Lords Meadow, CREDITON.
- The new 'Coursepro' swimming lesson digital management system available to users.
- Active Mid Devon had been shortlisted in the UK Active Awards which was a national award for providing excellence in the leisure industry.
- A new 'PoolPod 3.0' would be available soon allowing dignified entry into and out of a swimming pool for a disabled person and their carer. The service had a strong focus on inclusivity and accessibility.
- A grant had been received to provide start up costs for a junior park run.
- A carers pilot had received extremely positive feedback and a permanent offer was likely to be proposed. Details regarding this would be brought back to this PDG at a future date.
- There had been free health checks offered to the residents of Mid Devon.
- The 'virtual wallet' was now up and running.
- 'Sparkle of Magic' would be run again this Christmas donating gifts to those in need.
- The Leisure Service had a commitment to professional standards amongst its staff and encouraged professional qualifications where appropriate.
- Menopause Awareness sessions had been run.
- The service was committed to the Safe Spaces Charter.
- A successful, reduced price, family membership campaign had been run over the summer holidays.
- Height restriction barriers had been installed at the Leisure Centres in CREDITON and CULLOMPTON to prevent future illegal encampments.

Consideration was given to:

- The Leisure Service was congratulated on the number and range of positive activities and initiatives that had taken and were taking place. There was a great deal for the service to be proud about.
- Engagement with the Care Home community was seen as particularly positive.
- It was confirmed that first aid training included what to do in the event of knife injuries.
- It was confirmed that membership take up after the summer holiday scheme had been low due to the costs of full time membership compared to the great reduced rate during the summer holidays.



## 43 LEISURE PRICING STRATEGY 2026 (01:10:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Head of Revenues, benefits & leisure providing proposals to change the leisure fees and charges from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- Active Mid Devon was committed to delivering a pricing strategy for 2026/27 that balanced affordability, inclusivity, and financial sustainability. Following an independent review by leisure consultants the proposed approach reflected market conditions, competitive pressures and the need to maintain strong community engagement during a challenging economic climate.
- The recommendation was to freeze membership fees for all adult and junior categories throughout the forthcoming year. This decision prioritised member retention and affordability, ensuring that the offer remained competitive against local operators while supporting the community during the ongoing cost-of-living challenges. By freezing membership prices, the service aimed to strengthen loyalty and reduce attrition, which had been identified as a key driver of long-term success.
- To offset inflationary pressures and maintain financial resilience, pay-as-you-go tariffs were proposed to increase by 3% from April 2026, this was below Consumer Prices Index at 3.8%. This adjustment was modest and had been informed by sector benchmarks, generating an estimated £6,500 in additional income without discouraging casual participation. Concessionary discounts would remain in place, including 25% off memberships and 20% off pay-as-you-go sessions, ensuring continued access for priority groups and those on lower incomes.
- There was an amendment to the report as the percentages had been shown the wrong way around on page 4 section 3.5 where it was stated 20% off memberships and 25% off pay as you go sessions. This has been amended to state 25% off memberships and 20% off pay as you go sessions.
- Care leavers continued to enjoy a free membership up to the age of 25 as would unpaid carers, with free memberships for those under-18 and discounted rates for adults. These measures reflected the services' corporate parenting responsibilities and commitment to inclusivity. Commercial hire arrangements for schools, clubs, and organisations would also be reviewed periodically to optimise revenue opportunities while maintaining fairness and competitiveness.
- Growth would be driven by improving retention rather than increasing membership prices. The target was to increase total membership by 5% and extend the average length of stay with internal Key Performance Indicator's.
- Financially, this strategy aligned with the Council's corporate objectives to promote health and wellbeing while ensuring commercial sustainability.
- In summary, the pricing strategy represented a balanced approach that safeguarded affordability, supports inclusivity, and positions Active Mid Devon for sustainable growth in 2026 and beyond.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The forecasted increased operational costs due to employer National Insurance contributions and premises costs. The increase was estimated to be in the region of £700k.
- Additional income could be generated by improving member retention by as little as one month extra.
- The need for a full and positive publicity campaign should Cabinet agree to freezing fees for Active Mid Devon members in 2026/2027.

It was **AGREED** that the recommendations within the report be referred directly to the Cabinet for decision. The Policy Development Group were broadly in support of these but were also mindful of the £700k cost pressure on the Leisure Service budget. The PDG therefore agreed to **NOTE** the report only.

Note: \* Report previously circulated.

#### 44 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (0124:00)**

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

In addition the following was requested to be on the agenda for the next meeting:

- A report detailing progress with ongoing recycling initiatives as well as proposals for additional pilots in the future.

(The meeting ended at 6.56 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**