

Managing the Environment

Chairman's Annual Report

8 March 2016

As Chairman of the above Group I wish to submit my report to Council for the year 2015-16.

This year has been a difficult one as Members have had to make decisions that involve cutting services in order to save money. This Policy Development Group has made recommendations regarding car parking, play areas, waste and recycling and grass cutting all with the aim of reducing outgoings or increasing income.

Waste and Recycling Scheme

The biggest change this year has been the introduction of the Waste and Recycling Scheme, including the 'charged for' garden waste collection. This scheme has been introduced to schedule and the garden waste scheme is on target to meet its budget. Householders are recycling more and are pleased to be able to recycle plastic. The entire district now receives the same collection regime and to date over 6000 households have signed up to have their garden waste collected at a charge. Although the charging of this service was introduced in the last year's PDG, nevertheless, we endorsed the recommendation at the same time discussed and recommended what we felt was a fair pricing structure, something that has been free for 10 years.

Had this Council not taken this bold decision, we could well have been in a difficult financial position. Although we are recycling more the price of the recyclables has dropped considerably, the extra that we are recycling, has to a degree, helped to maintain our income, and reduced our landfill charges.

Our thanks go to the Waste and Recycling Team who have worked hard to deliver containers and reschedule rounds to meet the demands of the new service.

Play Areas

This year we also had to make tough decisions regarding play areas. Officers presented reports recommending closure of some play areas and a managed decline to others. We received representations from some local town and parish councils who subsequently have been able to come to agreements to lease the play areas themselves and therefore keep them open. The Officers set out a clear way forward with all the facts and figures, which enabled this PDG to make informed recommendations to Cabinet.

Grass Cutting

Devon County Council had paid Mid Devon's Grounds Maintenance Service to undertake grass cutting of verges in the towns and villages for a number of years. This year, following their Tough Choices consultation they withdrew this funding. Mid Devon made the decision to cover the cost for one year but consultation with towns and parishes has now taken place to negotiate where the parish/town can contribute towards the cost of cutting the grass and where it will be withdrawn. It was regrettable that County made this decision, the majority of the public will always consider it to be MDDC's responsibility to cut the verges, but it actual fact it is County's. Our responsibility is Parks, Play Areas and Open Spaces, which we will still do.

Car Parking

Car parks in Mid Devon had not seen increases in charges for a number of years but this is another area that the group needed to investigate with regards to increasing income to the authority. A Working Group of the PDG met on a number of occasions and took a thorough look at all of the options available to them. Following a significant level of work and research the Group recommended a pricing structure to Cabinet. Once in place this new charging structure should generate additional income for the council which can be reinvested in other services. Part of our remit has been discussions with the some Parishes and Town Councils over Amenity Carparks, which has been costing money for which we got no income, this has not totally been resolved, but should be in the near future.

Other areas of work undertaken by the Group over the last 12 months include:

- Press releases and communications work regarding the use of sky lanterns, in particular around the time of summer festivals.
- A review of air quality within the District and in particular the area of the new road in Crediton has been ongoing and this Group will continue to receive reports in the future.
- Following debate at the PDG a working group was set up to investigate food waste and this group will report back later in the year.
- A waste and recycling enforcement policy has been implemented which now allows officer to have more power to insist that householders recycle.
- Wildflower beds have been laid in local parks.
- Procedures for the collection of clinical waste have ben formalised.
- The PDG has also undertaken quarterly review of financial monitoring and performance and risk.

- The Group held healthy debate regarding the setting of next year's budget.

This PDG does recognise the efforts and co-operation that the Parish and Town Councils have given us, in understanding the difficult position this District Council is in, with the cuts we have had to contend with from Central Government, 40% cuts in five years has been difficult to manage without cutting our frontline services.

I would like to thank Members who have given their valuable support and keen insight into the matters covered and discussed.

I would like to thank all staff at Mid Devon District Council, particularly to Julia, who has taken over from Sally, and kept us on the straight and narrow, who are endeavouring to do more with less.

Many thanks

Ray Radford

Chairman

March 2016