

Leader's annual report to Scrutiny 2016

Key points across the Council's service areas for the last 12 months are highlighted below.

Audit and Governance

- Clean bill of health from the external auditors on the internal control environment – which includes the completion of the annual internal audit work programme and the Annual Governance Statement.
- New Corporate Plan adopted – involving working with officers and members and public consultation.

Benefits

- Performance maintained despite introduction of various Welfare Reforms including Universal Credit.
- Benefit processing times, HB subsidy expenditure recovery rate and recovery of overpayments in top percentile nationally.
- Reallocation of duties successfully managed following loss of 3 experienced staff.
- Third year of partnership with 'WiserMoney' to deliver MDDC Local Welfare Assistance Scheme. Over 1600 requests for help and assistance to March 2016; £775K of debt managed or reviewed and total financial gain £278k .
- Universal Credit Delivery partnership commenced with Jobcentre Plus to assist customers who require support with online applications and budgeting.
- Consultation and on proposed changes to Council Tax reduction scheme for 2017/18 commenced.

Customer Services and Revenues

- Helped customers with enquiries and purchases relating to changes in recycling and the implementation of the new chargeable garden waste scheme. We sold 6,540 in 2015-16.
- Increased council tax collection rate by 0.3% to 98.1% (97.6% last year) and collected £1.6m more in council tax over last year.

- Business Rates collection also increased by 0.01% to 99.1%, (99% last year).
- Improved the content and navigation of our website, working closely with ICT and resulting in moving from 1star to 3star SOCITM rating.
- Increased the number of items of post that were outsourced helping to reduce our post and printing costs.
- Reviewed Freedom of Information (FOI) administration, moving this to the customer service team.
- Increased communication using social media.
- Supported customers through changes in front line service delivery in Crediton resulting in minimal disruption to customers.

Economic and Community Development

- Working in partnership with Exeter, East Devon and Teignbridge on economic development projects including development of a joint Economic Development and Inward Investment Strategy and procurement of a joint business support service (BIP).
- Successful joint application with other Devon Districts to the Growth Hub Programme amounting to £1.8 million for business support services in the county.
- Helping small businesses access LEADER funding – with £55,000 being drawn down to support small businesses in the district.
- Supporting successful community events in our three market towns and improving the local offer – Cullompton Spring & Autumn Festivals, Crediton Festival 2015, Crediton St. Boniface Feast Day Celebration, Crediton Food Festival.
- Supporting the re-establishment of Crediton Chamber of Commerce.
- Organising a job fair to support Broadoak employees, following its unexpected closure.
- Organising monthly Electric Nights Streetfood events throughout the summer months and winning the NABMA award for Best Small Food Market.
- Facilitating a Blundell's School Activity Day with MDDC (looking at branding the Town Centre, street cleaning – particularly graffiti – and running a Teenage Market).
- Completion of Tiverton Coach Park.

- Tiverton Shopfront Facelift Scheme has enabled improvements to 6 shopfronts.
- Worked with various parties in Tiverton Town Centre on projects such as new “This is Tiverton” branding, strong focus on shoplifting and building police relationships and facilitating the creation of Tiverton Business Forum
- High Street Innovation Projects amounting to £43,308 – Crediton Flag Project, Crediton Food Festival – purchase pop up market stalls, Crediton Town Square Canopy Design Competition and consultation project, Town entrance signage design project, Bampton Business Directory, Cullompton Festival development and Tivvy Bumper Town Trail project. Provided support to groups delivering projects.
- Supporting successful applications for community projects: Bampton Library and Resource Centre project - £150,000 Power to Change grant award; & assistance with a variety of successful small grant awards < £10,000 (i.e. Journey Counselling, Beauty Unseen, Tiverton Adventure Play, Upstream Healthy Living Centre).
- Co-ordinating Mid Devon Teams for Devon Youth Games; Mid Devon came 4th overall with 2nd place for Fair Play.

Finance

- Last year the general Fund was overspent by £169k and our General Fund reserve fell to £2.2m maintaining our General Fund reserve at 25% of our net General Fund balance.
- Pressure to reduce our base budget remains and having made substantial cuts for a number of years we are expecting to have to cut at least another £1m in the next 3 years.
- Income from New Homes Bonus is being used to support our capital programme and some non-recurring projects rather than using it to prop up the revenue account (as some councils are now resorting to).
- Our financial statements were prepared by 31 May for the first time and a clean audit report is expected at a special meeting of the Audit Committee on 15 July, also the earliest ever for Mid Devon.
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) secured an underspend of £916k with the balance transferred to reserves for future capital works on our council houses.
- The HRA remains under pressure by the 1% rent cut last year and for the future four years, which will gradually impact on our reserves and threatens the future viability of the service were it to remain in place after four years.

- 100% of our Council housing stock has retained the Decent Homes standard.
- The Authority has continued with its council house building programme attempting to negate the loss of continuing right to buy sales which amounted to 19 last year.
- In a measure designed to improve our investment returns, an additional £1.5m was invested in the CCLA commercial property fund increasing our investment to £4m.

Housing and Property Services

- Performance across all areas of the service continues to match the best in the country in many areas, e.g. rent arrears, void turnaround times, gas safety and servicing
- 100% compliance with the Government's Decent Home standard for the Councils housing stock
- Completed a review of Band E applicants on the Devon Home Choice which successfully reduced the numbers on our housing waiting list.
- Completed building 14 new council homes at St Andrews Street, Tiverton and started work on 30 houses at Palmerston Park and Birchen Lane, Tiverton; other schemes are being planned. The 6 new homes previously provided at Fir Close, Willand came runner-up in the Devon's Best Rural Development Competition.
- No rise in arrears following the change in the way housing benefit is paid.
- We continue to negotiate for more affordable housing where this is viable.
- An active Tenants Together Group has scrutinised various aspects of the Housing service and made recommendations for improvements which have been adopted by the service.
- There are numerous financial challenges ahead for the Housing Service following the implementation of the 1% rent reduction scheme which will see a cumulative reduction of rental income of £4-5 million over the next 4 years. Additional pressure on the service will come from the roll out of Universal Credit, Pay to Stay and disposal of High Value Voids.
- The pressure to reduce our expenditure on General Fund activities remains and we have carried out consultation with Parishes and Town Councils on Grass Cutting, Public Conveniences and Play Areas to take over or provide financial assistance of the provision.

- We continue to make best use of our assets, including negotiations with Premier Inn and the Town Hall, Tiverton, reduction in revenue costs and increase in capital receipts.

Human Resources and Learning & Development

- New L&D manager in post after resignation of both members of the team in L&D.
- Review of appraisal system – ongoing.
- Successful recruitment of new Chief Executive.
- Roll out of a Management Development Programme for all “people” managers in the Council.
- Continued success with recruitment of apprentices – current total across the Council is 16.
- A much more robust Health and Safety service.
- Key reorganisations in areas such as Leisure and consultation in respect of Waste and Recycling.
- Continued success in coaching and mentoring.

ICT

- Improved our SOCITM web rating from 1* to 3* and are in the top quartile for accessibility within Devon.
- Hosted parish websites made available for those parishes that wanted them.
- Implementing new DMS system for Building Control, Public Health and Planning – access to associated documents for Planning should be improved via Public Access facility.
- Automating download on electronic planning applications from the Planning Portal.
- Continuing development of online forms and back-office integration to remove manual intervention.
- New Green Waste ICT system (approx. 8000 permits process so far) and currently writing annual renewal facilities with customer reminders, online renewal forms and auto-renew option.

- Work has commenced on the Building Control Partnership system provision – scheduled for go-live with full mobile facilities for officers April 2017.
- Successful implementation with Land Charges on new Con29 legislation and procedures.

Leisure

- Working with external partners, funding secured to encourage more health related projects, eg Walking Football now actively run at Lords Meadow Leisure Centre and Culm Valley Sports Centre. Also staff GP referral qualified to improve this service.
- Working with Public Health to ensure opportunities for sport and recreation for members of the public who are less likely to take up sport.
- Actively involved in the successful Devon Rotary Youth Games with several staff managing/training teams. This will lead to enhanced junior sports development across all three sites.
- Reorganisation of the senior team and new duty officer team for all three sites. Business based structure now in place to focus development of all areas.
- Streamlined the pricing structure, making it more competitive and adjusted shift patterns, with emphasis on going forward and growing the business – this is towards the 2020 target of running at no cost to the public.
- Commenced business case for the viability of an extension to Exe Valley's fitness facilities including study of current usage, utilisation of equipment, design for building and car park, increased membership.
- Improved marketing of Leisure, including more use of email and text to Zest members to retain membership.
- Continuation of arrangements with café tenants at EVLC and LMLC.

Member Services and Monitoring Officer

- Supported Members with the move to using iPads.
- Successful completion of new Members induction programme following the election and continuing training and development of Councillors.
- Training for Town and Parish Councils on Standards Regime.
- New Constitution.

Planning

- Local Plan prepared and been out to consultation. Further evidence has been commissioned (junction 28 Cullompton) to inform the plan.
- Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension: Design guide adopted. First stage of traffic calming and environmental enhancement of Blundell's Road due to start shortly. Area B feasibility study undertaken to inform the masterplanning of this area. Appointment of an externally funded project officer.
- North West Cullompton Urban Extension: Masterplan supplementary planning document adopted to guide development. The first planning applications are expected later this year.
- Agreement to enter into a memorandum of understanding with other 'Greater Exeter' councils (East Devon, Teignbridge and Exeter City) to explore opportunities for joint working. Cabinet has since considered the joint preparation of a strategic plan between these councils and is recommending this to Council together with the establishment of a joint budget for this work. Detail on the scope, timescale, terms of reference, governance and staffing of this joint plan is still to be established.
- Agreed to form a joint committee with North Devon Council over the Building Control function to enable joint working.
- Funding gained together with other 'Greater Exeter' councils to develop of brownfield land register.
- Starter homes bid made to the Homes and Communities Agency.
- National performance targets for planning met.
- Supplementary planning documents adopted: landscape implications of solar PV proposals, refuse storage for new residential properties.
- 5 conservation area appraisals and management plans adopted (Thorverton, Morchard Bishop, Newton St Cyres, Cheriton Fitzpaine, Silverton).

Public Health

- New Public Health Officer role in place and working closely with stakeholders and the CWB PDG to develop a district-wide Public Health Strategy.

- Partnership working with Leisure services to attract new customers in key vulnerable groups to targeted physical activities with social inclusion spin-offs- example project is the Walking Football for the over-50's project successfully launched at CVLC and LMLC and due to be rolled out at EVLC later in 2016.
- Leading two Devon-wide air quality initiatives - ECO-Stars (aimed at polluting commercial vehicles) and Personal Exposure Monitoring (of school children)
- Arranged for health checks and advice from Devon Doctors for our front-line manual workforce in Street Scene and Grounds Maintenance.
- Wide number of digital transformation projects under-way across the service supported by dedicated Systems Administration role.

Public Health – Environmental Health

- Significant improvement in food inspection performance metrics/new food-specialist EHO appointed.
- Continued high performance for Mid Devon premises that have a food hygiene 'Score on Door' – grown to 511 premises in the scheme with 488 (95%) rated 'good' or 'very good'.
- Major illegal meat prosecution secured at Crown Court – convictions for 16 offences of Food Hygiene Regulations secured (with on-going formal proceeds of crime proceedings).
- Leading on joint-working with Planning and Environment Agency regarding community-wide nuisance issues arising from anaerobic digestion activities.

Public Health – Private Sector Housing

- New, highly experienced Lead Officer in place and early work underway reviewing Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) processes and renewal policy/actions.
- Reformed partnership working with Exeter City Council to buy-in part-time dedicated Empty Homes Officer/support delivery of Corporate Plan objectives in this area.
- Review of the Wessex Home Improvement Loans scheme underway including assessment of proposed changes being trialled by another Consortium member.

Public Health – Licensing

- External audit review completed and actions implemented including targeted work around enforcement/new risk based enforcement plan.
- Strong working relationship with the Police service embedded and strengthened during the year.

- Successful joint-agency working with Trading Standards targeting under-age alcohol sales at higher risk premises.
- Strong performance metrics for statutory targets for managing both Temporary Event Notices and Full Premises applications.

Waste and Recycling

- Significant increase in recycling since the introduction of the new scheme, which in turn has seen 23% reduction in the amount of waste going to landfill.
- 8000 households have now taken up the charged-for garden waste collection service. This is currently on target to meet overall target of 10,000 households by the end of the first year of operation.
- Move to new waste and recycling facility at Hitchcock's Business Park has gone well (from 13 June) and very little disruption to service has occurred.
- Thanks to the team who have worked hard to bring in all these changes.
- Procedures for collecting clinical waste have been formalised.
- Enforcement policy introduced to give officers more powers to insist that householders recycle rather than send recyclable waste to landfill.
- Increased charges in the Council's car parks has seen increased income but some fall in usage based on limited first data. Discussions with town and parish councils in relation to amenity car parks, for which the council receives no income, continue.

Clive Eginton, Leader of the Council
July 2016