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MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 16 January 2017 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

F J Rosamond (Chairman)
Mrs H Bainbridge, Mrs C P Daw,
T G Hughes, Mrs J Roach, T W Snow,
Mrs B M Hull, Mrs G Doe, Mrs A R Berry,
J L Smith and S G Flaws

Apologies

Councillor(s)

N A Way

Also Present

Councillor(s)

R J Dolley, Mrs M E Squires and R Wright

Also Present

Officer(s):

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Andrew Jarrett (Director of Finance, Assets and Resources), Jill May (Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation), Simon Johnson (Legal Services Manager), Catherine Yandle (Internal Audit Team Leader) and Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

86 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr N A Way.

87 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

88 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

89 **MEMBER FORUM**

Cllr Mrs J Roach informed the Committee that she was becoming increasingly worried that people asked to attend meetings were not coming. The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) did not attend the last meeting and she did not consider it good enough for them to simply say they couldn't come. Cllr Roach suggested that they could have supplied answers to the questions that had been put to them, even if they did not attend the meeting. Cllr Roach was concerned that there were a lot of delayed discharges and issues with social care.

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had made some changes to the questions to be put to the CCG and that following the meeting these would be circulated to Members for comment before being sent onto the CCG.

The Cabinet Member for the Working Environment and Support Services informed Members that the Police and Crime Commissioner had a forward plan which could be viewed, along with Scrutiny Panel Minutes online.

Discussion took place regarding policing matters and it was **AGREED** that the local Police Inspector be invited to a future meeting of the Committee.

90 DECISIONS OF THE CABINET

The Committee **NOTED** that none of the decisions made by the Cabinet at its last meeting had been called in.

91 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

92 POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

The Police and Crime Commissioner had been unable to attend the meeting and had given her apologies due to ill health that morning. This agenda item would be rescheduled for a future date.

93 DRAFT BUDGET REVIEW FOR 2017-18

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a report * from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources requesting that Members consider options available in order for the Council to move towards a balanced budget for 2017/18.

The Director explained that Members had before them a compilation of reports that had been before the four Policy Development Groups and the Cabinet along with his most recent report to Cabinet. The Director explained that the budget was an evolving process, which involved a number of meetings, including one scheduled for the following week with the local business community, and that it was a statutory responsibility for Scrutiny to check and challenge the budget before it was set.

The Director outlined the contents of the report, in particular the following table which highlighted reconciliation of major budget variances.

Variances	Amount £k
<i>External items outside of our control</i>	
Reduced formula grant settlement	609
Decrease in Housing Benefit Grant	25
Pay award	100
Pension provision	35
Price inflation	50
New Apprenticeship Levy	40
<i>Subtotal</i>	859
<i>Other changes</i>	

New apprentices	20
DCC sharing of waste	(200)
Market Walk income	(20)
Increased income from CCLA investments	(38)
Increase in Collection Fund surplus	(45)
Contributions from town and parish councils	(8)
Increase Council tax income (£5 rise + new 200 properties)	(176)
Department of Work and Pensions rent	(45)
Additional election monies	(29)
Various additional fee income	(60)
Other net cost pressures (including reflection on 16/17 budget pressures)	161
Draft budget gap for 2017/18	419

The Director explained that there had been some unknowns at the time of the initial report, such as detail regarding the Revenue Support Grant.

Officers had worked hard to mitigate some of the costs identified, including waste savings sharing with Devon County Council, Market Walk at almost full occupancy, investments and calculations included an increase to Council Tax at £5 for a band D property.

The capital programme was balanced, but proposed changes to the New Homes Bonus could result in a rationalisation of plans moving forward.

The Housing Revenue Account was balanced, despite a 1% reduction in rents which was as a result of legislation.

The Director informed Members that since his initial report the Formula Grant Settlement amount had been confirmed and the New Homes Bonus had been reduced. Changes made now stipulated that Councils must build a baseline number of properties before they would become eligible to receive the bonus. In Mid Devon this was likely to mean that a claim could only be made after the completion of 130 – 140 new homes. New Homes Bonus was currently paid as a dowry for 6 years but this was reducing to 5 years and then to 4 years. Lobbying was taking place against this and the authority had written to the Minister.

The budget gap had improved to being £231k from a balanced position and further savings were identified within the report. Since issuing the report the Director had held further meetings with service managers and the gap had subsequently been reduced to just under £100k. These savings had been generated by Devon-wide Business Rate revenues, better prices and increased tonnages for recycling, investment income, rental for Station Yard and some staffing reductions among others.

The Director explained to Members that in future years he would look to find an alternative method of delivery for the budget.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The benefit of having a four year grant settlement moving forward;

- Community Engagement and reviewed methods that would provide savings;
- Garden waste income;
- The training budget;
- The Pannier Market and the business case for a canopy roof;
- Amenity car parks;
- Electric car charging points.

The Chairman thanked the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources for his comprehensive report.

Note: - Report * previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

94 **WHISTLEBLOWING 6 MONTHLY UPDATE**

The Audit Team Leader provided a six monthly update regarding Whistleblowing and confirmed that there had been no reports since the previous update in August 2016. The officer informed the Committee that the Whistleblowing Policy was due for review and would be presented to the Audit Committee in March. It was intended that the policy would be extended to include contractors appointed by the authority and that contractors would be expected to have their own Whistleblowing Policy.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The statutory requirement to have a Whistleblowing Policy;
- The need to ensure that there was a culture within the authority that the policy was sufficient and was used;
- The need to raise awareness;
- The potential to appoint whistleblowing champions.

It was **AGREED** that the Whistleblowing Policy would be reviewed by Scrutiny prior to Cabinet.

95 **RIPA SIX MONTHLY UPDATE**

The Legal Services Manager provided a six monthly update to the Committee, informing them that RIPA had not been used since March 2014. The officer informed Members that the RIPA Policy had recently been reviewed by the Community Policy Development Group and approved by Cabinet. The reason that RIPA had not been used was mainly due to the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 which stated that RIPA could not be used for offences with a sanction of less than 6 months in custody. This meant it could not be used in the case of benefit fraud and was therefore only likely to be used for fly-tipping offences.

Discussion took place regarding fly tipping and the difficulty in proving who had actually tipped waste.

96 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Clinical Commissioning Group
Performance and Risk
Cabinet Member for Community Well Being
Update Pannier Market

Local Police Inspector
The website and difficulty in navigation
Draft Whistleblowing Policy
Garden Village Cullompton

(The meeting ended at 3.46 pm)

CHAIRMAN

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