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MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 17 March 2017 at 11.00 am

Present

Councillors

F J Rosamond (Chairman)
Mrs A R Berry, Mrs F J Colthorpe,
Mrs G Doe, S G Flaws, T G Hughes,
Mrs B M Hull, Mrs J Roach, N A Way and
Mrs E J Slade

Apologies

Councillor(s)

Mrs H Bainbridge and Mrs C P Daw

Also Present

Councillor(s)

Mrs J B Binks, D R Coren and R L Stanley

Also Present

Officer(s):

Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

127 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr Mrs Bainbridge who was substituted by Cllr Mrs F J Colthorpe, Cllr Mrs C P Daw who was substituted by Cllr Mrs E J Slade, Cllr T W Snow and Cllr J L Smith.

128 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

129 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Subject to adding the wording 'the part that the Tiverton Gazette had played in highlighting Safeguarding issues was acknowledged' being added to Minute 125 the minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

130 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

131 **MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT MEL STRIDE**

The Chairman welcomed local MP Mel Stride and his assistant Mike Knuckey to the meeting.

The MP explained that due to his role as a Government Whip he had to be in London when the house was sitting, hence his attendance at the Committee on a Friday.

A number of questions had been forwarded to the MP in the advance of the meeting.

Cllr Mrs J Roach had asked would the government consider legislating to ensure that where there was a cycle track, cyclists who stayed on the road would be committing an offence.

Mr Stride answered that there were two types of cycle path; shared path and dedicated routes on the highway. The Highway Code determined what the cyclist should be doing on particular types. There were no plans to make changes at the current time but he was interested to know Members thoughts and asked that they put something in writing to him. He made comment that cyclists might say that the current cycle paths were not fit for use.

Cllr R J Rosamond said that according to an article in the Times rural areas were suffering from unfair funding for social care, receiving 60% less per head of population over 65 than in London. The funding was deemed regressive, unfair and opaque, and the gap was widening as the shire population of elderly people was increasing. Social Care funding should represent a needs based formula determined by demographic data. How was the government going to make society work for everyone?

Mr Stride replied that social care was one of the greatest challenges with an aging population that were living longer and in Devon 25% of the population being over 65. By living longer people were facing more complex conditions such as Alzheimer's. Devon was geographically large and end of care life was very expensive. The MP explained that the Government did not specify an amount to be spent on adult social care and it was up to the local authority to decide how funding was divided, with the exception of the extra funding that had been announced in the budget. He agreed that there were huge challenges ahead and that the size of the challenge should not be underestimated.

Cllr T W Snow had asked with regard to a statement from the Government that it would limit the amount of money spent by patients, to a maximum of £75000, after that it would be government funded, where did the government now stand on this pledge?

Mr Stride replied that a review was currently ongoing but his personal view was that it was a weakness in the system if those that could pay had to pay and others didn't have to pay anything at all. He was hoping that a cap would be put in place but it had not happened yet.

Discussion took place regarding 'baby boomers' and the need for all parties to work together to deal with long term problems. Mr Stride explained that the dynamics of politics often led to short term decision making rather than looking ahead a number of years, when the current Government might not even be in power.

Discussion took place regarding the provision of health care, the cost of overheads when more providers were used, the duty of a local authority to have a wide range of players providing care and the additional costs of providing care in a rural environment, although urban areas may have their own issues.

The MP informed Members that he was very aware of issues regarding rural sparsity. Priorities for Mid Devon included broadband, which could provide the ability to be

well connected even if physically unconnected, health, fairer funding for schools, social care and rail such as the Tarka line and the reinstatement of the Okehampton line to London. He stated that 96% of companies in central Devon were small businesses such as Post Offices, pubs, farming and tourism.

Mr Stride stated that he considered Mid Devon District Council to be much better run than it had been a decade ago.

Cllr Mrs J B Binks asked a question regarding broadband. She asked what was happening with Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) and the next phase of broadband rollout in remote rural areas. She said that the CDS website was very unhelpful for residents outside of the zones trying to find out how they might be connected. Was Gigaclear taking up the whole of Zone 4?

Mr Stride replied that he had had many meetings with Kerry Denton of CDS and that the contract for Zone 4 had been awarded but it had not yet been made public who to. He explained that the website had improved recently but asked Cllr Binks to contact him if she still encountered problems with the postcode search.

Discussion took place regarding broadband issues that several Members had encountered. Mr Stride offered to take up matters where BT had not performed and asked that Members forward him further information. He explained that for Phase 1 BT had exceeded their target and there had been a good take up of fibre broadband, as well as a lot of exciting developments such as wireless for hard to reach areas of Dartmoor.

Cllr N A Way informed Members that Kerry Denton of CDS provided an update to the Place Scrutiny at Devon County Council at every meeting. These meetings were webcast.

With regard to the 5 year Land Supply the MP invited Members to London to meet with the Minister to find out if anything could be done to relieve pressure from predatory applications.

Cllr F J Rosamond asked the MP for his view on Devolution. Mr Stride replied that he was positive about the concept, that local level was better and could better address local challenges, but that the proposal put forward did not include an elected Mayor and he considered that this would cause a delay. He explained that it was important to have an elected Mayor so that there was accountability.

Cllr Rosamond said that an experienced ex Head-Teacher had remarked that for every grammar school there would need to be two secondary moderns to house children, many of whom would deem themselves as failures, blighting their career prospects. Why did the Government ignore the voice of the professional? Why wasn't every child entitled to a quality education?

Mr Stride replied that existing grammar schools were valued in the communities that they existed. He had been to a grammar school and it had worked for him, although his brother had attended the local comprehensive and he was aware of the arguments against grammar schools. He considered that there were a number of alternatives available today, such as free schools and a growth in the number of apprenticeships. He considered education to be important to allow people to move

on in life and that grammar schools could play an important role in this. He stated that there was a need to ensure that those from a poorer background could go to grammar schools; by providing transport or looking at how tests were devised in order that they identified those with potential. Mr Stride considered that whilst education had been through a number of changes in recent years it had improved and that progress was being made.

Discussion took place regarding fair funding for education, challenges to budgets such as the living wage and the apprentice levy and consultation that was ongoing.

Cllr Rosamond asked a question on behalf of a concerned farmer. He asked if the UK was going to be opened as a free trade area; were we going to have cheap lamb and dairy products from countries like New Zealand as well as beef from the USA full of growth hormones and antibiotics and other cheap food from around the world dumped here?

The MP replied that he felt the farmer was right to be concerned. He had wanted to stay in Europe due to concerns regarding the economy and he still had those concerns. He considered that there would be massive challenges ahead and concerns raised were real challenges. He questioned where farming would come in the 'pecking order' against other areas such as car manufacturing. He said it was possible that food import taxes would be reduced, which would be good for the consumer but not for the farmer.

Mr Stride thanked Members for what he had learnt today and for all of the hard work that they did.

The Chairman thanked Mr Stride for his attendance.

Note: - Cllr N A Way declared a personal interest as he was a governor of Queen Elizabeth School.

132 **SCRUTINISING SCRUTINY**

The Chairman had requested that the Committee have an informal discussion regarding the role of Scrutiny. He had provided a report * which he had prepared for the recent Peer Review, for reference.

The Chairman asked Members to consider if the Committee was challenging enough, was it acting as a critical friend and was it expressing the voice of the public. He asked if the Committee was owning the process and looking to improve services.

Discussion took place regarding;

- The number of items on agendas, should the Committee be concentrating on fewer items in more detail?
- The lack of officer resource to support Scrutiny;
- Recent consultation by Government regarding scrutiny;
- The statutory obligation to hold six meetings a year;

- Duplication of work when reports were requested by Policy Development Groups and Scrutiny;
- Health Scrutiny at Devon County Council which Members could view by webcam or attend;
- Examples of where Scrutiny had worked well, such as the Supplementary Policy Document for waste.

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

133 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Police and Crime Commissioner
Communications Working Group – annual update
Cabinet Member for Working Environment and Support Services
Community Safety Annual Report
Chairman’s Report
Local Enforcement Plan
Homelessness

(The meeting ended at 12.52 pm)

CHAIRMAN

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