

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2017

This year has been no different to previous years, our Environment Policy Environment Group, having to make difficult choices to save money, with the aim of reducing our outgoings or increasing income. Altogether we have debated and given recommendations on 19 different topics on our agendas.

MAY 17th 2016

DEPOT MOVE

The first major, and I suppose the most important, was recommendations with regards to our waste and recycling. We had been given notice to move from our Unit 16, the then current recycling depot, the notice period ending in June. This was only a short three year lease and Officers knew we would have to move after that period, so the Officers had been looking for suitable premises, not easy to find as our requirements would be specialist and not always neighbourly friendly, because of what we do.

When Unit 3, Carlu Close, Halberton Parish, yes, it in the Parish of Halberton was considered, due to the size of the unit, consideration was given to just simply re-locate the whole recycling part of the Waste Service, or, make a more strategic decision to merge all the Waste/Street Scene operations, all under one roof. After considering all the operational issues, we felt that the advantages of providing a totally joined up service would be far more beneficial in the medium to long term.

Unit 3 was on a large industrial site with significant concrete parking area. From an operational perspective, it was effectively starting with a clean sheet that would require a complete `fit out` in order to continue existing operations. This would require the re-location of all our operational equipment, including the likes of dog kennels, fuel tanks, etc. It also included all the movement of 90 operational staff including District Officers, 9 Porto-Cabins would be required to house all the staff and provide offices, washrooms facilities, meeting space, etc. There could be no better place to relocate to, ideal. Just got to worry about the finances.

The Head of finance informed our PDG Group that the total fit out costs were currently estimated at circa £310k and that Members should note that an estimate of £100k had been included in the 2016/17 revenue budget as a provision for the costs of a potential recycling depot move. Operational delivery would not be affected during the move and it was intended to commence operations from the new depot from mid-June 2016.

The Officer concluded that entering into a 15 year lease to co-locate all of the Council's Street Scene operation under one roof was a crucial and long term strategic decision which would provide not only long term security of tenure for this key frontline service, but also would provide other operational and financial benefits to the service. Operating from one central base would allow for better supervision, greater uniformity of operation, the ability to re-deploy resources more effectively and create a closer team culture. We

nevertheless are open to the volatility of the ups and downs of the recycling market prices of recyclables, which will be the case, where ever we are based. We have also secured income as a transfer station for food waste.

REVIEW OF GRASS CUTTING

The Group had before it and noted from the Head of Housing and Property Services which set out the Councils arrangements for 2016/17 in providing the grass cutting service on Devon County Council's highway verges.

The Estates Manager outlined the contents of the report, explaining that a budget of £15k income had been set prior to the results of the consultation process regarding Parishes contributing to the maintenance of highway verges within their Parish.

The Officer explained that the value of the reduced area of highway grass verges for those Town and Parishes that did not want to contribute had been estimated at £36k and that staffing level had been reduced by one full time equivalent. The reduction would be agency staff, so had not incurred redundancy costs. When adding contributions from Town and Parish Councils the 2016/17 budget had been improved by a further £34k.

NATIONAL ASSISTED BURIALS

The group had before it a report from the Housing and Property Services informing Members of the Council's proposed procedure when dealing with a National Assistance burial. It was recommended, that subject to minor amendments to the report regarding contact names and numbers, Cabinet recommend that Council approve the National Assistance Burial Procedure.

TREE POLICY

The group had before it a report from the Head of Housing and Property Services informing it of changes the current Tree Policy following a recent scheduled review. It was recommended that the Cabinet adopt the revised Tree Policy.

JULY 12th 2016

HIGH HEDGES POLICY

The group had before it a report from the Head of Housing and Property Services regarding High Hedges. It was recommended to Cabinet that a flat fee of £350 should apply to all applicants with no discount given for those on benefits.

It was recommended to Cabinet that the Authority continues to adopt the current High Hedge Policy and processes outlined in Annex A subject to the changes agreed above.

UPDATE FROM THE EDIBLE FOOD WASTE WORKING GROUP

Cllr Evans updated the group regarding the Edible Food Waste Working Group. He reminded the group that the working group had been set up at the request of members following various media reports regarding the matter. The Head of Communities and Governance had look into the matter and provided the group with a considerable amount of information regarding how local supermarkets and charities were dealing with this issue. She found that local stores were taking their lead from head offices and a number of local schemes had been put in place. A white paper was being processed but the reading in Parliament had been delayed. The Officer found that the local charities had systems in place, were receiving and distributing food waste and that their supplies were adequate. In conclusion the group had found that there was little the Authority could do at this stage to enhance what was already taking place. The group therefore concluded that there was no need to meet at the current time but that the subject should be revisited if require in the future.

UPDATE ON DEPOT MOVE

The Head of Finance provided an update on the recent waste and recycling depot move. He explained that the move went well and that the work undertaken by the Officer/Member project group had proved successful. Several services had been merged and 100 staff had now been relocated to the new depot.

Recycling bays had been built, the baler was working and 9 porta cabins had been put in place for the Officers. Working in the same depot meant that there were synergies with waste and recycling services and that the staff could be moved to one area to the other as recycling performance improved and waste to landfill reduced.

Operations commenced at the new depot on the 13th June and there had been no adverse effect on collections. Licences and permits were all in place and there was security of tenure with a 15 year lease in place.

An opening event had been held on Friday 8th July which was attended by a number of Members and Neil Parish MP.

The Head of Finance informed Members that the merged service would have slightly cheaper running costs than the separate depots and that discussions were ongoing with Devon County Council regarding shared savings.

UPDATE ON GRASS CUTTING IN THE TOWNS AND PARISHES

The Operations Manager reminder the group that discussions with Devon County Council and Town & Parish Council's had taken place during the last 12 months to determine the grass cutting regime that would be put in place following a reduction in budget from DCC.

The Officer informed the group that there had been some confusion regarding the start dates for cutting, both with Town & Country Councils and within the cutting teams. These issues have now been resolved. There was a need for further discussions with DCC and the Town & Parish Councils to seek additional funding to improve the situation. Different Town & Parish Councils had provided varying levels of funding so were receiving varying numbers of cuts.

6th SEPTEMBER 2016

PERFORMANCE AND RISK

The group had before it and noted a report of the Head of Communities and Governance providing Members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2016/17, as well as providing an update on key business risks.

FINACIAL MONITORING

The group had before it and noted a report of the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources presenting financial monitoring information for the income and expenditure of the 2016/17 financial year.

WILD FLOWER BEDS

The group had before it and noted a briefing paper produced by the Operations Manager providing an update on the options and proposals for wildflower displays within Mid Devon in the future.

VERBAL WASTE UPDATE

The Waste and Transport Manager informed the group that the changes to the waste scheme had bedded in, the collection rates were better than expected, Member had received an informal briefing in the last few weeks and a full 6 monthly report would be provided at the next meeting.

LITTER & WASTE ISSUES IN THE DISTRICT

The issue of littering in various parts of the District had been raised by individual Members and therefore it was felt that the group should discuss the matter and seek Officers views as to what could be achieved to reduce the issue.

VISIT TO ENERGY from WASTE PLANT

Following a visit to the Exeter Energy from Waste Plant, Members were invited to provide feedback on the visit.

8th NOV 2016

PERFORMANCE & RISK

The group had before it and noted a report from the Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation which provided Members with an update on performance

against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2016/17 quarter 2 to the end of September, as well as providing an update on key business risks.

FINANCIAL MONITORING

The group had before it and noted a report from the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.

DRAFT BUDGET

The group had before it a report from the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources considering options available in order for the Council to set a balanced budget for 2017/18 and agree a future strategy for further budget reductions for 2018/19 onwards. It was recommended to Cabinet that;

- a) Bulky Waste collection fees be increased by £1 from April 2017.
- b) Garden Waste collections fees be increased by £1 for both size bins from October 2017.

WASTE & RECYCLING SCHEME 6 MONTHLY UPDATE

The group had before it and noted from the Waste & Transport Manager providing an update on performance of the new recycling scheme during the first year of operation.

MOTION FROM COUNCIL

The group gave consideration of the following Motions that had been referred by Council.

Motion 528 (Cllr P Heal - 10th August 2016)

That the Council investigates the provision of an elasticated net system for use on recycling boxes to prevent light materials such as plastics and cardboard being blown out and causing litter.

It was resolved that Motion 528 not to be supported.

Motion 529 (Cllr C. A. Collis - 17th August 2016)

That the Council investigates joint working with other Councils to recycle soft plastics such as polythene and film and to avoid putting these non-biodegradable items into landfill. This will benefit the environment for future generations and expand on the recycling that Mid Devon is already doing so well.

It was resolved that Motion 529 not to be supported.

10th JANUARY

Motion 532

The group gave consideration to the following Motion that had been referred by Council.

It was RECOMMENDED to Council that Motion 532 be supported.

BUDGET

The group had before it and noted a report from the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources outlining options in order for the Council to move towards a balanced budget for 2017/18.

PERFORMANCE & RISK

The group had before it and noted a report from the Director of Affairs & Business Transformation

7th MARCH

We will have various agenda items that we will consider and debate, which will be noted or be given appropriate recommendations. These will be available on the Web Site after our meeting.

This Environment PDG does recognise the efforts and co-operation that the Parish & Town Council has given us, it has been a difficult year for Mid Devon, only to get more difficult each year, as our funding gets less year on year and we are asked to do the same, or more, with less funding. Unfortunately it appears it will go on for another two years at least.

I would like to thank the Members of my PDG who have given their valuable support and keen insight into the matters covered and discussed. We could not have operated without the stinting help we have had from all the staff of Mid Devon District Council. Our move of the Waste & Recycling was particularly challenging, with everyone's co-operation, it went remarkably well.

I do thank the staff in Members Services for all the help they have given, particularly Julia Stuckey, she has been great, she has a lot to contend with to keep us on the straight and narrow.

Thank you all

Ray Radford, Chairman. 2017.