

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on 14 August 2017 at 2.15 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

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

### **Also Present**

#### **Councillor(s)**

K Busch and C J Eginton

### **Also Present**

#### **Officer(s):**

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Jill May (Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation), Stuart Noyce (Waste and Transport Manager), Kathryn Tebbey (Legal Services Manager and Monitoring Officer) and Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer)

## **37 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Following discussion it was agreed that the sentence 'issues were raised in connection with the proposed closures for Cullompton and Crediton and letters from Devon County Council Library Service and Cullompton Town Council were reported to the meeting' be added to Minute 32, the minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

## **38 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were no apologies.

## **39 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from the member of the public present.

## **40 MEMBER FORUM**

There were no issues raised under this item.

## **41 DECISIONS OF THE CABINET**

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

## **42 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had received a response from Mel Stride MP in response to a letter sent on behalf of the Committee regarding the five

year land supply. The response did not address the issues raised so the Chairman would write again.

The Chairman also outlined the contents of a letter that had been prepared to be sent to Neil Parish MP regarding anaerobic digestion.

#### 43 **CHIEF INSPECTOR, DEVON AND CORNWALL POLICE**

The Chairman welcomed Chief Inspector Sarah Johns and Sector Inspector Jane Alford-Mole to the meeting.

The following questions were put to the Inspectors;

*What impact did the potential demands on regional police resources to help nationally in response to terrorism threat or attack, have on local policing?*

Inspector Mole explained that there was a National Counter Terrorism Network. All regions had specialist officers so when there was an incident they would be drawn on first. This could result in an impact on local policing depending on the skills required and local reassurance work needed. However local impact would be small as the specialist officers would be used.

*Given that resources were already stretched in Devon and Cornwall due to the increase in activity of organised crime gangs, child sexual exploitation, and scammers all of which posed a serious threat in the rural counties, were we in an era of risk of increased petty/ conventional crime which would not be investigated?*

The Inspector reminded Members that a lot of funding had been taken out of Policing in recent years which had caused forces across the country to look at what they did and how it was delivered. Devon and Cornwall was clear in its mission to safeguard vulnerable people, to deal with crimes that caused the most harm to people and they were, as a force, now recognising crime that would have been unnoticed in the past, such as child sex abuse and exploitation. These crimes had all been happening previously but were not being reported or dealt with. Dealing with these crimes, which caused the most harm, did mean that some other crime might not be investigated. However, the Inspectors stressed the importance of crime reporting in order that trends could be identified. New shift patterns were being introduced, having looked at demand data over the previous 4 years, to ensure that officers were working at the times that crime was most likely to be reported. Overnight shifts would look at intelligence over the previous 2 weeks to help identify crime trends. A lot of recruitment had taken place within Devon and Cornwall and there was an uplift of 120 officers. There was also good use of Special Officers in the force and in the previous year they had contributed 19500 hours. Continued training for Special officers was encouraged.

*Is there not value in having local policing on the streets? Surely it would have potential to pick up local intelligence which may assist in resolving more serious crimes?*

The Section Inspector responded that intelligence was about smarter working and that the Police Community Support Officers and Neighbourhood Teams still worked in their local areas, building relationships with the public.

*I am, almost on a daily basis receiving complaints about the speed of traffic and dangerous driving on the Silverton to Killerton Road. Would it be possible to address this problem?*

*We also have a problem at the end of Park Road where there is a bollard; people are driving on the wrong side of the bollard. Highways have looked at the problem but are unable to suggest anything that might help. In such situations would it be possible to install a camera for a short period?*

The Section Inspector informed the Committee that incidents such as those mentioned in the question needed to be logged. They had checked records and had been unable to find any reports regarding this matter. Recent major accidents in Devon which had resulted in death on the roads would take priority on officer time so it was imperative that the public made note of incidents, with registration numbers, and reported this.

*Last week I attended Mid Devon Children's Centre Advisory Board meeting at Tiverton, which focussed on Domestic Abuse. It was really well attended by most agencies - except for the local Police, Social Services and the Courts Service.*

*I welcome the opportunity for the Police to restate their policy on attending, reporting and referring incidents of Domestic Abuse in families in Mid Devon where there are young children living with and witnessing such abuse.*

*Unless all these agencies adopt a well meshed, inter-disciplinary reporting approach to this issue, young children will fall through the net in an adult world. It was upsetting that the three non-attending agencies had accepted the invitation to attend, yet none of them sent apologies or substitutes.*

Sector Inspector Alford Mole agreed that it was disappointing that an officer had failed to attend and that apologies had not been sent. She asked for further information in order that she could look into this matter. She informed the Committee that the police took these offences very seriously with robust policing and there was a specialist unit in Exeter in place to deal with these matters on a daily basis.

*What is the policy on domestic abuse and how information is shared with other local agencies, when there are young children in the family?*

The Inspector explained that when officers attended a domestic incident there were certain forms that had to be filled in which collected information regarding the family such as children, schools and GP. Officers would use this form to make recommendations and ensure that all organisations that need to be informed were. Significant matters would be dealt with at the time and as a last resort officers would get a Police Protection Order to take children from the address there and then. Regular multi agency meetings were held and a new initiative was in the pipe line which would result in police making contact with the school of any child involved, or at home, during a domestic incident.

*A local controversy had developed as a result of an ex police officer claiming that a potential proposal to remove fencing in need of significant maintenance around children's play areas as an economy measure would be an invitation to paedophiles*

*and represent a danger to children. There was also new Government guidance on play to encourage more outdoor and adventurous activity by children. Any such proposals would only be taken following local consultation, but have the Police any concerns in this respect?*

Chief Inspector Sarah Johns was in receipt of an email from the Designing Out Crime Officer regarding this matter. She explained that his response had stated that where there was an obvious need for fencing such as a road or river nearby, each play area should be considered on its own merits. The view of officers was that it was a good idea to fence areas for protection from dogs when possible but that no evidence had been found to suggest that fencing would make any difference regarding sex offenders. Offenders were managed in a specialist way and there were powers in place to control them. The Chief Inspector offered to circulate the email following the meeting.

*How do forces operate across the border?*

The Chief Inspector informed Members that they worked closely with neighbouring forces and there was constant interaction. If necessary officers could go over the border to apprehend. ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) cameras allowed the force to know when a flagged car had entered the area and specialist teams could be tasked to deal with specific crime types.

*Why don't the police promote trackers from the NFU on farm equipment?*

The Inspector was not aware of this scheme but informed Members that organisations such as Farm Watch were promoted by the force and a national register was kept for stolen farm equipment. Officers concentrated on crimes that caused most harm and this might result in less support for rural areas. The Inspector stressed the importance of reporting crime.

*Was domestic abuse investigated at the detriment of other crime, such as burglary and why was the Police Station not open to the public?*

The Chief Inspector responded that domestic abuse was at the top of what they dealt with. It blighted lives and had been suffered behind closed doors for years. It had a devastating effect on children and there was evidence that brain development was affected. As an organisation Devon and Cornwall Police were giving total support to this crime and more officers were dealing with it than previously with expertise from a dedicated team. There had been a huge increase in historical reports.

With regard to officers on the street, as previously explained, officers were deployed to meet demand. Some areas had seen a reduction in officers but Mid Devon remained fully resourced.

The Chief Inspector explained that it was not cost effective to man a front office at the Police Station, when it had often only dealt with a couple of callers per day. Other means of contact such as telephone and online had been improved and these were the preferred means of contact for a lot of people.

The Inspector added that though the service was not perfect, and they would not through choice have made any reductions, they were reviewing methods of working

all the time and changes such as the alliance with Dorset were saving money as well as providing positive results, allowing them to do more with less.

With regard to Tiverton specifically the Sector Inspector confirmed that the number of officers had not reduced and that the area could also call on support from the dog team, armed response and traffic officers. They could not however provide a presence on every street corner at all times.

*Did the reduction in mental health provision have an impact?*

The Inspector confirmed that it did.

The Chief Inspector thanked Members for the invitation to attend Scrutiny and offered to come back at any time.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Inspector and Sector Inspector for their attendance.

#### 44 **PEER REVIEW**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a report \* from the Chief Executive regarding the Peer Review. During the 6-9<sup>th</sup> March 2017, the authority had received a delegation of external officers and members to conduct a 'peer challenge review'. The process generated a review report which contained a number of specific recommendations for the council to consider. The report which Members had before them provided an update on that process and outlined how this process would be contributing to the council's improvement programme moving forward.

The Chief Executive outlined the contents of the report, explaining steps that had already been taken, for example an organisational design framework, organisational values, managerial competencies, Medium Term Financial Planning and Efficiency Statement, a refreshed council constitution, a revised staff survey and new approaches to member engagement and development. There were a number of areas in progress such as a performance framework refresh, a business transformation programme, a staff charter, comprehensive benefit-tracking and realisation, strategic options appraisal and business case development for discrete service change. The Chief Executive informed Members that a report detailing his plans to fully align performance indicators to the Corporate Plan would be submitted to the Cabinet shortly.

A restructure to appoint three Directors had been put in place and the next stage, the Group Manager structure, would be confirmed in the near future. When appointed these Group Managers would be tasked to look at options for service delivery.

The Chief Executive outlined some recommendations from the review:

*Produce an economic development plan that conformed with Exeter and the Heart of Devon strategy for economic growth and prosperity but provided greater detail on what this would look like for Mid Devon, the benefits that would be delivered, and how this would be achieved*

This had been discussed at the Economy PDG to set out what was best for Mid Devon and officers were now pushing forward with this piece of work.

*Ensure that major projects were supported by a robust business case agreed by the council*

The Chief Executive explained that the authority was moving in this direction, particularly in relation to capital investment.

*Agree a strategy for influencing partners to win more external funding to support investment in major schemes in Mid Devon.*

The Chief Executive explained that there had been some success in the last year or so and gave examples such as funding for the link road scheme and resurfacing as part of National Productivity Funding. In addition the council has secured capacity funding to continue unlocking growth, as well as smaller sums from the LGA as part of their Productivity Expert funding.

*Review internal and external communications, along with community engagement, and take advantage of IT and social media efficiencies that could support these*

This was a resourcing issue and the Chief Executive explained that he was looking to introduce a new officer role regarding community engagement but there would be a cost implication attached to this.

*Continue with the commitment and resources to work closely with developers to build out consented housing allocations and ensure that approved development can progress in a timely fashion.*

The Chief Executive informed Members that he had regular meetings with Planning officers, developers and the Cabinet Member at which he stressed the importance of actually building houses rather than just obtaining consent.

The Chief Executive went on to outline progress regarding Business Transformation for which an initial programme plan outlining what it might look like had been drafted and would be finalised and launched to staff in October.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Member engagement and the appropriate route for service delivery change which would be through the PDG's;
- A Policy Officer that had been appointed on an interim basis to work full time with the Scrutiny Committee (1 September until the end of December), with a view to exploring options for delivery after that. The Chief Executive was also looking into options to share a resource with neighbouring authorities;
- Concerns that the Scrutiny Committee was not working effectively and a lack of involvement for back benchers, including a lack of 'away days';
- Links to the Corporate Plan which would be reported to the Cabinet at the end of August;



- The need for a balanced budget and whether funding would be drawn from financial reserves or the New Homes Bonus for this;
- The need for Member steer and engagement in developing policy.

Note: Report \* circulated and attached to Minutes.

#### 45 **AGENCY WORKERS**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a report \* from the Waste and Transport Manager regarding the use of agency staff in operational services. This information had been requested by the Committee at its last meeting.

The officer explained that all agency workers received full health and safety training prior to starting work and that this requirement was set out in the contract with the agency. The bill for agency staff totalled 7% of the annual staffing bill for the financial year and the use of agency staff was cheaper than appointing permanent staff. The agency staff were used to cover short term issues such as sickness and annual leave and also to allow for fluctuation in service requirements on different days of the week. This ensured that all permanent staff were fully occupied at all times. Vacancies were not left open for very long and recruitment tended to take place 3 or 4 times a year.

Discussion took place regarding:

- An information request for an hourly rate for permanent staff and an hourly rate for agency staff;
- A new contract for agency staff which would be submitted to Cabinet shortly;
- The number of staff in the Waste service and the amount of leave per employee;

Members thanked the Waste and Transport Manager for the savings that he had made.

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

#### 46 **AGEING WELL**

The Committee had before it and **NOTED** a report \* that had been produced by the Aging Well Working Group in December 2013. The Chairman had asked that it be revisited in order that the Committee could decide whether or not it should be taken forward.

The Director for Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation explained that a lot of work had been undertaken previously but there were resource issues involved in progressing the recommendations. She suggested that this might be an area that the new Policy Officer could look into.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Statistics and the increasing number of elderly people in the District;
- Duplicate work with Devon County Council and other District Councils and whether joint working might be appropriate;
- A lack of Gypsy and Traveller provision in the District;
- A lack of suitable housing for the elderly within new build developments and difficulties in ensuring that this happened;
- Plans by the Chief Executive to liaise with Members of the Planning Committee to explore effective ways to engage and to help them support appropriate development, which might include Lifetime Homes Standards.
- A changing social environment in the way that families care for each other;
- Positive action that had taken place in Hemyock;

It was **AGREED** that any future work regarding ageing well be delayed until after the Corporate Plan review and that in the meantime officers explore opportunities to work closely with Devon County Council and liaise with Exeter University and Dr Dixon of Cullompton to establish what is already taking place.

Note: - i) Report \* previously circulated and attached to Minutes.  
ii) Cllr N A Way declared a personal interest as he was a Devon County Councillor.

#### 47 **CABINET MEMBER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

The Committee had before it a report \* from the Cabinet Member for the Environment providing an update on areas covered by his remit.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The Litter Busting team and the good work being undertaken by them;
- Grass cutting and a number of complaints and problems created by a lack of understanding regarding which areas of land should be cut by the Authority and which areas were parish or county land. There was an acknowledgement that the service was not perfect but open spaces was a topic being looked at by the Environment PDG and it was hoped that over-winter a service level could be set, for which resources could be put in place in time for the next growing season. However, Members needed to be aware that funding had been cut so the service would never be what it had been in the past.
- The Cabinet Member **AGREED** to visit Lapford with a Parish Councillor to review the situation there;
- Liaison with Town and Parish Councils and how they may request grass cutting services from the authority in the future;



- The restructure at Director level meant that services were now all under one Director, allowing for more 'joined up' working;
- Roundabouts directly off the A361 were outside of the 40mph speed limit which meant the workforce were unable to work on them without a road or lane closure being put in place. This had been highlighted by the Health and Safety Officer and solutions were currently being investigated;
- The importance of 'one stop shop' when the public called to report incidents as they could not be expected to know which council was responsible for areas of land;
- Compliments were given regarding the wild flower displays in the District.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for his report.

(Note: - Report previously circulated and attached to Minutes)

#### 48 **RIPA SIX MONTHLY UPDATE**

The Legal Service Manager and Monitoring Officer had not received any requests for RIPA authorisations since joining the Council in April 2017. No authorisations were given in the preceding 6 months. However, advice had recently been given in relation to CCTV in communal parts of residential council premises and the need to ensure that any new installations were not covert, otherwise RIPA would apply.

The officer reiterated that RIPA powers should only be used sparingly, in appropriate circumstances.

#### 49 **FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee **NOTED** the Forward Plan.

#### 50 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Cabinet Member for Housing  
Performance and Risk  
Car Parking 6 Monthly Update  
Cross Parks update  
Devon County Council closed homes and what was going to happen to them

(The meeting ended at 5.00 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**