

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP**
held on 5 September 2017 at 2.00 pm

Present

Councillors

R F Radford (Chairman)
D R Coren, Mrs C P Daw, R Evans,
F W Letch, Mrs E J Slade, J D Squire and
R Wright

Also Present

Councillor(s)

Mrs J Roach

Also Present

Officer(s):

Andrew Pritchard (Director of Operations), Stuart Noyce (Waste and Transport Manager), Roderick Hewson (Principal Accountant), Joe Scully (Operations Manager), Catherine Yandle (Internal Audit Team Leader) and Sally Gabriel (Member Services Manager)

20 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were no apologies.

21 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

22 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (00-01-45)**

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

23 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00-09-39)**

The Chairman informed the meeting that he wished to take item 10 as the next item of business, this was agreed.

24 **FINANCIAL MONITORING (00-09-45)**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a * report of the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.

The Principal Accountant outlined the contents of the report stating that there was a projected deficit of £130k at year end.

He highlighted the significant service movements and identified the shortfall in leisure and car parking income; trade waste was also showing a reduction in income but that

this was offset by reduction in disposal expenditure, however the garden waste scheme income was up on profiled income.

During the discussion it was necessary to pass the following resolution to exclude the press and public having reflected on Article 15, 15.02(d) (a presumption in favour of openness) of the Constitution. This decision was required because consideration of the matter in public may have disclosed information falling within one of the descriptions of exempt information in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Having discussed a number of business issues with regard to the leisure service, the meeting moved back into open session.

Note: *Report previously circulated, copy attached to minutes.

25 **GRASS CUTTING (00-24-00)**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a * report of the Director of Operations setting out Devon County Council's grass cutting arrangements for verges as delivered by Mid Devon District Council, the areas cut by this authority and subsidised by the Parish and Town Councils.

The officer outlined the contents of the report highlighting the grass cutting issues that had arisen in previous years, the reduction of Devon County Council funding, the need to subsidise the maintenance of Devon County Council owned land and the involvement of the Town and Parish Councils in the grass cutting arrangements. He highlighted the report put before the PDG in November 2015 which outlined options for Town and Parish Councils regarding future arrangements for grass cutting.

He outlined a pilot scheme taking place in Silverton which hoped to identify the level of resource required taking into consideration the equipment required and the terrain of the land to manage grassed areas. Some of the areas within Silverton were HRA owned land therefore the maintenance of those grassed areas should be charged for within the Council's accounting systems.

Cllr Mrs Roach raised the following questions:

Please could you give separate and approximate figures for grass cutting and the other grounds maintenance work?

The cost of living recharge, is that a way of saying that the charge to the HRA has not kept pace with the cost of living. If this is the case, how long ago was it reviewed?

When are funds transferred from the HRA to pay for the grass cutting? Have any payments been made this year?

She also stated that she had agreed for Silverton to be used as a pilot, land had been identified and whose responsibility to cut the grass had been confirmed.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The areas cut with Devon County Council funding
- The transfer of monies to the General Fund from the HRA and when the transfer took place
- The number of cuts per year for each area
- Maps highlighting each Town and Parish and who had responsibility for cutting the grass
- Whether land could be transferred to residents
- Whether HRA land could be sold to residents and any legal implications/restrictions.

The Director of Operations agreed that a thorough report would be brought using Silverton as the sample area to the next meeting of the Group in which Cllr Mrs Roach's questions would be answered, a review of the bill of quantities provided, a review of existing prices levied across the HRA for Silverton which would include income, a review of pricing, cost of living recharges and clarification on legal restrictions to do with the HRA (specifically the sale and transfer of HRA land), all of which would be fed into the budget process.

Note: * Report previously circulated, copy attached to minutes.

26 **MOTION 538 (CLLR MRS J ROACH - 1 JUNE 2017) (00-50-39)**

At the previous meeting of the Group Cllr Mrs J Roach had agreed that this Motion be deferred to the following meeting in order that enquiries could be made.

Motion 538 (Cllr Mrs J Roach – 1 June 2017)

Mid Devon District Council is concerned that the present level of grass cutting across the district is the subject of much criticism.

The Mid Devon District Council therefore resolves to urgently review;

1. Whether the budget is sufficient and if it isn't to put forward a request to Council for a supplementary budget to meet the cost of providing an effective service.
2. If it is impossible to provide extra funding the Council should consider asset transfers to Parish Councils and/or individuals.

Taxpayers are now facing the second year of a grass cutting regime which leaves the grass uncut for long periods.

Following discussion within the previous item, where further work was required to enable a thorough report to be submitted to the next meeting, Cllr Mrs Roach although unhappy with the delay stated that she wished her motion to be discussed thoroughly and therefore agreed to a further deferral to allow for further work to take place.

27 **PARKS AND OPEN SPACES 10-YEAR MANAGEMENT PLANS AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES (00-52-26)**

Following consideration of the 10 year management plan and design principles at the previous meeting and the recent views of the Community Policy Development Group, the Director of Operations provided the following update: Members were being asked to consider/develop policy which would feed into a 10 Year Management Plan and Design Principles for parks and open spaces across Mid Devon, the Community Policy Development Group had been requested to consider health and well-being issues which would be fed into the plan and the following views had been put forward for consideration:

- a) Play areas must be fenced when necessary for health and safety reasons, as the health, safety and wellbeing of children was of paramount importance:
- b) Play England criteria be used;
- c) When work was undertaken to remove fences or other items such as benches, the work must be undertaken safely and no hazards left:
- d) That communication and clear consultation must take place with all parties being updated.

A debate had also taken place at full Council regarding play area issues and those views would also be considered as part of the plan. Options would also be considered for the transfer of assets, the aspiration to retain native trees and the wild flowers in amenity spaces that had been so well received, all these views would form part of a report to the next meeting.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The contents of the 'Play England' document, which outlined design ideas, specifications and maintenance of play areas and open spaces which could be fed into the design guide.
- The issue of the use of design consultants for parks and open spaces in Mid Devon.
- The need to change the way planning applications were dealt with, with regard to the creation of open spaces in line with an approved design guide.
- The possible conflict with design principles and planning guidance.
- The need to protect play areas in Mid Devon.
- The affordability of maintaining play areas across the district.
- The requirement of a budget to deliver the vision

It was **AGREED** that a full report with recommendations be brought to the next meeting of the Group.

28 **WASTE AND RECYCLING REGULAR UPDATE (1-08-45)**

The Waste and Transport Manager provided the following 6 monthly update by way of presentation, he stated that the Devon wide figures were not available at the present time, however with regard to Mid Devon the overall recycling rate was 53.7%, an improvement on the previous year, the dry recycling rate was up from 17%

to 21%; the total waste figures showed a reduction of 796kg and waste for disposal data showed a decrease to 371kg. The authority was mid table with regard to waste arising, this was where further work was required. The cost per household for the disposal of waste had reduced by 17%.

He outlined the savings made and the changes to the services which looked to reduce costs, that of:

- The new transfer station which would see all the garden waste being taken to a site in East Devon, food waste being taken to an AD plant in Somerset and residual and trade waste being taken to the Waste to Energy Plant in Exeter,
- The 10 year share saving agreement with Devon County Council
- The new vehicles which would allow garden and food waste to be collected separately
- An audit of the contents of black bags which may highlight the need for further education
- The work of the recycling advisors had commenced
- An expansion of the trade waste scheme
- The trial of split litter bins in the main towns
- New collection calendars would be delivered shortly

The Chairman thanked the officer for his update.

29 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK (1-28-10)**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** a * report of the Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation providing Members with an update on performance against the corporate plan and local service targets for 2017-18 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The Internal Audit Team Leader outlined the contents of the report highlighting the corporate aims and actions that had taken place against the targets in the Corporate Plan.

Members stated that they were pleased with the performances highlighted in the report.

Note: * Report previously circulated, copy attached to minutes.

30 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

The following items are due to be discussed at future meetings of the Group:

- Parks and Open Spaces, 10 year Management Plans and Design Principles
- District Officer Discretionary Time Update
- Performance and Risk
- Financial Monitoring
- Grass cutting and the HRA

(The meeting ended at 3.40 pm)

CHAIRMAN

