

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT  
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON WEDNESDAY,  
16 SEPTEMBER 2009**

**MEMBERS**

\* Cllr R Rowe - Chairman

\* Cllr R J Carter - Vice-Chairman

\* Cllr P Coulson

∅ Cllr G Date

∅ Cllr D W May

\* Cllr S L Rankin

∅ Cllr R J Vint

\* Cllr A Ward

\* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance and participating:

Cllrs J D Hawkins and M J Hicks

Officers in attendance:

All agenda items: Strategic Director (Community) and Member Support Officer;  
Items 5 and 6 (minutes EPDG.9/09 and EPDG.10/09 below refer) Head of  
Environmental Health; and  
Item 7 (minute EPDG.11/09 below refers): Head of Environment Services

**EPDG.7/09 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Environment Policy Development Group (EPDG) held on 1 July 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**EPDG.8/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but none were made.

**EPDG.9/09 REVIEW OF COUNCIL'S ENFORCEMENT POLICY**

The Head of Environmental Health presented a report that informed Members of the proposed Council wide generic Enforcement Policy which would establish a framework on which other service-specific policies would be based. However, it was noted that there would still be a number of subsidiary enforcement policies e.g. relating to food safety due to the diverse range of regulatory work that was undertaken.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a) There was widespread support expressed for the policy, but concerns were raised about the legal capacity of the authority to absorb an increase in enforcement cases and it was asked if the policy had been developed in consultation with the Legal Service. In response, the Head of Environmental Health informed that Legal Officers were signed up to the policy but if there was a sufficient rise in cases then resources could be problematic. He further added that it was difficult to assess what the future capacity requirement would be as enforcement was mostly a reactive process and depended largely on the complexities of each case;
- b) A Member queried the approach to enforcement in terms of a perceived failure to enforce in the middle ground cases which could cumulatively bring the Council into disrepute. In reply, the Officer said that for clarity, the aim of the policy was to define the two extremes and that trying to define the middle ground was difficult;
- c) It was asked how the service assessed levels of risk. In reply, the Officer advised that highly trained, professional Officers assessed risk on a case by case basis, which underlined why good quality training in competency was essential to the service.

It was then:-

**RECOMMENDED**

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** to approve the Enforcement Policy.

**EPDG.10/09 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH BUDGET REVIEW**

The Head of Environmental Health presented a report that provided Members with a detailed budget analysis of the Environmental Health Service. He advised that the service had taken an early lead in the shared services agenda with West Devon Borough Council (WDBC). The combined service was also looking at the possibilities of incorporating new technology to allow remote working, thereby making considerable savings in officer time travelling both to and from the offices of both authorities. However, it was noted that this would take approximately three to four years before full implementation so would therefore constitute a medium term saving. The Officer further advised that there was also potential for future shared services with Teignbridge District Council (TDC). The service would also be reviewing the process of offering advice to businesses and investigations would take place over whether a charge could be introduced.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a) With regard to Shared Services, a Member queried whether the cost of officers travelling to and from West Devon, and potentially in the future to and from Teignbridge had been costed into savings. In reply, the officer advised that most usually it would be the Management staff that travelled between Council sites, however in the future it was hoped that video conferencing technology could be utilised which would also further reduce the carbon footprint of each authority;
- b) It was noted that with regard to paragraph 4 (page 12 of the published agenda refers) 'Service Budget', the comparison figures with 2008/09 were not present which was not considered satisfactory. In addition the figures for Food Safety Budget breakdown 2008/09 (Appendix 5: page 22 of the published agenda refers) were listed only as 'probable'. It was therefore requested that officers be made aware that all future reports should include comprehensive and up to date financial information;
- c) The Officer was asked to expand on the Empty Homes initiative. The Group was informed that empty properties were usually either holiday homes, homes in probate, or long term empty homes that had fallen into disrepair. The district had approximately 600 empty homes although only 200 of these were likely to be able to be brought back into use. The initiative would use loans to entice home owners to restore their properties to a habitable condition. Enforcement powers, such as compulsory purchase orders could be utilised but this action would be a very last alternative due to the financial costs incurred. Members were asked to bring to officers attention any property they were aware of that could benefit from the initiative;
- d) A Member asked about the likely impact upon emergency planning and flooding when considering surface drainage would be a major problem in the future. The Group was informed that the service was waiting on advice from the Government, but that the Pitt Review recommended that any funding went to Council's with the highest risk and to further split funding between County and District Councils. The Strategic Director (Community) expressed that the Integrated Devon approach would be the best route to working efficiently on these issues.

It was then:-

**RECOMMENDED**

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that the Group notes the report and has commented upon it (as recorded above).

## EPDG.11/09 ENVIRONMENT SERVICES BUDGET REVIEW

The Head of Environment Services presented a report that provided a detailed budget analysis of household waste collection, trade waste, recycling, street cleansing, beach cleaning and public conveniences.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a) A Member asked if the service could look into the processing of biodegradable waste particularly with regard to flats in more urban areas of the district. The Officer assured that they would investigate the possibilities provided any solution was cost neutral to the Council.
- b) With regard to Domestic Waste, a Member voiced concern that the focus was in aiming to make reductions in the service budget. The Member wished for more attention to be paid to increasing income streams and that they would like to see more attention paid to increasing income streams from waste and seeing it as a resource (e.g. in generating energy), and not just as material to be thrown away and proceeded to cite the example of agricultural waste. In response, the officer advised that only 25% of all waste was domestic but that most targets were directed at the public sector and not the private sector. It was the disposal authority who had the control over end use including the introduction of Energy for Waste (EfW).

An Executive Member reminded Members that there would need to be significant re scaling of budgets for at least the next three to five years, which would present significant issues and difficult budgetary decisions for Members to determine. As an example, the Member made reference to the servicing of public conveniences which was a discretionary, not a statutory function for the Council, at a cost of £810,000 (paragraph 22 page 36 of the published agenda refers). In response Members were adamant that they did not wish to see the levels of service reduced in this area as the district was a tourism area and it was essential to keep the streets clean and public conveniences open. The Group also took the opportunity to thank the Officer and his staff for the excellent work they undertook which was reflected in the numerous compliments received from visitors on the cleanliness of the area;

- c) An Executive Member informed Members that he had recently been on a site visit to our processor Severnside at Plymouth. The Member found it to be a valuable awareness raising exercise in learning how waste was utilised and recommended Members visit the site for themselves.

- d) As with the previous agenda item (EPDG.10/09 refers), a Member noted that once again the financial information contained in the presented agenda report was not up to date and reiterated their earlier comments regarding this being unacceptable.

It was then:-

**RECOMMENDED**

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that the Group has noted the report and commented upon it.

(Meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 3.25 pm).

---

Chairman