

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON WEDNESDAY, 08
OCTOBER 2008**

MEMBERS

* Cllr J D Hawkins – Chairman

* Cllr R C Steer – Vice-Chairman

* Cllr B F Cane

∅ Cllr S E Cooper

∅ Cllr M J Howarth

∅ Cllr C W Jones

* Cllr L P Jones

* Cllr D M O'Callaghan

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apologies for absence

Also in attendance and participating:

Cllrs J I G Blackler, J Brazil, M J Hicks, M F Saltern and J W Squire

Officers in attendance:

All Agenda Items: Economic Development Officer, Public Relations Officer and
Senior Member Support Officer

Items 5 and 6 (minutes CPDG.17/08 and CPDG.18/08 below refer): Housing Advice
Manager

CPDG.14/08 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Community Policy Development Group held on 17 September 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPDG.15/08 URGENT BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that he had one item of urgent business he wished to raise at the meeting in relation to the recent Post Office Closures. This item was considered urgent due to the evolving situation. Following the recent closures, the Group questioned what level of support the Council were offering those facilities which had lost their post offices.

The Economic Development Officer informed Members that Post Office Ltd (POL) was yet to give an official view on a number of outstanding issues. However, it was noted that the facilities at Ermington, Kellaton and West Charleton had been closed and left no surviving shops. Blackawton, Dittisham and Rattery were likely to be subject to outreach services, although this was yet to be confirmed. The outlet in Avonwick had closed, and although the shop remained, there was concern for its viability.

During discussion, Members felt that it was important to remind those premises that had been unduly affected that they could apply for Business Rate Relief. Therefore, although the Leader of Council and the Head of Financial Services had the delegated authority to insist on this, the following motion was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and on being put to the vote declared **CARRIED:-**

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** to ensure that outlets at Avonwick, Blackawton, Dittisham and Rattery, who had lost their post office facilities, be contacted to ensure that they were aware of the Business Rate Relief they were entitled to apply for.

CPDG.16/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

CPDG.17/08 CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

Consideration was given to a report which sought comments on the draft Housing Need Assessment Policy which was proposed to operate across Devon. Furthermore, it advised Members of the progress made in introducing a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme for the South Hams and wider Devon area. It was noted that the key barrier preventing people in Devon from accessing social housing was the overall shortage of properties. Choice Based Letting in itself did not increase the number of available homes. However, it was clear that Devon Home Choice would improve the way that those properties were let, and that it offered tremendous potential benefits to people seeking housing.

It was noted that currently, there was limited control over the number of people housed being housed within the district who had no local connection. The proposal being presented to Members limited this to a maximum of 10% of housing being available to such groups and in doing so officers felt that it benefited local people and those with a local connection.

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- a) the 10% housing proposal for those with no local connection. Although in support of this proposal, a query was raised, following which, Members were advised that currently there was no data available through the housing register, that clarified the number of families, who had no local connection, migrating into the district. Members expressed concern in relation to this as it was felt that obtaining this information was essential for monitoring purposes. Furthermore, Members queried how officers could arrive at the 10% figure without any prior statistics. Officers stated that this was a figure drawn up by the project board that included officers from across all Devon authorities. Members were informed that if the percentage of lettings to those with no local connection to the area exceeded 10% in any one quarter, the authority could opt out letting any further properties to those without a connection to the area until the balance had been readdressed. Officers advised that the 10% level was based upon the number of previous years' lettings. Moreover, a new computer system for CBLs would be able to produce such information;
- b) the involvement of all local authorities in Devon;
- c) applicants' financial resources. Following a query, Members were informed that each applicants individual financial situation would be taken on its own merits and it would not, as the presented report stated, be that "applicants with a household income of over £60,000 will be normally be considered to be able to meet their households needs";
- d) advertising the properties. Members were informed that properties were to be advertised in a number of different ways including online at the Devon Home Choice website, a freesheet, an automated telephone service and information being emailed/sent to town and parish councils and partner agencies;
- e) the estimated costs of the scheme. Members wished for their concern over the financial implications of the scheme to be noted.

It was then:-

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that the Group has commented on the presented report and policy (as recorded above) and ask the Executive to be assured of any future financial implications.

CPDG.18/08 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY FOR PROPERTIES OWNED OR MANAGED BY SOUTH HAMS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Consideration was given to a report which sought comments on the proposed Anti Social Behaviour Policy for properties owned or managed by South Hams District Council. The Council had a duty to ensure that properties for which it had management responsibility were managed in a responsible manner so as not to have a detrimental effect on other residents in the immediate vicinity. This policy would enable the Council to fulfil its obligations in this respect, not only with regard to properties currently managed but any other properties in the future which the Council may manage under the Direct Lets Scheme.

During discussion, although welcoming the policy, Members felt that tenants should be respectful enough not to require such a policy.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that:-

- a) the Anti Social Behaviour Policy for properties owned or managed by South Hams District Council be adopted; and,
- b) delegated authority be granted to the Executive Member for Housing, in consultation with the Housing Advice Manager, to agree a plain English leaflet for tenants advising of the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and its implications.

CPDG.19/08 BT PAYPHONE REMOVAL PROGRAMME

Members considered a report which highlighted BT's proposal for the removal of public telephone boxes (PCBs) in the district as a means to improve the viability of the national payphone network. Whilst the BT Payphone Removal Programme clearly constituted a further erosion of services in a predominantly rural area, it was likely that the effects of PCB removal would not be felt in the community to the same extent as the recent closure of Post Office outlets. However, in the event, BT's proposals had generated a significant concern within rural communities led largely by a wave of dissent from the Parish and Town Councils concerned residents and District Council Members.

47 PCBs had been identified within the South Hams for removal, of which the Council had found reason to object to 35 of these proposed removals. It was noted that objections to BT's proposals were typically driven by conservation concerns, lack of mobile telephone coverage, potential for emergency use, rural disadvantages and unacceptable distances to the nearest alternative kiosk.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- i) Members wished to extend their gratitude and thanks to the Economic Development Officer for his work on this issue;
- ii) A non-Committee Member expressed concern with Ofcom's apparent lack of foresight into the lack of mobile phone signal within certain rural areas. In response to this, the Chairman agreed to contact Ofcom to express a number of concerns about both the principles and the process adopted by BT;
- iii) It was felt that the PCBs were iconic to the street scene and the Parish Council's should be made aware of the opportunities to adopt or sponsor those within their parishes. Therefore an addition to the recommendation was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and on being put to the vote declared **CARRIED**.

It was then:-

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that the Group:-

- a) have considered the potential impact that wholesale removal of BT Payphones would have on local distinctiveness (as detailed above);
- b) note the opportunities available to local communities to adopt or sponsor their red telephone boxes and retain them for historical and aesthetic reasons;
- c) note the degree of engagement that the Council has enjoyed with many Parish and Town Councils across the district in generating a robust response to BT's proposals for removal;
- d) note the degree of cross-Council engagement in addressing serious conservation concerns; and
- e) wish to ensure that Parish Councils are aware of the opportunities to adopt or sponsor their red telephone boxes.

(Meeting started at 10.00 am and concluded at 11.40 am)

Chairman