

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON
TUESDAY 5 JANUARY 2010**

MEMBERS

* Cllr R C Steer – Chairman

* Cllr B F Cane – Vice-Chairman

∅ Cllr N A Barnes

∅ Cllr S E Cooper

* Cllr M Hannaford

* Cllr L P Jones

∅ Cllr I Longrigg

* Cllr D M O'Callaghan

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance and participating:

Cllr M F Saltern

Members in attendance and not participating:

Cllrs B E Carson, M J Hicks, P W Hitchins, M J Howarth and J W Squire

Officers in attendance:

All Agenda Items: Strategic Director (Community)

For item 5: (Minutes CPDG.21/09, CPDG.23/09 and CPDG.25/09 below refer) Strategic Director (Resources), Head of Financial Services, Head of Environment Services, Communications Manager and Senior Member Support Officer;

For items 6, 7 and 8: (Minutes CPDG.26/09, 27/09 and 28/09 below refer) Member Support Services Manager;

For item 6: (Minute CPDG.26/09 below refers) Divisional Environmental Health Officer;

For item 7: (Minute CPDG.27/09 below refers): Devon Affordable Housing Co-ordinator, Affordable Housing Manager and Planning and Affordable Housing Officer

CPDG.19/09 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Community Policy Development Group held on 29 September 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CPDG.20/09 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. These were recorded as follows:

Cllr D M O'Callaghan declared a personal interest in Item 5: 'Budget Proposals 2010/11' (Minute CPDG.21/09 below refers) by virtue of her having a resident's concessionary parking permit and took part in the debate and vote thereon;

Cllr B F Cane declared a personal interest in item 5: 'Budget Proposals 2010/11' (Minute CPDG.21/09 below refers) by virtue of him having an involvement with the tourism industry and took part in the debate and vote thereon.

CPDG.21/09 **BUDGET PROPOSALS 2010/11**

The Group began by discussing the proposals from Cllr Lawrence regarding the concessionary car parking permits which the Head of Environment Services introduced. He reiterated the main points arising from the paper, whilst balancing them with comments detailing the operational issues. Cllr Lawrence had put forward two possible proposals. Firstly, to send the permit free of charge to all households or, secondly, to send a revised permit which did not allow for free overnight parking to all households.

During discussion, the following points were made:

- The cost of the loss of income was unknown and could only be estimated;
- The request was made for greater detail regarding how similar schemes were run by other councils;
- The desire to help traders by making the permit available to all during shopping hours;
- Officers concern over how to enforce the rules of the permit if residents were asked to write their own registration numbers on the permit;
- The increase in council tax that may be required to fund the permit and how this would unfairly disadvantage those who did not own a car.

The majority of the Group felt that the proposals merited more work and requested more information on the impact of the proposals. The Strategic Director (Resources) stated that it was difficult to predict human behaviour in relation to car parking activity patterns but if the Group wanted to revisit the proposals the work should be done well in advance of next years budget setting process. It was then **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and on being put to the vote was **CARRIED**:

That the Prosperity Policy Development Group undertake more work on the proposals put forward by Cllr Lawrence.

When put to the vote the Group did not support Cllr Lawrence's proposals by three votes to two.

The Head of Financial Services then took Members through the key elements of the Executive report on 3 December 2009 which gave the background to the Executive budget proposals for 2010/11.

Questions were raised over the reduction in budget for Beach and Water Safety and the Strategic Director (Community) explained that this budget resourced the deployment and re-siting of the buoys following storms. The proposed reduction in budget should not impact on the initial laying of the buoys but the funding available for repositioning would depend on the number of summer storms. The Harbour Master had made a judgement about levels of risk in the context of financial constraints, and this was felt to be an example which illustrated how difficult decisions had to be made in order to balance the budget for 2010/11.

Members were advised that the Leisure Centre Contract saving related to efficiency savings required as part of the contract when it was tendered.

The Head of Financial Services then introduced the additional pages which set out the Executive proposals to reduce the budget shortfall. He advised that should Members not agree to any of the proposals, then alternatives would have to be put forward in their place in order to address the shortfall.

Bids

There were two Bids for the Group to discuss. The first Bid for £17,000 related to funding an anti social behaviour officer post for one year as a joint post with West Devon. Anti social behaviour was increasingly being seen as a district council responsibility rather than a police responsibility.

When put to the vote, the bid for £17,000 for an anti social behaviour officer post was unanimously agreed.

The second Bid related to the purchase of street sweeping vacuum cleaners. The Strategic Director (Resources) advised that the intention was to improve the quality of street sweeping currently undertaken and not necessarily to increase the number of streets swept. In order to be confident of the effectiveness of the machines, the Strategic Director (Resources) had suggested that initially one would be bought, and if proven, then the other three cleaners would be purchased.

When put to the vote the bid for £20,000 for vacuum machines for street sweeping was unanimously agreed.

The Executive proposals were then discussed as follows:

Possible savings from Shared Services - £75,000

The Strategic Director (Resources) advised that a total saving of £150,000 would be required from the Shared Service programme and this would be split between the two authorities to achieve the £75,000 saving. Executive Members had already approved a programme to pursue further shared services. Officers felt that this target for future savings was challenging but realistic.

When put to the vote the proposal was unanimously agreed.

Possible savings from Crime and Disorder Activity - £30,000

The Strategic Director (Community) advised that the Executive proposal for savings related to the Community Safety Partnership and associated activity. The Council had a statutory duty to be involved but Members could make a judgement on the extent of involvement. In light of Members' wish to discuss in greater detail all of the Executive's proposed savings and the potential impact on individuals, the Group felt it would be appropriate to exclude the press and public from the meeting for these items.

CPDG.22/09 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED

That in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business as the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act is involved.

CPDG.23/09 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2010/11 - CONTINUED

Discussion then continued on how the budget for Crime and Disorder Activity was made up. The Executive view was that the Council could have less engagement with the Crime and Disorder Partnership as generally in the South Hams people felt safe.

When put to the vote, the proposal was unanimously agreed.

Possible savings from Tourism - £10,000

The Strategic Director (Community) reminded Members that the Council had entered into a five year tourism partnership and in time the contribution in terms of staff and finance would taper down. The Executive proposal would reduce the work on green tourism activity and focus our contribution on marketing activities as part of the partnership.

When put to the vote, the proposal was unanimously agreed.

Possible savings from Development Control and Land Charges - £30,000

The Strategic Director (Community) advised Members that this saving would arise from joining the administrative elements of the two functions, which would achieve synergy at a time of reduced activity because of the economic situation.

When put to the vote, the proposal was unanimously agreed.

Possible savings from Economic Development Activity - £45,000

The Strategic Director (Community) introduced this item by explaining that it should be viewed in the context of changing circumstances. The activity was being promoted by government more as an upper tier authority role. Furthermore the business advice market had a range of providers. However Members should be aware that the customer response indicated that our service was highly regarded.

When put to the vote, the proposal was unanimously agreed.

CPDG.24/09 RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED

That the public and press be re-admitted to the meeting.

CPDG.25/09 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2010/11 - CONTINUED

Possible savings from Community Grant - £30,000

Members were reminded that this did not relate to the Locality Fund, but was a grant available for identified projects in the community.

Historically, a range of projects had been supported and the average grant allocated was £5,000.

When put to the vote the proposal was carried by four votes to one.

Contributions to Reserves

The Group then examined the list of reserves and each respective contribution. The Strategic Director (Resources) introduced the list of reserves and asked Members to note that some contributions had already been deleted.

During the discussion, points raised included the following:

- The Community Wellbeing reserve funded a range of activity and would be used to cover the anti social behaviour bid discussed earlier;
- The contribution to Vehicles and Plant Renewals was higher than the present balance within the reserve, but this was because a number of vehicles had recently been replaced and the fund was currently at a low point Work was ongoing to assess whether reductions in contributions could be made without damaging the longer term viability of the Reserve.

When put to the vote the Group unanimously agreed all of the existing contributions to reserves, but asked that the contributions to the Community Wellbeing reserve and the Vehicles and Plant Renewals reserve be reviewed.

The Group was then reminded by the Strategic Director (Community) of the proposals made by Cllr Pennington at the Council meeting held on 17 December 2009 in relation to funding of certain partnership activity. Cllr Pennington had identified four partnerships where he felt that savings to contributions could be made. The Strategic Director (Community) gave a background to each of the organisations and following a brief discussion the Members voted as follows:

Youth Enquiry Service – funding contribution to remain;
Rural Housing Enablers – funding contribution to remain;
Devon Rural Network – funding contribution to be stopped;
Devon and Exeter Racial Equality Council – funding contribution to remain.

To conclude this item, Members discussed levels of council tax and confirmed that whilst an increase was inevitable, it should be kept as low as possible in recognition of the difficult economic circumstances that many residents found themselves in.

CPDG.26/09 **EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY**

The Group considered a report which ultimately sought approval to adopt an Empty Homes Strategy (as outlined in the presented agenda report).

In presenting the report, the lead Executive Member for Housing highlighted that the main purpose of adopting the strategy would be to provide a systematic and equitable approach in an attempt to bring a number of vacant houses (which currently stood at 600 homes in the South Hams) back into use.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- (a) The Group expressed its support for adoption of the Strategy and felt that even if a few empty homes were brought back into the housing stock, then the scheme could be considered a success;
- (b) To maximise publicity of this scheme, Members believed that it would be beneficial to inform each town and parish council of this initiative;
- (c) A Member felt there was potential for holiday and letting properties to also be included as an extension to this scheme.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive **RECOMMEND** to Council that the Empty Homes Strategy (as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report presented to the Group) be adopted.

CPDG.27/09 AFFORDABLE HOUSING BEACON RESEARCH – FINAL REPORTS

A report was considered which advised of three commissioned reports in relation to: Land Leasing, Second Homes and Community Land Trusts.

It was noted that these reports had enabled additional research on three areas of possible innovation around increasing the delivery of Affordable Housing and related policies and practice.

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) the referred need for patience to deliver a successful Community Land Trust (CLT) project, as evidenced by examples from the United States where the initiative had been in place for some time but with relatively few outcomes. It was noted that CLTs were more appropriate in certain areas than others but emphasis was given to the need for land availability to enable delivery of any affordable housing project;
- (b) the affordable housing Development Plan Document (DPD). A Member highlighted that the adopted DPD was sufficiently robust and effective to enable for significant contributions to be made towards affordable housing on future development sites.

RESOLVED

That the Group note the findings of the three reports and endorse their publication.

CPDG.28/09 MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC SPACES WORKING GROUP HELD ON 4 NOVEMBER 2009

In noting the content of these minutes, a Member proceeded to make particular reference to the unrest in some town and parishes regarding the proposal to charge town and parish councils a fee of £100 per play area towards the cost of inspection and insurance.

(Meeting started at 10.00 am and concluded at 1.20 pm)

Chairman