

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON
16 DECEMBER 2008**

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 B E Carson, M J Hicks and M F Saltern

Officers in attendance:

All agenda items: Strategic Director (Community), Strategic Director (Resources),
Head of Financial Services and Senior Member Support Officer;
Item 5 (minute EPDG.11/08 below refers): Landscape and Recreation Manager.

EPDG.9/08 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Environment Policy Development Group (EPDG) held on 23 October 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EPDG.10/08 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.11/08 BIODIVERSITY: STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS

Consideration was given to a report which brought attention to the legal duties placed upon the Council in relation to biodiversity and sought Members' approval for a proposed scoping exercise to identify and quantify the delivery of these obligations. In order to investigate the opportunities and risk in more detail, it was proposed to make short term arrangements (possible in conjunction with West Devon) to:

- undertake a detailed analysis of the Biodiversity related actions of all Council services in relation to the S.40 duty;
- identify areas where amendments to Council practices may be required; and
- identify areas where additional policy or actions may be required – with details and timescales.

During discussion, Members were advised that each Council service would be tasked with identifying how it might impact on bio-diversity. Once the scoping exercise had been complete, a report would be presented to a future meeting of the Environment PDG proposing possible future working practices. Members stressed the importance of working with, and learning from, neighbouring authorities and interested stakeholders such as the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It was also noted that the draft AONB plan included a section on bio-diversity. Furthermore, the Landscape and Recreation Manager confirmed that he worked with the Forward Planning officers to ensure the Development Planning Documents referred to bio-diversity issues.

It was then:-

RECOMMENDED

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

1. the proposals within the presented report would enable the Council to develop a response to statutory requirements in relation to biodiversity; and
2. the proposals to fund the recommended scoping exercise from the Land and Development Reserve be agreed.

EPDG.12/08 DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2009/2010

Consideration was given to a report which updated Members on the budget position facing the Council. The report also outlined bids for additional expenditure and options available to address the funding shortfall.

The report concluded in stating that each year the preparation of annual budgets became more challenging than before; this year was particularly difficult due to the general economic conditions, uncertainty in financial markets and falling interest rates. Uncertainty existed over the future funding and structure of local government. Members' views were now sought as to how they wished to reconcile the competing demands of additional expenditure, service provision and sound financial management.

In presenting the report, Officers presented to the Group a paper which provided an update on the proposed budget gap following publication of the presented report and the outcome of the Executive meeting of 4 December 2008 (minute E.79/08 refers). The Head of Financial Services outlined the savings identified by the Corporate Management Team, the Concessionary Bus Fare scheme which, it was felt, would not be as costly as initially anticipated, and the increased council tax

from a higher tax base due to increased numbers of properties within the district. However, additional pressures on the Council's monies were noted as being a reduction of investment income due to lower interest rates and a net reduction in car park income. If Members were minded to support the potential budget bid of an E-Newspaper (as outlined in the circulated papers) and the additional budget bid as proposed by the Executive (as tabled to the Group and referred to in minute E.79/08) towards the running costs of an additional street sweeper, Members were looking at a revised potential budget gap of £484,000.

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- a) the wish to implement no increase in Council Tax levels. Whilst applauding this proposal from the Executive (minute E.79/08 refers), a Member wished to highlight that the Council was not the sole precepting authority for Council Tax;
- b) bridging the budget gap. Members were advised that at the Executive meeting of 4 December 2008, officers had been tasked with identifying which of the annual contributions to Council Reserves could be reduced and set the Senior Management Team a target for additional savings (in addition to the £494,000 as proposed at presented Appendix D to the report). It was felt that such savings would be aided through the Shared Services and Integrated Devon projects;
- c) street sweeping. In discussion on the additional bid for a mechanical street sweeper, a Member also expressed concern at the seemingly increasing amount of chewing gum being discarded on pavements;
- d) reducing the Council's carbon footprint. Members expressed concern that during the consultation process with the town and parish councils, there had been a noted response to reduce expenditure on work relating to reducing the Council's carbon footprint. A Member wished it to be noted that they would be strongly against any reduction in expenditure on this aspect. In response, officers advised that the town and parish councils were focused on front line services and therefore a lack of understanding of the Council's wider responsibilities may have prompted this vote;
- e) fuel poverty. A Member queried whether monies were being spent on addressing fuel poverty. In response it was noted that, Registered Social Landlords were required to raise the standards by 2010. Grant funding was available to privately owned dwellings and each application would be considered on its own merits.

B1. E-Newspaper

A Member raised strong objection to this bid, questioning the need to spend £10,000 on an e-bulletin.

The Group then voted by five to one in support of this bid.

B2. Mechanical Street Sweeper

Following a query, it was confirmed that even with this additional sweeper, a further sweeper would be hired for 13 weeks during autumn to assist with the increased leaf fall. Furthermore, it was confirmed that the projected £46,000 per annum would cover all running costs.

The Group unanimously supported this bid.

In conclusion, the Group also confirmed its support for the no increase in Council Tax levels.

(Meeting commenced at 10.15 am and concluded at 11.10 am).

Chairman