

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON
THURSDAY, 15 JANUARY 2004**

MEMBERS

* Cllr R W Hallett - Chairman

∅ Cllr A R Vale - Vice-Chairman

∅ Cllr J Brazil

* Cllr R J Carter

* Cllr S L Rankin

* Cllr M Stone

* Cllr A Ward

* Cllr J A Westacott

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman:

Cllrs N A Barnes, B E Carson and R O Yonge

Also in attendance but not participating:

Cllrs V A Harvey and P J Prudden

EPDG.14/03 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Environment Policy Development Group held on 13 November 2003 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EPDG.15/03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting, the following were made:-

Cllr J A Westacott declared a personal interest, by virtue of her position on a number of museum trusts, advising that she would not participate in any debate or vote on this aspect of the budget process;

Cllr M Stone declared a personal interest, by virtue of his local connection, in proposed charges for the Dartmouth Ferry, advising that he would not take part in any discussion, or vote on this aspect of the budget process.

EPDG.16/03 **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Consideration was given to proposed future agenda items. During discussion, it was agreed that the next meeting of the Policy Development Group would consider Barn Policy and undertake a scoping session on Environment Policy and Waste Management.

Cllr Ward provided an outline on climate change for consideration by the Programming Panel.

EPDG.17/03 **BUDGET PROPOSALS 2004/2005**

A report was considered that set out the draft Budget Proposals 2004/2005 which had been formulated on the basis of an updated forecast of the financial position facing the Council for 2004/05 and over the medium term. In the report, particular mention was made of the following:-

- Core budget pressures;
- Bids for additional resources;
- Options for reducing the projected budget gap of £610,000, which included:
 - (a) additional income from fees and inflationary increases on charges;
 - (b) income from increasing council tax;
 - (c) budget reductions previously identified for 2004/2005.

The Group was advised that the Executive had provisionally given a view on which bids and reductions it felt should be supported and that this was the Environment Policy Development Group's opportunity to make its recommendations on the draft Budget Proposals.

The Group then considered Appendices C to H of the report.

(a) **Appendix C – Bids/Service Pressures 2004/2005**

- i. **C3 – Property** – a Member suggested that any opportunity to improve assets and to increase the use of assets, ie. by hiring rooms, should be taken;
- ii. **C15 – Community Development** – a Member questioned whether the subscription to Grantfinder duplicated the work of South Hams Council for Voluntary Service (CVS). The Group was advised that the CVS subscribed to a service suitable for charitable organisations;

- iii. **C19 – Forward Planning** – the Group questioned whether, by not supporting this bid the progress of the Local Plan would be affected. Members were advised that the possible transition to the Local Development Framework offered a more flexible approach, which would mean that not all aspects of the work of the Forward Planning Team would need to be progressed simultaneously;
- iv. **C23 – Tourism** – concern was expressed that the deletion of this grant would affect up to twelve small museums. It was noted that the £4,000 grant offered good value for money; was match funded; and provided partnership working with Teignbridge District Council. Members were reminded that the Council had agreed to this grant funding for a set period, and that the Council had been approached to extend this period. Members were further reminded that the Executive had felt that the grant did not relate to one of the Council's key objectives and should therefore be discontinued. It was agreed, that the Executive be informed that the Environment Policy Development Group supported this bid;
- v. **Totnes Heritage Grant** – the meeting was advised that two years ago the Council had reviewed the provision of the Totnes Heritage Grant and decided to redistribute resources to benefit the whole of the district, which had included employing a second enforcement officer. Totnes Town Council had produced a paper showing the impact of the loss of this Grant which would be considered by the Community Policy Development Group at its next meeting. It was agreed that a representative of the Environment Policy Development Group would attend that meeting to make representation.

The Group agreed, subject to the comments recorded above, to support the Executive's view that only bids C1 to C17 be included in the draft budget proposals.

(b) **Appendix D – Capital Bids/Service Pressures 2004/05**

- i. **D5 – Information Technology** – a view that this bid should be supported as the Council should provide comprehensive evidence of air quality.

The Group agreed, subject to the comment recorded above, to support the Executive's view that only bids D1 to D6 be included in the draft budget proposals.

- (c) **Appendix E – Progress In Achieving Reductions for 2004/2005 Identified Last Year**
- i. **E4 – Street Cleaning** – a Member suggested that this was an area where increased savings could be achieved. The Group was reminded that this Council allocated significantly more resources to street cleaning than any other comparable district;
 - ii. **E17 – Development Control & Conservation** – one Member expressed a view that the Council should not charge for the supply of information. The remaining Members of the Group advised that all organisations made a charge for photocopying. It was suggested that the new Customer Service Unit may be able to provide access to more information, such as planning on-line which would reduce the need to charge for photocopying.
- (d) **Appendix F – Reductions 2004/2005**
- i. **F3 – Leisure and Parks** – the local Member requested the Council's support as this year's event was of particular significance. The Group supported the opportunity of achieving a saving and voiced their concern that should each of the district's market towns enter Britain in Bloom, it could have serious cost implications for the Council. The Group supported this reduction;
 - ii. **F11 – Environmental Health** – that because of the importance of tourism to the district, the cessation of the Blue Flag and rural beach award scheme should not be implemented. It was further suggested that there was a need to investigate alternative methods of funding those awards, possibly from local contributions;
 - iii. **F12 – Environmental Health** – the Group felt that the cessation of the placement of dog signs could lead to the Council being unable to prosecute members of the public because of the absence of 'warnings'. As an alternative it was suggested that local parish/town councils could place signs, as this would place this local issue in local control. The reduction was not supported by the Group;
 - iv. **F14 – Environmental Health** – the Group noted the work undertaken within this budget to respond to any sewage problem. It felt this to be an important area of work and suggested a budget of £1000, on the proviso that even if the budget was fully spent, that work would be funded through other sources if a problem occurred.

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 part of this item of business as the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act is involved.

- (e) **Appendix H – Reductions 2004/2005**
- (i) **F13 – Development Control and Conservation** – the Group noted the discretionary work undertaken by this post and therefore supported its reduction;
- (ii) **F15 – Environmental Health** – the Group supported the alternative arrangements, as outlined at the meeting, for the provision of this service;
- (iii) **F18 – Coast & Countryside** – the Group did not support this reduction.

The Group agreed, subject to the comments recorded above, to support the Executive's view that only bids F1 to F15 be included in the draft budget proposals.

RESOLVED

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

- (f) **Income Opportunities 2004/2005**
- (i) **G4 and G5 – Trade Waste Collection** – one Member's concern that this income opportunity could be detrimental and could lead to flytipping. The Group was advised that this was a competitive market which could be sustained. The Group therefore agreed to support this income opportunity;
- (ii) **G12 - Homelessness** – one Member's concern that the Council would be making a charge to vulnerable people. The Group was advised that the Council was establishing a principle that it would charge for the collection and storage of furniture and belongings. Further, that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had provided guidance enabling councils to make this charge. Members were advised that the charges would be applied in a reasonable manner. This income opportunity was therefore accepted;

- (iii) **G19 – Waste Management** – the Group did not support the principle of charging for the collection of domestic clinical waste.

The Group agreed, subject to the comments recorded above, to support the Executive's view that bids G1 to G22 be included in the draft budget proposals.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that the Environment Policy Development Group's consideration of the draft budget proposals 2004/2005 and comments as detailed above, be noted.

(Meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.20 pm).

Chairman