

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON
THURSDAY, 23 DECEMBER 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, J T Pennington, R Rowe, I P Steer and R O Yonge

EPDG.7/04 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Cllr Rankin be appointed Vice Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

EPDG.8/04 MINUTES

A Member expressed concern that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Policy Development Group held on 8 July 2004 did not fully reflect the discussion which had taken place. On being put to the vote, however, the minutes were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EPDG.9/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members 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 A Ward declared a prejudicial interest in Item 5 Budget Proposals – R31 Landscape and Leisure: Arts Grants (see EPDG.9/04 below) by virtue of her involvement in a local art group and left the meeting during the discussion and vote on this item;

Cllr J A Westacott declared a prejudicial interest in Item 5 Budget Proposals - B5 Community Regeneration: Transport Ring and Ride (see EPDG.9/04 below) by virtue of her position on the management board and left the meeting during the discussion and vote on this item.

EPDG.10/04 **BUDGET PROPOSALS 2005/2006** (see also Minute E.68/04(ii) and CPDG.17/04)

Consideration was given to a report which provided Members with an updated assessment of the budget gap facing the Council for 2005/06, and over the medium term. The report was divided into four categories:

- The latest assessment of the core funding gap faced by the Council;
- Additional resources to address service pressures or to enhance provision;
- Options to address the funding gap, including budget reductions identified by the Corporate Management Team (CMT), income opportunities and an increase in Council Tax levels and;
- Next steps – achieving a balanced budget.

The report made specific reference to the consultation exercise which had been undertaken with a random sample of around 300 residents on a range of budget issues using the SIMALTO modelling technique. In addition, presentations were also being made to meetings of the Business Forum (feedback notes were presented to the meeting) and Town and Parish Councils so that their views could be incorporated into the process.

Members were advised that since the item was considered at 2 December 2004 Executive meeting, additional information had been received by the Council, which was tabled at the meeting. Firstly, the Strategic Director (Resources) informed Members that the Council had not anticipated receiving a real term inflationary increase in Revenue Support Grant (RSG) but indications were that the Council would receive an additional £146,000. Consequently, an adjusted position was presented to Members and, if assuming that all bids and recommendations were accepted, the revised budget shortfall would be £74,000. Members were advised that whilst the additional funding relieved some of the budgetary pressures on the Council, pressures increased over the medium to long term and the RSG was still insufficient to accommodate additional services (e.g. licensing).

Secondly, a brief analysis of the Simalto Consultation exercise had been received and was tabled to the meeting. It was noted that whilst the final, detailed report was still to be received, it was unlikely that the key findings would vary significantly and some important messages had come to light.

The Group then considered Appendix F of the report, deliberating each bid and reduction individually. Where a bid or reduction was supported without comment, no reference is made below.

Please note that officer updates were provided on specific items and are reported in the Community Policy Development Group minutes of 9 December 2004 (minute CPDG.17/04).

B1. Property Services – Repair and Maintenance

In response to a Member's proposal that consideration should be given to the possible decampment of the Council from the Follaton House site because of the escalating costs associated with its maintenance, the Group was advised that this option was being investigated.

The Group supported the recommended additional resources.

B5. Community Regeneration – Transport Ring and Ride

It was noted that this request for resources had arisen due to the 3 year funding as previously agreed coming to an end.

The Group supported the recommended additional resource.

B6. Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

It was noted that this was an additional item not included in the budget papers and was brought forward at the request of Members who had been contacted independently by the CAB. Members were happy for this bid to be brought forward as part of the budget process, but agreed with the stance taken by the Community Policy Development Group that a defined scheme which included some outputs to measure performance and the benefits to the Council be brought forward. Officers advised that due to the likely level of negotiations required with the CAB, the information requested may not be available before 10 February 2005, when the final budget decisions were to be made.

Subject to the outcome of further negotiations with the CAB, the Group supported the recommended additional resource.

B7. Discretionary Relief for Village Shops and Pubs

A Member proposed that additional resources should be made available to provide increased discretionary relief for village shops and pubs. It was argued that such a measure would help to ensure the continued viability of many small retail businesses across the district.

The motion, having been **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** on being put to the vote was declared **LOST**.

R7. Community Regeneration – Housing (Youth Advice)

The Group was advised that the funding gap created by the Council's withdrawal of funds was unlikely to be bridged by either of the other two core funders. It was further noted that, whilst not a statutory duty, this service offered a range of information to young people and a source of advocacy.

In light of the anticipated consequence of a withdrawal or reduction in the Council's funding, the Group agreed that a recommendation on this item should be deferred pending further investigations.

R8. Community Regeneration – Community Development (Village Hall Grants)

A Member suggested that consideration should be given to employing a 'bid writer' to realise a longer term approach for securing funding.

The Group supported the recommended reduction.

R10. Community Regeneration – Economic Development (Dartmouth Regatta)

Some Members of the Group highlighted the inequity created by this provision because it apparently favoured one town in the district over the other three for which there was no equivalent provision.

It was noted that the proposed reduction for this item was £3,000 from a budget of £6,000. It was the view of officers that the withdrawal of the funding could be absorbed by the Regatta Committee.

It was therefore **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** that the total funding of £6,000 be withdrawn from 2005/2006, and on being put to the vote was declared **CARRIED**.

(Cllr Stone requested that his opposition to the recommendation be recorded.)

R12. Community Regeneration – Economic Development (Devon County Show)

The Group, whilst agreeing to support the recommended reduction, expressed the view that the Council must not lose sight of the importance of promoting economic activity.

R23. Operations Team/Property Services – Public Toilets

A Member expressed his dismay over the inclusion of this item given Members' clear rejection of any plans to reduce the number of public toilets in the district. He suggested that efforts should be focused on reducing costs rather than the level of provision.

Other Members accepted that there was a need to examine the achievement of savings by considering some closures of facilities although, as a Member workshop had recently been held on this issue and was due to meet again, it was agreed to defer a recommendation pending the findings of the workshop.

R31. Landscape and Leisure – Arts Grants

In opposing the proposed budget reduction, a Member commented on the detrimental impact that any reduction would entail for the district's communities, particularly in relation to tourism and the Villages in Action scheme.

Whilst recognising the fear as detailed above, other Members, however, believed that the proposed reduction was necessary in the current financial climate.

The Group supported the recommended reduction.

R34. Business Development - Operations

The Group supported this possible reduction.

R35. Financial Services – Discretionary Benefit Payments

It was noted that this proposed reduction would only effect approximately 70 individuals. The Group was also reminded that the local disregard of War Disablement and War Widows/Widowers pensions from benefit calculations was effectively being subsidised by other individuals including those in receipt of the basic state pension.

The Group, however, rejected the recommended reduction.

EPDG.10/04 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 Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act is involved.

EPDG.11/04 BUDGET PROPOSAL: B4. ICT – DRAWING OFFICE

An exempt report that detailed a Bid, which had staffing implications, was considered by the Group.

The Group supported the bid as recommended.

(Meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 3.50 pm).

Chairman

