

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PROSPERITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON 7 JANUARY 2010**

MEMBERS

* Cllr R F Croad – Chairman

* Cllr J I G Blackler – Vice-Chairman

* Cllr J Brazil

* Cllr J T Pennington

* Cllr F J Hawke

* Cllr M Stone

∅ Cllr R M Lawrence

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance and participating:

Cllrs K J Baldry, J D Hawkins, P W Hitchins and M F Saltern

Also in attendance and not participating:

Cllrs B E Carson, M J Hicks and M J Howarth

Officers in attendance:

All Agenda Items: Strategic Director (Community), Strategic Director (Resources),
Senior Member Support Officer;

Items 5, 6 and 7: (Minutes PPDG.27/09, PPDG.28/09 and PPDG.29/09 below refer)
Head of Financial Services and Head of Environment Services;

Item 9: (Minute PPDG.31/09 below refers) Economic Development Officer.

PPDG.24/09 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Prosperity Policy Development Group held on 18 November 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

PPDG.25/09 URGENT BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that he had agreed for one item of urgent business to be raised at this meeting. The item was deemed to be urgent due to its impact on the Budget Setting process. The Chairman had been asked by a local Ward Member to revisit a previous recommendation in relation to parking restrictions at Mayor's Avenue, Dartmouth (minute PPDG.18/09 refers).

Further consultation had now been undertaken and it was apparent that there were concerns locally surrounding the recommendation that the car park be split during the summer months between pay and display users and permit holders. Also of relevance was the park and ride car park and the improvements that would take place to it. If changes were made to the parking restrictions at Mayor's Avenue, it would be difficult to determine the success of the new park and ride car park. Therefore, the Ward Member asked that the Group agree to the status quo remaining for one more season to gauge the effectiveness of the new park and ride car park. If agreed, then this decision should then be reviewed at the end of the season during autumn 2010. This request was then **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and on being put to the vote was **CARRIED**:

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that in relation to the Budget Setting Process for 2010/11, the previous recommendation regarding Mayor's Avenue Car Park (Minute PPDG.18/09 recommendation 1 refers) be reversed and therefore the Car Park should not be split between pay and display users and permit holders.

PPDG.26/09 **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 F J Hawke declared a personal interest in Item 7: 'Amendments to the Off Street Parking Order' (Minute PPDG.29/09 below refers) by virtue of him operating a taxi and he took part in the debate and vote thereon.

PPDG.27/09 **ORAL UPDATE ON THE LOWER FERRY**

The Head of Environment Services advised the Group that the Lower Ferry concessionary charges for commercial vehicles were more expensive than the commercial vehicle charges for the Higher Ferry and as such the numbers of vehicles being carried had reduced. Following a brief discussion, the Group took the view that in order to be able to respond to changing circumstances in this difficult economic climate, authority should be delegated to the Head of Environment Services and the Lead Executive Member for a Clean Environment to be able to vary the ferry prices as necessary. It was therefore **PROPOSED**, **SECONDED** and on put to the vote was declared **CARRIED**, that:

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive **RECOMMEND** to Council that authority be delegated to the Head of Environment Services, in consultation with the Lead Executive Member for a Clean Environment, to be able to vary all pricing charges on the Lower Ferry as and when deemed necessary.

PPDG.28/09 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2010/11

The Group began by discussing the paper put forward by Cllr Lawrence in relation to the Residents Concessionary Car Parking Scheme. The Head of Environment Services introduced the paper and reiterated the main points to the Group. Cllr Lawrence had put forward two possible proposals to either send a free permit to all households or to send a revised permit, which did not allow overnight parking, free to all households.

During discussion, the following points were made:

- The cost of the loss of income was unknown and could only be estimated;
- Members generally wanted to support the scheme to be able to give something back to local residents and support the local economy and businesses but were concerned about the financial implications;
- It was queried whether sponsorship of the permits could be considered.

When put to the vote the Group did not support either of Cllr Lawrence's proposals.

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

The Head of Financial Services proceeded to introduce 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 alternative suggestions would have to be put forward in their place to fill the budget gap.

A Member asked if the expected increase in car parking fees included VAT and went on to say that the Council had benefited from the VAT reduction by £70,000 through not reducing car park charges by 2.5% whilst the VAT rate was lower. There was also a question over the funding of free car parking during the Christmas period, but officers confirmed that this could be funded from a Reserve for Christmas 2010.

A Member also raised concerns that second homes council tax money was no longer being paid to the Affordable Housing Reserve. He felt that as this Council had openly criticised Devon County Council for not ring fencing second homes council tax monies, this Council had undermined its position by doing the same thing.

Bids

There were two Bids for the Group to discuss. The first bid for £17,000 was to jointly fund an anti social behaviour post with West Devon Borough Council for one year. The Strategic Director (Community) advised Members that this Bid should be viewed in light of the Executive proposal to reduce funding on Crime and Disorder activity. He also explained that this Bid would be funded from a reserve for a year and therefore there would not be an ongoing cost. Despite this, Members felt that this was a Police Authority responsibility and should be funded by the police.

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

The second Bid was for the purchase of street sweeping vacuum cleaners. The Strategic Director (Resources) advised that the service was trying to become more effective and these machines would help to improve the quality of cleaning.

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

Officers advised that a total saving of £150,000 would be required and this would be split between the two authorities to achieve the £75,000 saving. Members were reminded of the services they had selected to be shared and whilst officers felt the amount was realistic, it was not possible to say exactly how this saving would be delivered. A Member was disappointed that Teignbridge District Council was no longer part of the shared service project. He felt that there was the opportunity to share more with Teignbridge District Council and that every effort should be made to persuade them to re-engage. In response another Member added that the Council was more than happy to re-engage, but unfortunately TDC had, to date, been unwilling to participate.

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 a lot of crime and disorder activity was undertaken as part of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership including liaison between agencies to tackle issues and implementing the action plan.

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 the Council's contribution on marketing through 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 a saving would arise from joining the administrative elements of the two functions, which were currently split between different services. By joining the two teams together, they would be able to take advantage of synergies and the opportunity to manage peaks and troughs of activity.

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 the Executive view of the Council's role in economic development was changing and whilst the Council received positive feedback on the function, some of what was provided could come from other providers. In addition, this was increasingly being seen as an upper tier authority activity and much of the activity was discretionary.

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

Possible savings from Community Grant - £30,000

For clarity, Members were reminded that this did not relate to the Locality Fund, but was a grant available for identified projects in the community. A number of projects had been supported over the years and the average grant was approximately £5,000.

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

Contributions to Reserves

The Group then examined the list of reserves and their contributions. The Strategic Director (Resources) introduced the list of reserves and advised that he had already been asked to look at the Vehicles and Plant Renewals Reserve.

When put to the vote the Group unanimously agreed the retention of all contributions to reserves.

Members then asked if further proposals could be made, and Cllr Pennington made the following suggestions in relation to the funding of certain partnership activity 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 remain; and
Devon and Exeter Racial Equality Council – funding contribution to remain.

PPDG.29/09 **AMENDMENTS TO THE OFF STREET PARKING ORDER**

The Group considered a report which proposed a number of administrative changes to the Off Street Parking Order. The Head of Environment Services explained each section of the report and the background in each case.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive **RECOMMEND** to Council that the amendments as identified in the report presented to the Group be advertised for inclusion in the Off Street Parking Order 2010.

PPDG.30/09 **DARTMOUTH EMBANKMENT**

The Chairman informed that this item was to be deferred to the next Group meeting to be held on 27 January 2010.

PPDG.31/09 **SOUTH HAMS LOYALTY CARD SCHEME**

The Economic Development Officer introduced the report, which had been requested by Members, and which identified the potential for a loyalty card scheme which would link into the wellbeing of our towns but would not be limited to the retail sector. A questionnaire had been prepared and was ready to be sent out to traders to determine interest.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- Members generally felt that this was a good idea and that a meeting with the Chairmen of the appropriate Chambers of Commerce would be a good idea;
- The Group highlighted that there would be benefits to both the council tax payer and to the local businesses;
- It was queried whether a loyalty scheme should be aimed at the Council Taxpayer or to a wider external audience;
- Research had shown that to ensure an effective scheme, the support of the businesses involved was critical;
- One Member felt that although the scheme was a good idea, the current economic climate may not be the best time for such a scheme to be successful;
- There were difficulties identified in terms of being able to cost the scheme, and a decision would have to be made on whether to charge for the loyalty card;

- The original idea had in fact not been retail based, but was more about supporting tourism related businesses through the quiet seasons.

In conclusion, it was decided that the questionnaire should be sent out as planned. In addition a discussion would take place with 'Visit South Devon' to ascertain if they would want to become involved in a scheme to support tourism businesses. A new report would then be presented back to the Group which outlined the results of the questionnaires and the discussions.

It was then:

RESOLVED

That a further report be presented back to the Group at a later date, which includes the comments and results as requested above.

(Meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.55 pm)

Chairman