

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 13 June 2019 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

N V Davey, R J Dolley, J M Downes,
Mrs S Griggs, T G Hughes, D F Pugsley,
R F Radford, J Wright and A Wyer

Also Present

Councillor(s)

G Barnell, F W Letch and Mrs N Woollatt

Also Present

Officer(s):

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Adrian Welsh (Group Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader), Catherine Yandle (Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security), Joanne Nacey (Group Manager for Finance), Chris Shears (Economic Development Officer), Alan Ottey (Tiverton Town Centre and Market Manager), Matt Auty (Communications Officer) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN (VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL IN THE CHAIR)

RESOLVED that Cllr J Downes be elected Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2019/20.

2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Cllr N V Davey be elected Vice Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2019/20.

3 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no apologies for absence.

4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

5 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Cllr Mrs N Woollatt declared an interest in relation to item 11 on the agenda, 'Connecting the Culm Project', in that she is a mill owner.

6 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2019 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

7 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman stated that he was honoured to have been elected Chairman of the Group. He felt that it was a proactive forward thinking forum and that it had the potential to carry a lot of influence.

8 MOTION 555 (COUNCILLOR F W LETCH - 8 APRIL 2019) (00:08:00)

At its meeting on 24 April 2019, Council had referred the following Motion to the Economy Policy Development Group for its consideration.

Motion 555 (Councillor F W Letch):

“Mel Stride MP recently said: “Central Devon has market towns with a wonderful variety of high street shops selling high-quality local produce and offering a range of services. Many are doing very well, but others face stiff competition from out of town and on-line retailers. I know that the margin between success and failure can be very small and even a small increase in the number of people who make it a priority to shop locally more often can make a big difference.”

High Street Saturday was on 16th March. I propose that:- In order to encourage the high street shops in Mid Devon’s 3 main towns, this council will not charge for Saturday parking in the long stay car-parks of Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton.”

Cllr Letch stated that the original intention behind his Motion had been for Council to consider offering free parking in the towns on Saturdays. However, since submitting the Motion he had given more thought to the whole area of car parking across the district and now felt that perhaps a better way forward was for the Car Parking Working Park to reconvene and for it to continue its work bearing in mind the contents of his Motion in conjunction with car parking charges generally.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- The considerable amount of work that the Car Parking Working Group had already undertaken in the previous Council.
- The amount of income that would be lost if free parking on every Saturday was to be offered.
- The need to consider all possible options going forwards.

It was **AGREED** that the Car Parking Working Group be re-established and for it to meet as soon as possible so that a recommendation could be brought back to the next meeting of this Group. The members of that Group to comprise of Cllrs D F Pugsley, R F Radford and for Cllr B Evans to be asked to return as a co-opted member. It was also requested that Cllrs F Letch and Mrs N Woollatt be invited to attend the Working Group meeting as observers.

It was further **AGREED** that the Policy Development Group's decision as to whether or not to recommend that the Motion be supported or rejected be postponed until the next meeting so that this could be considered alongside the recommendation of the Car Parking Working Group.

9 **PERFORMANCE & RISK OUTTURN REPORT FOR 2018/19 (00:19:10)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Planning & Economic Regeneration providing Members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2018/19 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The contents of the report were outlined with particular reference to the indicators in relation to the number of empty shops, business rate accounts, the number of businesses assisted and car park vends.

Consideration was given to:

- The challenging nature in the way performance information was presented and the need for officers to receive feedback from Members in order to try and find a more helpful format.
- A need to evaluate performance information retrospectively and to ascertain whether interventions had been successful; whether projects had been worthwhile and what had worked and what hadn't.

It was **AGREED** that an item be brought back to the next meeting providing an evaluation of past projects in this area.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

10 **OUTTURN 2018/19 (00:29:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) presenting the revenue and capital outturn figures for the financial year 2018/19. The report contained a number of recommendations that would be made to the Cabinet at its meeting on 27 June 2019.

The contents of the report were briefly outlined with discussion focussing on the following areas:

- The final monitoring report presented to the Group prior to the election had predicted an end of year deficit of £65k for the General Fund. However, the final position had improved by £84k meaning that the General Fund for 2018/19 would finish with an underspend of £19k
- In year financial monitoring throughout 2018/19 had been very accurate.
- It had been possible to set aside funds to Earmarked Reserves where needed.
- The recommendation to the Cabinet to carry forward circa £12m from the 2018/19 capital programme to fund schemes in the years to come. In addition to this the recommendation to transfer to earmarked reserves £459k which had been unspent.

- Market Walk and Fore Street shops in Tiverton. There had been a number of voids throughout the year but in December 2018 every unit in Market Walk had been occupied although overall rents had been lower.
- The Collection Fund and how effective the Revenues section had been in collecting Council Tax and NNDR during extremely challenging economic times.
- Variances in each of the budget areas falling under the remit of this Group and the reasons for these being explained in the appendices to the report.
- This Group did not have control over a large proportion of the council's budget and that the larger variances were due to market forces rather than poor service delivery.

Notes:

- (i) * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.
- (ii) Cllr N V Davey declared a personal interest in that he is a member of the Moorhayes Community Association.

11 **CONNECTING THE CULM PROJECT (00:56:13)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration informing Members of the progress with the Connecting the Culm Project.

The Economic Development Team Leader outlined the contents of the report explaining that the project was essentially designed to get a better understanding of the whole catchment area of the River Culm.

Consideration was given to:

- Whether other water courses would be considered as well as a need to consider not just flooding issues but the fact that during dry spells there was insufficient water in these water courses. In addition to this, there was damage to weirs and silted up channels requiring ongoing maintenance. Some of these water courses had heritage value and were a rich habitat for wildlife. It was confirmed that the whole catchment area would be included in the project so this would indeed include all tributaries.
- Questions were asked in relation to the need for co-ordination between all the partners and stakeholder groups. It was also essential that the District Council had a strong presence in this project. It was explained that the project was in the very early stages and that the main people were not in post yet. However, once they were, they would be looking not only at flooding but also water quality, biodiversity and water effectiveness amongst other issues.
- The end point of the project was to develop ways of working and to create a management plan for the river. It was confirmed that the Environment Agency were fully behind this project. However, a large number of authorities would need to find a way of working together if the project was to be successful and these early stages were about finding a way to make this happen.
- Issues with a historic bridge in Culmstock which needed urgent attention.
- This was a European funded project and Members were able to access a 200 page document listing what the desired outcomes were.

- Water run-off from housing developments and the effect upon water courses.
- The report would also be reported to the Environment Policy Development Group as this was an issue that was of interest to both Policy Development Groups.

It was **AGREED** that:

- a) An update on this project be brought to the next meeting including a timetable showing the key steps involved and that all Members in the Culm catchment area be copied into this whether or not they were on this Group.
- b) The Economic Development Team Leader collate a list of Members' concerns so that evidence could be brought to the attention of the relevant authorities.

Notes: (i) * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

(ii) In addition to the interest declared under item 5, Cllr Mrs N Woollatt also declared a personal interest in that she is a member of the Cullompton Leat Conservancy Board.

12 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICE UPDATE (01:31:30)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * of the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration updating Members on progress with key Economic Development Service Priorities.

The Group Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery informed the Group about the make-up of his team and explained that an informal meeting would be arranged so that Members could meet them and discuss the work programme for the Group for the coming year. He also provided a brief context to the report by reference to the key components of the Mid Devon economy and its challenges.

The objectives and key sectors within the Economic Strategy were outlined by way of presentation and reference made to projects under each area. Discussion took place with regard to:

Employment and Skills

- The demand for employment sites was high but there were not many sites coming forward.
- There had been interest from an international company wanting to work in Mid Devon and making use of the M5 corridor.
- It was the role of the team to support these initiatives and to help businesses fulfil their aspirations.
- It was vitally important to strengthen the relationship with education providers.

Place

The Masterplanning process for Crediton would take place next year. Crediton was experiencing strong economic and business growth and enquiries were received on a regular basis. However, parts of the High Street did need regeneration as did the infrastructure around the town.

Infrastructure

Money was being secured through a Section 106 contribution from Lidl to facilitate the installation of high quality wireless internet services to Tiverton town centre as a pilot scheme with the intention to roll-out across Cullompton and Crediton when suitable funding becomes available. The question was asked as to whether significant investment needed to be made in relation to WiFi within the towns when 4G or 5G might suffice. It was explained that having WiFi within the towns presented other opportunities such as encouraging and supporting local businesses. Not all the funding from the Lidl S106 had been allocated to the installation of WiFi as it contained other measures to support the town centre.

Hi Tech, Innovation and Green Energy

The possible use of the river behind the Town Hall as a source of useable power was briefly discussed. It was explained that whilst this was a viable site the cost implications would need to be examined, however, the amount of power that could potentially be generated could be used to great effect within the town. Early estimates show that such a project could generate all of Phoenix House's power needs when combined with the solar energy already captured by the solar roof panels, potentially enabling the council to utilise a fully carbon-free energy supply. It was further explained that a group of master's students had investigated ecological improvements as well as hydro engineering.

Agriculture, Food and Drink

More information would be provided to a future meeting regarding the destination website.

A number of questions were asked in relation to initiatives designed to increase footfall within the towns, particularly Tiverton. It was explained that initiatives were being generated through the Town Centre Partnership such as evening entertainment, craft and farmers markets. More needed to be done and the informal meeting of the Group would provide Members with an opportunity to discuss the year one actions within the Economic Strategy and consider a work programme for the Group to push forward over the coming year.

The Group considered that it was important for it to be proactive in its work, to take issues forward and to achieve successful outcomes where it could.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

13 **START TIME OF MEETINGS (02:22:57)**

It was **AGREED** to continue to hold meetings of the Group at 5.30pm for the remainder of the municipal year.

14 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (02:24:10)**

In addition to the items already listed it was requested that the following be on the agenda for the next or a future meeting:

- Update on 'Connecting the Culm Project' including a timetable
- Evaluation of performance data in relation to Economic Projects
- Report from the Car Parking Working Group with their recommendations
- Initiatives for Tiverton Town Centre Regeneration.
- Crediton Park Project

The Group requested that consideration be given to condensing the Economic Projects report with only the key highlights being brought forward for Members attention and discussion. The Chairman also requested that agenda items be time limited where possible in future.

(The meeting ended at 8.00 pm)

CHAIRMAN