

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 5 November 2020 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

J M Downes (Chairman)
N V Davey, R J Dolley, Mrs S Griggs,
B Holdman, D F Pugsley, R F Radford and
J Wright

Also Present

Councillors

R J Chesterton, R M Deed, R Evans, B G J Warren and
Mrs N Woollatt

Also Present

Officers

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Jenny Clifford (Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration), Adrian Welsh (Group Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery), Ian Chilver (Group Manager for Financial Services), Catherine Yandle (Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security), Dean Emery (Group Manager for Revenues and Benefits), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader), Chris Shears (Economic Development Officer) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

34 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no apologies for absence.

35 PROTOCOL FOR REMOTE MEETINGS

The protocol for remote meetings was noted.

36 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

37 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

No interests were declared under this item.

38 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2020 were confirmed as a true and accurate record.

39 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman stated that today was day 1 of a second national lockdown. The report at item 11 on the agenda regarding COVID19 had been written before there had been any suggestion of this happening therefore it was to be assessed in the light of that. At the last meeting there had been general agreement that there were some signs of economic growth however, since then, things had changed dramatically.

40 PRESENTATION FROM PHIL MAYER FROM HYDROMATCH (00:02:00)

Mr Phil Mayer from Hydromatch attended the meeting to provide the Group with a presentation on the proposed hydroelectric scheme at Tiverton Town Weir.

Before the presentation began the Chairman reminded the Group that this was now a live planning application and that any concerns regarding the scheme would have to pass through the correct channels in terms of the planning process.

The presentation provided the following information:

- Tiverton Town Council had initially asked for an investigation to take place regarding the possibility of a hydro scheme.
- There was a drop of 2 metres across the weir.
- Flood defence work had taken place in the 1960's to reinforce the weir.
- 2 options had been considered, one to create a substation located in the car park at Westexe South and one to connect the scheme to Phoenix House.
- 4 scenario's had been investigated in terms of the technology needed in relation to the water flow and in each case the cost/benefit of each scenario was assessed. One of these scenario's involved a traditional turbine arrangement which would require a fish protection scheme. Another considered the Archimedes Screw principle. The River Angling Association had been consulted in relation to maintaining the ecological diversity of the river. Fish stocks included eels, lamprey, salmon and sea trout. The developers had received advice from an independent panel of fish experts.
- Projected rainfall figures had been included within their analyses.
- Detailed discussions had been held with the Environment Agency.
- Development costs included a budget of £820k.
- Energy outputs had been mapped in order to project annual energy yields.

Discussion took place regarding:

- What mitigations would be in place should a large tree branch come floating down the river, this would need to be managed especially around the weir.
- The amount of noise that is generated by hydroelectric installations.
- Detailed information would be provided to the Planning Committee in due course.
- The impact on other leisure pursuits.
- Ongoing costs into the future.
- Expected lifetime of the scheme which was currently estimated to be circa 40 years.
- Costs 'versus' the energy created.

The Chairman thanked Mr Mayer for providing an interesting presentation to the Group.

41 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT (00:56:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security providing it with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2020-2021 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The contents of the report were outlined with particular reference to the following:

- The Group were asked to review the measures suggested for inclusion in the Corporate Plan Performance framework.
- Many risks, including the Economy ones, had been affected by COVID19 and were now scoring higher than before.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the measures suggested for inclusion in the Corporate Plan Performance framework (at appendix 4) be approved.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Reason for decision:

If performance is not monitored the Council may fail to meet its corporate and local service plan targets or to take appropriate corrective action where necessary. If key business risks are not identified and monitored they cannot be mitigated effectively.

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

42 **FINANCIAL MONITORING (01:02:00)**

The Group Manager for Finance provided the Group with a verbal update regarding the financial position so far in the year and highlighted the following key pieces of information:

- At the end of July the forecasted deficit had been £1.2m, by the end of August this had reduced to £41k. One reason for this was that in July no allowance had been made within the figures for the Income Compensation Scheme.
- The second lockdown would have yet another severe effect upon income most particularly within Leisure Services.
- The 4 tranches of COVID funding were outlined.
- Car park income had improved and was better than had been expected.
- Areas of movement which were not specific to this Group included interest received on investments, the furlough and compensation scheme and revisions of expectations in relation to Business Rates and Council Tax.
- £7.6m had already been given in Business Rate Relief.
- A new set of grants had been made available as a result of the second lockdown.
- The Council would be sympathetic where it could with businesses that were struggling by providing support and suggesting deferrals if appropriate.

It was **AGREED** by the Group that in future the summary of financial monitoring for each relevant period be provided in hard copy within the agenda pack for the meeting.

43 **DRAFT 2021/22 GENERAL FUND AND CAPITAL BUDGETS (01:24:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive considering the initial draft 2021/2022 budget and the options available in order for the Council to set a balanced budget and agree a future strategy for further budget reductions for 2022/23 onwards.

The contents of the report were outlined with reference to the following:

- This was the first iteration of the General Fund budget for next year. The Finance team were also in the process of preparing a Medium Term Financial Plan for next year and the following 4 years.
- Currently there was a predicted deficit of just over £3m.
- There was ongoing uncertainty over the Fair Funding Review.
- Funding pressure as a result of COVID19, income streams were unlikely to recover.
- The draft budget had been prepared on the basis that there wouldn't be any further lockdowns. The draft budget as presented had now been superseded by events.
- Other pressures on the budget including pay awards, property maintenance and the effect of Brexit.
- The legal duty to report a balanced budget despite these additional pressures and the effects of COVID19.

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

44 **COVID 19 ECONOMIC RESPONSE UPDATE (01:47:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration providing it with updated information regarding the Growth, Economy & Delivery team's latest COVID19 emergency economic and community response activities.

The contents of the reports were outlined with particular reference to the following:

- The relevant figures in relation to the number of positive Coronavirus tests and the number of deaths within Mid Devon were reported.
- There had been a huge impact on the economy of the region. Businesses were very dependent on the support being provided by both national and local government. Many were adapting where possible.
- The extension of the furlough scheme had been greatly welcomed, however the late announcement of furlough extensions may have happened after businesses had already had to make commercial decisions regarding their staff.
- In general the government grant schemes announced as a result of the second lockdown were less generous than the first, the pots of money made available were smaller.

- There were 3 different categories of grant funds, these included lockdown support grants, a discretionary scheme and a sector focussed scheme. The detail of these had only been received the previous day. An FAQ document would be released next week. The application form had been prepared and was in line with other Devon local authorities.
- Government detail in relation to all these schemes had been received very late and in some cases hadn't been received at all yet.
- Fraud checks would now have to be completed both before and after payments had been made creating more administrative pressure. No fraud had been identified thus far in any payments made within Mid Devon as part of the previous grant schemes.
- The COVID19 Support Hub had now been reinstated for those people who previously would have been classed as needing to shield.
- All Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people would receive a letter from the Government providing guidance on what they were and were not allowed to do under the new lockdown rules. Individuals would be asked to register any support needs on a national website. Food packages are not being offered this time.
- Reopening High Streets Funds work continues however this will be reviewed as a result of the November Lock down in order that messaging is consistent with the change in circumstances. .
- Meetings were being held with Town Mayors to discuss the latest situation with regard to our town centres.
- Exeter Hill (Cullompton) pavement widening has been delayed and may need to be rethought owing to a lack of carriageway width to accommodate the initially proposed measures.
- The work of the Growth, Economy and Delivery team had been re-prioritised as a result of the second lockdown. This had had a significant impact upon the work of the team.

The Chairman thanked the team on behalf of the Group for their hard work and diligence during these challenging times.

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

45 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (02:13:00)**

The Group continued to request that priority be given to COVID19 related activities for the immediate future, this was particularly the case given the extent of the second wave and the second national lockdown. It was requested that this item be placed at the beginning of the agenda next time.

(The meeting ended at 7.45 pm)

CHAIRMAN