

Public Document Pack

Mid Devon District Council

Economy Policy Development Group

Thursday, 4 June 2020 at 5.30 pm

Next ordinary meeting
Thursday, 16 July 2020 at 5.30 pm

Important - this meeting will be conducted and recorded by Zoom only. Please do not attend Phoenix House. The attached Protocol for Remote Meetings explains how this will work.

To join the Zoom Meeting please use the following link:

<https://zoom.us/j/96608109432?pwd=K3NWMTYvU0lub3owV1dsUnQ2b3Q3QT09>

Meeting ID: 966 0810 9432
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Dial by your location

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0 800 260 5801 United Kingdom Toll-free
0 800 358 2817 United Kingdom Toll-free

Meeting ID: 966 0810 9432
Password: 335654

Membership

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

AG E N D A

Members are reminded of the need to make declarations of interest prior to any discussion which may take place

- 1 **Election of Chairman**
To elect the Chairman of the Economy Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2020 / 2021.
- 2 **Election of Vice Chairman**
To elect the Vice Chairman of the Economy Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2020 / 2021.
- 3 **Apologies and Substitute Members**
To receive any apologies for absence and notice of appointment of substitutes.
- 4 **Remote Meetings Protocol** (*Pages 5 - 10*)
To note the protocol for remote meetings.
- 5 **Public Question Time**
To receive any questions relating to items on the Agenda from members of the public and replies thereto.
- 6 **Declaration of Interests under the Code of Conduct**
Councillors are reminded of the requirement to declare any interest, including the type of interest, and reason for that interest, either at this stage of the meeting or as soon as they become aware of that interest.
- 7 **Minutes** (*Pages 11 - 16*)
Members to consider whether to approve the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 12 March 2020.
- 8 **Chairman's Announcements**
To receive any announcements that the Chairman may wish to make.
- 9 **Covid 19 Economic Response** (*Pages 17 - 24*)
To receive a report from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration providing members with information regarding the Growth, Economy & Delivery team's COVID19 emergency economic and community response activities. To also inform members of emerging work setting the scene for recovery and providing the opportunity for the Economy PDG members to contribute towards the process and associated policy direction.
- 10 **Start time of meetings**
To agree the start time of meetings for the remainder of the municipal year.

11 **Identification of items for the next meeting**

Members are asked to note that the following items are already identified in the work programme for the next meeting:

- Economic Development Service update – continued response to and recovery from the Covid-19 crisis
- Capital and Revenue Outturn figures for 2019 / 2020
- Hydro Mills (tbc)
- Tiverton Regeneration Working Group
- Town Centre health check information

Note: This item is limited to 10 minutes. There should be no discussion on the items raised.

Stephen Walford
Chief Executive
Wednesday, 27 May 2020

Covid-19 and meetings

The Council will be holding some meetings in the next few weeks, but these will not be in person at Phoenix House until the Covid-19 crisis eases. Instead, the meetings will be held remotely via Zoom and you will be able to join these meetings via the internet. Please see the instructions on each agenda and read the Protocol on Remote Meetings before you join.

If you want to ask a question or speak, email your full name to Committee@middevon.gov.uk by **no later than 4pm on the day before the meeting**. This will ensure that your name is on the list to speak and will help us ensure that you are not missed – as you can imagine, it is easier to see and manage public speaking when everyone is physically present in the same room. Notification in this way will ensure the meeting runs as smoothly as possible.

If you require any further information, please contact Sarah Lees on: slees@middevon.gov.uk

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Mid Devon District Council - Remote Meetings Protocol

1. Introduction

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations permit remote attendance in Local Authority meetings.

Remote attendance is permitted as long as certain conditions are satisfied. These include that the Member is able to hear and be heard by the other Members in attendance. Also, being able to hear and be heard by any members of the public entitled to attend the meeting (in line with the public participation scheme). A visual solution is preferred, but audio is sufficient.

This also relates to members of the public attending the meeting also being heard. The regulations are clear that a meeting is not limited to those present in the same place, but includes electronic, digital or virtual locations (internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers).

2. Zoom

Zoom is the system the Council will be using for the time-being to host remote / virtual meetings. It has functionality for audio, video, and screen sharing and you do not need to be a member of the Council or have a Zoom account to join a Zoom meeting.

3. Access to documents

Member Services will publish the agenda and reports for committee meetings on the Council's website in line with usual practice. Paper copies of agendas will only be made available to those who have previously requested this and also the Chair of a virtual meeting.

If any other Member wishes to have a paper copy, they must notify the Member Services before the agenda is published, so they can arrange to post directly – it may take longer to organise printing, so as much notice as possible is appreciated. Printed copies will not be available for inspection at the Council's offices and this requirement was removed by the Regulations.

4. Setting up the Meeting

This will be done by Member Services. They will send a meeting request via Outlook which will appear in Members' Outlook calendar. Members will receive a URL link to click on to join the meeting.

5. Public Access

Members of the public will be able to use a weblink and standard internet browser. This will be displayed on the front of the agenda.

6. Joining the Meeting

Councillors must join the meeting early (i.e. at least **five** minutes before the scheduled start time) in order to avoid disrupting or delaying the meeting. Councillors should remember that they may be visible and heard by others, including the public, during this time.

7. Starting the Meeting

At the start of the meeting, the Member Services Officer will check all required attendees are present (viewing the participant list) and that there is a quorum. If there is no quorum, the meeting will be adjourned. This applies if, during the meeting, it becomes inquorate for whatever reason.

The Chair will remind all Members, Officers and the Public that **all microphones will be automatically muted**, unless and until they are speaking. This prevents background noise, coughing etc. which is intrusive and disruptive during the meeting. The Hosting Officer will enforce this and will be able to turn off participant mics when they are not in use. Members would then need to turn their microphones back on when they wish to speak.

8. Public Participation

Participation by members of the public will continue in line with the Council's current arrangements as far as is practicable. However, to ensure that the meeting runs smoothly and that no member of the public is missed, all those who wish to speak must register **by 4pm on the day before the meeting**. They should email their full name to Committee@middevon.gov.uk. If they wish to circulate their question in advance, that would be helpful.

At public question time, the Chair will invite the public by name to speak at the appropriate time. At that point, all public microphones will be enabled. This means that, to avoid private conversations being overheard, no member of the public should speak until it is their turn and they should then refrain from speaking until the end of public question time, when all microphones will be muted again. In the normal way, the public should state their full name, the agenda item they wish to speak to **before** they proceed with their question.

Unless they have registered, a member of the public will not be called to speak.

If a member of the public wishes to ask a question but cannot attend the meeting for whatever reason, there is nothing to prevent them from emailing members of the Committee with their question, views or concern in advance. However, if they do so, it would be helpful if a copy could be sent to Committee@middevon.gov.uk as well.

9. Declaration of Interests

Councillors should declare their interests in the usual way. A councillor with a disclosable pecuniary interest is required to leave the room. For remote meetings, this means that they will be moved to a break-out room for the duration

of this item and will only be invited back into the meeting when discussion on the relevant item has finished.

10. The Meeting and Debate

The Council will not be using the Chat function.

The Chair will call each member of the Committee to speak - the Chair can choose to do this either by calling (i) each member in turn and continuing in this way until no member has anything more to add, or (ii) only those members who indicate a wish to speak using the 'raise hand' function within Zoom. This choice will be left entirely to the Chair's discretion depending on how they wish to manage the meeting and how comfortable they are using the one or the other approach.

Members are discouraged from physically raising their hand in the video to indicate a wish to speak – it can be distracting and easily missed/misinterpreted. No decision or outcome will be invalidated by a failure of the Chair to call a member to speak – the remote management of meetings is intensive and it is reasonable to expect that some requests will be inadvertently missed from time to time.

When referring to reports or making specific comments, Councillors should refer to the report and page number, so that all Members of the Committee have a clear understanding of what is being discussed at all times.

11. Voting

On a recommendation or motion being put to the vote, the Chair (or the Member Services Officer) will go round the virtual room and ask each member entitled to vote to say whether they are for or against or whether they abstain. The Member Services Officer will announce the numerical result of the vote.

12. Meeting Etiquette Reminder

- Mute your microphone – you will still be able to hear what is being said.
- Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- Speak clearly and please state your name each time you speak
- If you're referring to a specific page, mention the page number.

13. Part 2 Reports and Debate

There are times when council meetings are not open to the public, when confidential, or "exempt" issues – as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – are under consideration. It is important to ensure that there are no members of the public at remote locations able to hear or see the proceedings during such meetings.

Any Councillor in remote attendance must ensure that there is no other person present – a failure to do so could be in breach of the Council's Code of Conduct.

If there are members of the public and press listening to the open part of the meeting, then the Member Services Officer will, at the appropriate time, remove them to a break-out room for the duration of that item. They can then be invited back in when the business returns to Part 1.

Please turn off smart speakers such as Amazon Echo (Alexa), Google Home or smart music devices. These could inadvertently record phone or video conversations, which would not be appropriate during the consideration of confidential items.

14. Interpretation of standing orders

Where the Chair is required to interpret the Council's Constitution and procedural rules in light of the requirements of remote participation, they may take advice from the Member Services Officer or Monitoring Officer prior to making a ruling. However, the Chair's decision shall be final.

15. Disorderly Conduct by Members

If a Member behaves in the manner as outlined in the Constitution (persistently ignoring or disobeying the ruling of the Chair or behaving irregularly, improperly or offensively or deliberately obstructs the business of the meeting), any other Member may move 'That the member named be not further heard' which, if seconded, must be put to the vote without discussion.

If the same behaviour persists and a Motion is approved 'that the member named do leave the meeting', then they will be removed as a participant by the Member Services Officer.

16. Disturbance from Members of the Public

If any member of the public interrupts a meeting the Chair will warn them accordingly. If that person continues to interrupt or disrupt proceedings the Chair will ask the Member Services Officer to remove them as a participant from the meeting.

17. After the meeting

Please ensure you leave the meeting promptly by clicking on the red phone button to hang up.

18. Technical issues

In the event that the Chair, the Hosting Officer or the Member Services Officer identifies a problem with the systems from the Council's side, the Chair should declare a recess while the fault is addressed. If it is not possible to address the fault and the meeting becomes inquorate through this fault, the meeting will be adjourned until such time as it can be reconvened.

If the meeting was due to determine an urgent matter or one which is time-limited and it has not been possible to continue because of technical difficulties, the Chief Executive, Leader and relevant Cabinet Member, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, shall explore such other means of taking the decision as may be permitted by the Council's constitution.

For members of the public and press who experience problems during the course of a meeting e.g. through internet connectivity or otherwise, the meeting will not be suspended or adjourned.

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MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 12 March 2020 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

J M Downes (Chairman)
N V Davey, R J Dolley, Mrs S Griggs,
T G Hughes, D F Pugsley, A Wyer, R Evans
and B Holdman

Apologies

Councillors

R F Radford and J Wright

Also Present

Officers

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

64 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr R F Radford who was substituted by Cllr R Evans and also Cllr J Wright who was substituted by Cllr B Holdman.

65 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

No interests were declared under this item.

66 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No members of the public were present.

67 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

68 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

69 CREDITON HEART PROJECT (00:00:05)

Trustees from the Crediton Heart Project had been invited to attend the meeting to provide more information about the work of the Crediton Heart Project. This included a presentation with the following key messages:

- Concerns regarding the number of community buildings that had been closed, whether or not Crediton would become a dormitory town and most jobs being in Exeter.
- Activities within the town such as the Crediton Festival, Mumcycles, the Flag Project and the Boniface Heritage Trail.
- The desire for Crediton to be an economic success, a place with cultural talent and a developing community that fulfilled the vision both of the Crediton town plan and Mid Devon District Council.
- The project aimed to create Crediton as a place of destination, acting as the 'social glue' connecting people, encouraging new projects, support businesses and sourcing funding.
- They had a plan for a community website promoting venues, groups, events activities and businesses. However, the project needed flexible spaces for performance, cinema, leisure and learning rooms for meetings, activities, services and small businesses.
- Progress so far included a skilled, active Trustee group, a community consultation resulting in over 600 responses, a professional feasibility study and a commissioned website.
- Next steps included seeking funding for the website to go live later this year, engaging partners for the project, finding a site, commissioning an architect and also seeking funding for a building which would act as the 'hub'.

Discussion followed with regard to how MDDC could engage with the project:

- Old Heathcoat School was available as a possible venue and an invitation was extended to the project group to liaise with a tourism group from Tiverton planning to visit similar sized towns in the Netherlands.
- Crediton had many different clubs but needed a central hub.
- Developers had obligations with regard to S106 and might be interested in engaging with the project. This need not necessarily be in relation to a specific housing site but could be located elsewhere. There could also be opportunities in relation to the Greater Exeter Strategic Partnership (GESP).
- The Project team were encouraged to contact the Economic Development team and local district councillors as sources of expertise in terms of connecting people.
- MDDC had recently launched the 'Visit Mid Devon' website and this could act as a valuable resource for promoting events in the Crediton area. The Economic Development team would be able to provide clarity on how it could link up with other stakeholders and interested parties.
- Investigations could be undertaken to ascertain the extent of certain underused sites (notwithstanding land ownership issues).
- Changes to Business Rates recently announced in the Budget could help new businesses and costs associated with venues. The Project team were encouraged to contact the Group Manager for Revenues and Benefits for further advice.

70 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT (00:44:38)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Planning & Economic Regeneration providing an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2019/20 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The following was highlighted with the report:

- The 6 week public consultation on the Local Plan main modifications had now concluded. 75 representations were received, these had been sent to the Inspector on 28 February for his consideration.
- The number of businesses supported was slightly down against target but the team had recently lost a member of staff and the quarter referred to was traditionally a quiet time of year.

A brief discussion took place regarding the risks associated with Coronavirus. This was a constantly changing and fast moving situation, for the moment the Council was continuing to operate as usual until advised otherwise by Government bodies.

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

71 **FINANCIAL UPDATE FOR THE NINE MONTHS TO 31 DECEMBER 2019 (00:49:34)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.

The Group Manager for Financial Services outlined the contents of the report stating that the figures before Members were from the Quarter 3 monitoring calculations. The forecast General Fund deficit for the current year was £292k. She highlighted some of the significant variances which had led to the new deficit figure, that of reduced overpayment recovery and software costs for Revenues and Benefits; and with regard to Trade Waste and Recycling an increase in customers and reduced discounts.

The surplus within the Housing Revenue Fund had reduced to £618k with monies being spent on disabled facilities. The appendices within the report outlined the Capital Programme.

It was the intention in future to produce financial information which was more relevant to each Policy Development Group. Loss of income from car parking and empty shops were two significant areas falling under the remit of this Group.

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

72 **NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES (BUSINESS RATES) SUMMARY REPORT (00:57:49)**

The Group had requested at their last meeting that they receive a background paper on Business Rates to aid their understanding of this area. This information included how the different types of relief were calculated and the thresholds by which Business Rates became payable and not payable. Over half of the businesses in Mid Devon were claiming Business Rate reliefs to the value of £5.2m.

Announcements made in the budget the preceding day were summarised as follows:

- Retail Relief had been increased in 2020/21 from 50% to 100% - qualifying businesses had been expanded, such as Hotels, B&B, and Holiday Lets – Hospitality generally, music venues and cinemas. It only applied to businesses with an Rateable Value (RV) of less than £51,000
- Pub Relief – Increased from £1,000 to £5,000 Rateable Value (RV) of less than £100,000
- Small Business Grant Funding – What is known so far is that those businesses with a rateable value below £12,000 could get a grant of £3,000, this apparently represented a 3 month advance on their rent. It seemed Local Authorities would be required to administer this grant.
- Public Toilet Relief – Government had said that they would try and fast track the legal changes required to make this happen. Subject to full guidance it was suggested that 100% Mandatory Relief would be paid, fully funded under s31 grant.

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

73 **'SHAPING THE FUTURE - PETROC 2020 - 2025' CONSULTATION - BRIEFING PAPER (01:07:56)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a briefing paper * providing information regarding a consultation being undertaken by Petroc with staff and stakeholders regarding their future strategic plan for 2020 – 2025. The first stage of the consultation was a listening exercise around 4 scenarios exploring the key themes for their future development. The scenarios were purposely provocative designed to stimulate 'blue-sky' thinking about the potential role of Petroc within the education and training sector from 2025.

The second stage would involve identifying key themes. The Council's Corporate Plan would be able to link into this since a key theme in the Economy area was working with education establishments regarding post 16 education provision.

A brief discussion took place regarding whether or not the Council should provide a response. It was also suggested that a representative from Petroc be invited to attend a future meeting of the Group once all of the consultation stages had been completed

Note: (i) * Briefing paper previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes

(ii) Cllr R Dolley declared a personal interest as he had spoken to Petroc staff regarding tourism in the area.

74 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICE UPDATE (01:13:30)**

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

It was explained that the team were just about to commence year two of the Council's Economic Strategy and reference was made to the informal meeting of this Group where Members looked at the work programme for the Growth, Economy and Delivery area. The Group had identified a number of projects which it felt needed investigation. The Cabinet was also reviewing the priorities for delivery of strategic development projects. However, these activities needed to be set against the amount of available resource.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- Investment and Growth packages – the project would be re-scoped and refocused to support and promote the low carbon construction sector.
- Incubation space – MDDC had supported a bid to the ERDF which had not been successful. Alternative options were being discussed with Petroc and other partners.
- Business Awards – feedback from businesses was that it was not cost effective to pursue this, a wider conversation needed to be had as to what could be done to engage with businesses and get their support.
- The need for specific projects and outcomes to be listed rather than high level strategic aims and aspirations.
- The need for the Group to feed in any additional measures that it thought was relevant especially given the new Corporate Plan.
- The need for the towns 'health check' information to be made available to the Group at the earliest possible opportunity.
- The need for the format of the update report to be reviewed.
- The responsibility of Members in setting the economic direction of the Council.

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

75 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2019/20 (01:32:05)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a draft report * by the Chairman of the Group, a final copy of this report would be submitted to Council on 29 April 2020.

76 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (01:33:15)**

The following was identified for the agenda for the next meeting (as well as the items already identified in the work programme):

- Tiverton regeneration - what could be achieved in the short term, over and above the masterplan, for example, to improve the street scene. Group to consider setting up a Working Group.
- 'Healthcheck' report for each of the towns.

(The meeting ended at 7.10 pm)

CHAIRMAN

ECONOMY PDG

4TH JUNE 2020

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMY AND REGNERATION

COVID 19 ECONOMIC RESPONSE

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Graeme Barnell

Responsible Officer: Mrs Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration

Reason for Report: To provide members with information regarding the Growth, Economy & Delivery team's COVID19 emergency economic and community response activities, to inform members of emerging work setting the scene for recovery and provide the opportunity for the Economy PDG members to contribute towards the process and associated policy direction.

RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted and members indicate how they would wish to be involved in this process.

Financial Implications: It is clear that there have been extreme impacts on the local economy, individual businesses, and the wider community as a result of the pandemic and the resulting lockdown. Nationally much analysis and modelling is underway to seek to understand in more detail the extent and nature of this economic impact. At a more local level, work is currently being undertaken on behalf of South West Councils to better understand the impact on the local economy.

The Government's emergency financial response has been to make grant funding available to help support businesses. Many of these grants have been administered by the District Council at a local level and at the time of writing this report nearly £18 million has been distributed to local businesses. These are explained in more detail later in the report. The Government's package of measures also include a staff furlough scheme to refund businesses for up to 80% of employment costs for staff not required to work during this period. This rate of support is in the process of being reduced as part of the Government's transitional measures in order to incentivise staff returning to work and participating in economic recovery.

Budget and Policy Framework: The focus of this report is on the wider economic impacts rather than on how the Council's own budget and income have been affected. It is likely that this will be part of a financial report as part of a mid-year budget update. The Government has so far announced two tranches of financial support for councils for which the Mid Devon allocation currently totals £864,262.

There will be a need to review Economic Strategies as a result of the pandemic. A future report will update members on any suggested changes to policy. In the meantime the current economic strategies will inform the focus of some of the recovery plans including sectorial focus.

Legal Implications: There are no legal implications arising from this information report.

Risk Assessment: The impact on the economy has been significant. Ongoing work will be focussed on mitigating risk to aid recovery.

Equality Impact Assessment: There have been unequitable impacts of the lockdown with it being felt greatest by many economically vulnerable individuals and households. There are huge impacts on the medically vulnerable as a result of the need to be shielded from the wider community.

A range of initiatives seek to reduce the impact on the economically and medically vulnerable:

- The Mid Devon Covid 19 Support Fund (Devon County Council funded) is a hardship fund for essential crisis payments. It is for those individuals who are in considerable financial distress.
- Similarly the Shielding Hub has also been extremely effective in supplementing the government effort to provide supplies for those who are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic.

Recovery impacts need to consider equality issues carefully. Recovery plans and any changes to Economic Strategies will need to be the subject of Equality Impact Assessments.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The work of the Growth, Economy and Delivery team supports the corporate objectives for the economy:

- Bringing new businesses into the District
- Business development and growth
- Improving and regenerating our town centres
- Growing the tourism sector

These objectives have even greater significance following the effects of the COVID19 pandemic.

Impact on Climate Change: Putting recovery plans in place to rebuild the local economy will present opportunities to further the climate change agenda, encourage greater use of renewables and support green tech businesses.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 On 31st December 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) was informed of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Since then the coronavirus (SARS coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2)) was subsequently identified and has spread rapidly around the globe. The first confirmed cases of coronavirus in the UK were on 29th January 2020. As the outbreak spread, the UK was put into lockdown on 23rd March 2020 in an unprecedented step to attempt to limit the spread of coronavirus. At that time the Prime Minister announced that all UK residents must stay at home to protect the National Health Service (NHS) amid the growing threat of the coronavirus. Other countries worldwide have adopted similar measures. The lockdown has had a significant effect on the global, national and local economy.

1.2 At the time of writing there were 93 tested cases in Mid Devon and 7 deaths (with a COVID 19 positive test result). There were 807 in Devon (excluding

Plymouth and Torbay) out of a total population of 802,375. In terms of the national situation, the UK has more than 250,908 confirmed cases and 36,042 deaths (with a positive COVID 19 test result).

- 1.3 The situation is changing daily. There are daily Government briefings which often bring about new approaches and schemes which local authorities must adapt to and deliver swiftly. There is still a risk of a wider outbreak in Mid Devon particularly as a result of easing of lockdown restrictions and Devon and Cornwall being popular places to visit. This is also a particular risk given the Mid Devon demographic having a high proportion of elderly people.
- 1.4 The pandemic and lockdown is having a significant impact on Mid Devon businesses. In terms of resilience, micro and small businesses with premises are currently having greater protection than some other businesses. This is because many of them are eligible for Government grants and benefit from the furloughing scheme. These initiatives have enabled many small businesses to cover bills during lockdown and keep staff on.
- 1.5 Medium to large enterprises have particular difficulties. Many will be too big to qualify for rates related grants, or the grants are relatively small compared to their turnover. Furloughing has helped, but shutting down businesses can be a big process for larger companies, and can take time to restart, resulting in loss of revenue. Also, overheads tend to be higher, so many businesses will have to resort to their reserve funds, if they have them. Many larger businesses are not eligible for government grants and will not be willing to take up the government loan scheme and accrue more debt.
- 1.6 Food and drink businesses who supply pubs and restaurants are being hit particularly hard, some are having to pay to have stock frozen, which is costly and further drains their financial reserves.
- 1.7 The tourism sector is also severely suffering as a result of lockdown, with the majority of businesses in the tourism sector effectively writing off 2020. Whilst some businesses will benefit from grant support, this often will not be sufficient to keep the businesses afloat.
- 1.8 Our town centre businesses, particularly retail, have been very badly affected by the lockdown and the renaissance of town centres will need to be an important element of recovery plans.
- 1.9 The following sections of the report set out the immediate response undertaken by the District Council with partners to assist businesses and communities through this initial period of the economic effect of the virus at a time when the Government is seeking to suppress the pressure on the NHS and save lives by reducing transmission rates. The report then sets out early thoughts and working arrangements over economic recovery. Members are asked to note that recovery work is in its infancy and therefore this report can only reflect initial thoughts on the subject. Finally the report sets out some discussion points to inform the debate on the nature and scope of the Council's role with regard to the recovery process.

- 1.10 To reflect that much of capacity of officers remains currently committed to the emergency response this report provides a broad overview with the intention that officers will expand on its contents verbally at the meeting.

2.0 Initial Response

- 2.1 The following paragraphs summarise elements of the initial response stage. Throughout this period the Council's website has been continuously updated to reflect the current situation. A link to our webpage can be found below:
<https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/coronavirus-support-for-communities-and-businesses/>

Business Assistance

- 2.2 The Growth, Economy and Delivery team has been working alongside the Revenues and Benefits team in processing Government funded **Business Grants**. To date nearly £18 million of business grants have now been issued following over 1,500 applications. Work continues with this including extensive cold calling to notify business who have yet to claim.

- 2.3 The Government has also created a **Discretionary Business Grants scheme**. This initiative is particularly geared toward charities who did not qualify for previous funding opportunities, B&B's (particularly those who are not registered for business rates), businesses occupying shared work space and market traders; however there is significantly less monies available for these grants with only around £1 million allocated to the Mid Devon as compared with the £22 million available for the business grants scheme. The application processes has been developed in partnership with neighbouring Districts and Devon County Council to ensure a consistent approach to determining applications for funding. The team has created an online application form which will also be used by the other Devon Districts. This scheme should be live prior to this meeting.

- 2.4 Where businesses are not eligible for these funds the team are **signposting** them to the Growth Hub. In certain circumstances, where individuals are facing specific hardships, we are directing people to the community schemes set out below.

Community Support

- 2.5 A **Shielding Hub** has been set up to ensure that the extremely vulnerable are provided for. Whilst the government had set up food packages for the vulnerable, via local wholesalers, there is often a regular two week delay in these deliveries coming through. The District Council has been stepping in to assist to help with provisions during the time before supplies come through. The Shielding Hub has had 117 referrals and 86 emergency food packages have gone out. Of those that are having government food packages sent to them, there are 46 people in Mid Devon who need specialist food supplies which the shielding hub are also providing for. This work has been done in partnership with CHAT. The Growth, Economy and Delivery team has led on co-ordinating the community response to vulnerable residents. This has also included organising the use of the Council's own vehicles to assist.

- 2.6 The **Mid Devon COVID 19 Support Fund** is a Devon County Council funded hardship fund administered by Mid Devon Officers. It is for those individuals

who are in considerable financial distress. It could potentially benefit those that are self-employed, those who are furloughed or have lost their jobs, or are on zero hour contracts and fall outside the scope of the business grants coming from the Government. This scheme is relatively new and at the time of writing there have been 46 applications received and £3,517.48 of funds distributed. Demand is likely to increase in the coming months as some of the longer term economic impacts of lockdown kick in.

- 2.7 Officers are also working on a Devon pilot scheme for the **Non-Shielding Vulnerable**, in which local authorities, including the District Council, will have direct access to preferential delivery slots for supermarkets that can be issued to non-shielding vulnerable residents. More information will be provided at the meeting.

The Tiverton Pannier Market

- 2.8 The Tiverton Pannier Market has remained open Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday; albeit for essential food items only. The Pannier Market has played a significant part in reacting to the current situation at a time when many markets outside of the district have not managed to stay open. More traders are gradually returning to the market to sell essential foods in addition to the fruit and vegetable traders, with Fridays now including a butcher, fishmonger and cake sales. The butcher is also present on Tuesdays. Since the recent easing of lockdown restrictions, plant sales are also now available at the market on Fridays.

- 2.9 The market has provided a useful base for fruit and vegetable deliveries. At the time of writing there has been over 2,000 combined vegetable box deliveries since the 23rd March 2020. Both 'Kelland's Fruit and Veg' and 'The Healthy Root' have played a vital role in supplying the elderly, the vulnerable, key workers and those who are shielding with fresh and healthy produce to their doorstep.

- 2.10 The Pannier Market team continue to follow government advice to minimise spreading the virus. The team is currently working on preparations for when more restrictions are lifted which include continued precautions related to social distancing. The market team has developed a COVID 19 Risk Assessment and is working closely with the District Council's new Health and Safety Officer to ensure that we can continue to implement precautions such as social distancing.

3.0 Next Steps in Planning for Recovery

- 3.1 The Government emergency assistance has cushioned the immediate economic effects of the pandemic; however there are significant concerns about business impacts going forward. The first steps of working towards economic recovery will involve the continuation of the processing and delivery of financial support to businesses as set out above. It will also involve finding sustainable arrangements for ensuring that the appropriate community support mechanisms are set up for the short and medium term.

- 3.2 Officers are currently exploring how to best effect change with the resources and capacity available. This is likely to be through a combination of partnership working, direct action and lobbying.
- 3.3 Given the scale of the challenge it is imperative that we need to assess the situation jointly with others, ascertain opportunities for joint action through aligning or combining resources and also, whether we in some instances, take a step back to allow others more appropriate to take the lead.
- 3.4 At a sub-regional level, the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSW) exists to promote, support and accelerate the economic growth of the area. Most recently this has been encapsulated within the Productivity Plan and the draft Local Industrial Strategy (LIS). HotSW intends to have a draft recovery plan available shortly. Early work has been around the three pillars of 'Restart, Revitalise, Grow', and in addition to this they are using the phrase 'Building Back Better – Coming Back Greener' to reflect the priorities of the LIS around clean growth and shared prosperity. This is very much an emergent piece of work, but the current understanding is that they are looking at a range of principles that underpin all support packages which are likely to be implemented through a combination of government lobbying and through the use of the LEP's funding programmes. These are likely to include:
- Levelling up - align SW funding with rest of England per capita allocations;
 - Greater flexibility and spending across all government departments such that spending periods can be extended to reflect COVID impacts;
 - Recognition of the need for additional capital to reflect increased costs post lockdown where more costs are incurred due to social distancing, supply chain shortages etc.; and
 - Flexibility and extensions on existing funding programmes where it has not been possible to deliver work programmes and outputs due to lockdown.
- 3.5 Initial thoughts on intervention could include:
- Support and revitalise the identified hardest hit sectors;
 - Support the wider business economy as they restart and recover;
 - Ensure that we have the people with the right skills to meet the needs for the short, medium and long term of our region's economy;
 - Provide the necessary digital infrastructure that has the capacity and resilience for the 'new ways of working' post COVID 19;
 - Continue our drive towards a low carbon and green economy in the region;
 - Seize the opportunity to regenerate our towns and high streets to create places that facilitate social and cultural opportunities.
- 3.6 In addition to HotSW, it should be noted that there is a weekly meeting of the HotSW Economic Resilience and Opportunities Group (HEROG), which covers the same sub-regional geography but exists as an advisory group to the statutory HotSW Joint Committee. This is the forum that co-ordinates between different authorities and provides a bridge between them and the HotSW level. It also ensures that any relevant messages are fed back to the regional Chief Executives across England who in turn liaise with the Government.

3.7 At a County level a **Devon Business and Economic Recovery Task Group** has been established. This task group includes a range of organisations (including the Heart of the South West Local Economic Partnership, key sector/business representatives, etc) and considers the issues being faced at a tactical level. This joint approach is being developed as part of a co-ordinated countywide approach. This Countywide recovery work is still in its infancy and is focussing to date on four emerging work streams which will develop over the coming months. Your officers are contributing to these work streams, which are Place, People, Business/Sectors and Opportunities.

4.0 Discussion Points and Member Involvement

4.1 Early work to date makes it clear that there are key lines of enquiry where greater clarity over approach and policy direction is required. Clearly there is a role for the Economy PDG to input into this and help shape the Council's longer term approach to the crisis.

4.2 The purpose of the following discussion points is to stimulate debate to influence the policy direction of the Council over the coming months in order to create the best conditions for the people of Mid Devon, taking into account the scope of the Council's role and resources.

- What economy are we aspiring to rebuild and what do we mean by recovery?
- What opportunities are there to embed our economic recovery with the aspirations to tackle climate change, revitalise our places and seek sustainable growth?
- Given the finite resource and capacity available which areas and actions would the PDG wish to prioritise?
- What is the role of the Economy PDG and how it would wish to contribute toward the recovery and be kept informed?
- What would success look like?
- Which other areas do Members consider should be pursued?

4.3 Officers are keen to understand how the Economy PDG would wish to explore these issues further.

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Leadership Team

List of Background Papers:

[Our plan to rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy](#) Published 11 May 2020

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