

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 8 June 2023 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors G Cochran, A Cuddy, J M Downes, M Farrell, B Holdman, N Letch, R Roberts and G Westcott

Apology

Councillor B Fish

Also Present

Councillors D Broom, J Buczkowski, S J Clist, F W Letch and D Wulff

Also Present

Officers

Andrew Jarrett (Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Richard Marsh (Director of Place), Matthew Page (Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste), Paul Deal (Corporate Manager for Finance, Property and Climate Change), Luke Howard (Environment and Enforcement Manager), Adrian Welsh (Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery), Zoë Lentell (Economic Development Team Leader), Linda Perry (Economic Development Officer), David Parker (Member Services & Policy Research Officer) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

1 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN (00:00:17)**

RESOLVED that Cllr J M Downes be elected Chairman of the Economy Development Group for the municipal year 2023/24.

2 **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN (00:07:26)**

RESOLVED that Cllr M Farrell be elected Vice Chairman of the Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2023/2024.

3 **START TIME OF MEETINGS (00:08:49)**

It was **AGREED** that the start time of meetings for the remainder of the municipal year remain at 5.30pm.

4 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00:09:17)**

Apologies were received from Cllr B Fish who was substituted by Cllr B Holdman.

Cllr M Fletcher attended the meeting virtually.

5 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00:09:32)**

There were no public questions.

6 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (00:09:53)**

No interests were declared under this item.

7 **MINUTES (00:10:11)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2023 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

8 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00:10:48)**

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- He informed those present that he would be taking the Introduction and Overview item from the Economic Development Team after the financial outturn report.
- He stated that whilst the Policy Development Group did not have many statutory responsibilities it did have responsibility for maximising opportunities to improve revenue streams.
- He also reminded Members that the meeting was being recorded and the public would be able to access the recording during and after the meeting.

9 **REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN REPORT FOR 2022 - 2023 (00:17:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive presenting the Revenue and Capital Outturn figures for the financial year 2022/2023 for both the General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The contents of the report were outlined and a high level summary provided as follows:

- The outturn position on the General Fund showed a small overspend. This represented a good achievement given the current economic circumstances. The Housing Revenue Account showed a small underspend.
- Notable variances included a higher than expected staff pay award, investments in schemes such as Bin-It 123, a significant VAT refund and an impairment of some loans to 3 Rivers. Despite this small overspend, reserves remained in a healthy position and amounts set aside for future planned capital projects remained untouched.
- Returns on interest rates had been higher than expected.
- It was confirmed that there was no further external borrowing requirement for this financial year.
- Regarding service areas that fell within the remit of this Policy Development, Parking Services showed a £40k over achievement on income and the Economic Development area had come in under budget caused by delays in incurring expenditure. Overall there were no particular issues to highlight from a financial position.

Discussion took place regarding:

- An underspend was showing against some projects as they had not fully got off the ground yet. This could be due to a number of reasons, for example, not being successful in being awarded the funding applied for, capacity within the team or procurement issues. However, it was still hoped that these projects could be brought forward as soon as feasible.
- Members were informed that the forum for discussing economic development growth principally took place at the Planning Policy Advisory Group, which all Members could attend.

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

10 **MID DEVON ECONOMY - INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW (00:30:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Place providing an introduction to Mid Devon's local economy, its current position including arising issues and opportunities.

The following was highlighted within the report and by way of presentation:

- The reporting structure of the team was outlined, officers introduced and the role of the function of the team explained.
- Key themes in the work undertaken included, Employment and Skills, Place, Infrastructure, Hi-Tech, Innovation and Green Energy, Agriculture, Food and Drink. It was explained that this Policy Development Group had been a key player in determining these themes as priorities for Economic Development.
- Examples of Growth and Infrastructure Projects were provided and the Shared Prosperity Fund was explained.
- The importance of 'Visit Mid Devon' and the Tiverton Pannier Market which were managed by the team were also highlighted as key areas of work.
- The team actively sought to engage and work with town councils to develop projects in their towns. Members were encouraged to talk to the team at any time about particular schemes, ideas or concerns.

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

11 **ESTABLISHMENT OF A CAR PARKING WORKING GROUP (00:47:00)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Environment and Enforcement Manager providing an update on the forming of a future Car Parking and Permit working group to consider potential future fee and tariff prices. The working group was designed to feed into potential future price increases and assist the consultation by involving the necessary personnel and local representatives from the District.

Consideration was given to:

- The process that had led to the proposal to set up a Working Group.
- The emphasis going forward would be to engage with local businesses and the community.
- The recommendations from the Working Group being a part of the budget setting process each year.

- The aim of the first meeting of the Working Group would be to set the Terms of Reference.
- It was explained that the Group would not only need to look at fees and charges but also, and importantly, amenity provision, demand and supply, availability of parking, discount policies, permits and payment options. There was much to consider in order to make better use of car parks for the public. This would need to be made clear in the Terms of Reference.
- Sustainable travel would be considered as a part of this but would also be picked up and promoted through other Policy Development Groups going forwards.

It was **AGREED** that three Members of the Policy Development Group would join the Working Group, each one representing the views of their town. These would be:

Cllr G Cochran (for Crediton) who volunteered to be Chairman
 Cllr A Cuddy (For Tiverton)
 Cllr M Fletcher (For Cullompton)

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

12 **MID DEVON'S PROSPERITY PROGRAMME: UPDATE (01:05:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Place updating Members on the progress under the Shared Prosperity Investment Plan (Year 1:2022/23) and informing them of the Year 2 (2023/24) Delivery Plan for Mid Devon's Prosperity Programmes.

Prior to discussion of the SPF the Group were provided with pertinent information by the Economic Development Officer in relation to types of employment in Mid Devon, the health of the high streets (which were continuing to suffer as a result of the pandemic), employment space and business growth hubs.

Following this the contents of the report were outlined and reference made to the following:

- The primary aim for the team was to make best use of a limited funding resource.
- The team had to be regimented in terms of what it could do as strict criteria was in place regarding funding.
- Many of the projects listed in the report were now in the delivery phase.
- Members of the Policy Development Group were encouraged to act as ambassadors in order to help promote these schemes.
- Recent significant success had included the creation of business hubs.
- Business support programmes were being run by Devon County Council and where there were opportunities to align the District Council's schemes with theirs the team ensured that they did.

Consideration was given to:

- The Policy Development Group had been proactive in the proposal of many of the projects listed in the report.

- It remain a key challenge of the Group to try and identify where economic opportunities existed.
- There was a significant need for ‘shovel ready projects’ as funding was often unexpected but needed utilising quickly according to strict criteria.
- Disappointment with the delay of receiving funding. The first tranche had been received late and the second had not been received yet.
- Members were encouraged to contact the team to understand how the SPF allocation worked within their areas.
- A lot of work had already been undertaken to prepare businesses in readiness for receive funds to grow their business, for example, getting three quotes in order to fulfil any procurement requirements.
- 25 businesses were due to attend a business launch event at Petroc the following day.

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

13 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TEAM UPDATE (01:20:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Place updating Members on activities undertaken by the Economic Development Team during the last quarter.

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

14 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (01:25:00)**

The items identified for the next meeting were **NOTED**.

A brief discussion took place regarding the reporting of the economic benefits brought about by the 3 Rivers company and whether this should be reported through the Economy Policy Development Group. It was explained that it may not be wholly appropriate for this to come through the Growth and Economic Development team and that the reporting of this would likely be taking place elsewhere.

Going forwards, the Chairman encouraged Members to bring forward ideas so that the team could be discharged to develop schemes and projects, where funding allowed, in order to improve the economic position of the district.

(The meeting ended at 6.58 pm)

CHAIRMAN