

MINUTES of a MEETING of the ECONOMY & ASSETS POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 19 June 2025 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

J Cairney, G Cochran, M Farrell,
B Holdman, L Knight, J Poynton, R Roberts,
A Stirling and M Stratton

Apology

Councillor

J Buczkowski

Also Present

Councillors

G Duchesne, S Keable and S Robinson

Also Present

Officers

Richard Marsh (Director of Place & Economy), Matthew Page (Head of People, Performance & Waste), Adrian Welsh (Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery), Luke Howard (Environment and Enforcement Manager), Linda Perry (Economic Development Officer) and Sarah Lees (Democratic Services Officer)

Councillors

Online

E Buczkowski, A Glover and L Taylor

Officers Online

Paul Deal (Head of Finance, Property Services and Climate Resilience) and Darren Beer (Manager of Street Scene and Open Spaces)

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR 2025/2026

RESOLVED that Cllr G Cochran be elected Chair of the Economy & Assets Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2025/2026.

2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR FOR 2025/2026

RESOLVED that Cllr M Farrell be elected Vice Chair of the Economy & Assets Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2025/2026.

3 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

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

4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from members of the public.

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

The following interests were declared:

- Cllr J Cairney declared a personal interest in that he was also a member of another local authority.
- Cllr B Holdman declared a personal interest in that he had been contacted by a resident regarding the Car Parking item on the agenda.
- Cllr L Knight declared a personal interest in that he had a car parking permit with Mid Devon District Council.

Members were reminded that any interest/s could be declared at any point during the meeting.

6 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2025 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

7 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair had the following announcements to make:

- He thanked colleagues for electing him as Chair of the Policy Development Group.
- He also thanked the outgoing Chair, Cllr J Downes, for his lengthy service as the Chair of this Group.
- He would like the Group to discuss Assets more closely from now on, especially the transfer of any Assets in the run up to Local Government Reorganisation. He would like the Group to receive a presentation on that at some point in the near future and for the town and parish perspective to be born in mind.

8 **START TIME OF MEETINGS**

It was **AGREED** that the start time for meetings for the remainder of the municipal year continue to be at 5.30pm on Thursdays.

9 PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD Q4 (00:15:00)

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED**, a slide * showing performance in the Economy & Assets area.

The dashboards aimed to give an 'at a glance' understanding of how services were performing in terms of performance measures, finance and risk. Any measures that were also part of the Corporate Plan were listed in yellow text.

The indicators were presented with current performance, the annual target and a RAG (red/amber/green) rating to indicate whether or not the Council was on track to meet its target. Overall performance was presented in a pie chart which combined the RAG ratings for both the performance and the finance measures.

The following indicators were currently showing as amber or red:

- The Pannier Market occupancy was showing as amber. This had slipped just behind target in quarter four, however, the period of January to March tended to see the lower occupancy at the market. It was a seasonal trend and a quieter trading period.
- The PDG outturn was at red and this was due to a significant underspend which was mainly related to maintenance. This had gone back into earmarked reserves to fund future maintenance. The under spend reflected that the asset base was in a relatively good condition. Condition surveys were in place and future planned maintenance would increase.
- Car parking income was showing as amber and this was slightly down mainly due to lower than predicted permit income during the year. The Pannier Market income was also showing as red with the income being £21k behind target.
- Capital programme slippages were at red. There were nine projects that related to this PDG and two of those had slipped. One was a building management system for Phoenix House which was currently being scoped and the Cullompton Relief Road which was now well under way after securing funding.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- Was there anything that could be done to make the Pannier Market warmer in the winter months? It was explained that whilst this was challenging, funds had been put aside next year to see what could be done to improve this.
- Two significant storms had affected two planned events which had had a negative effect on income figures. This had been extremely unfortunate but had been unavoidable. In addition to this a number of permanent units had been vacant, however, the Group were reassured that they were now fully occupied which reflected well for the coming year. Some of the staffing costs had also been recently reduced. The Group expressed the desire to see this move in a positive direction to be reflected in the Dashboard presented to the next meeting.
- A Pannier Market Strategy Review was underway and would be led by the Market Team. Updates would be brought to the Group which would include footfall data.

- Whether the Council could recover any empty property business rate reliefs? It was explained that this would depend on what this was for, whether it was mandatory or discretionary relief. Clarification on this would be provided to the Group after the meeting.

Note: (i) * Slide previously circulated.

(ii) Cllr B Holdman declared a personal interest in that he was Chair of the Allies Group which occupied one of the Pannier Market units.

10 CAR PARKING (00:30:00)

The Group had before it a report * from the Head of People, Performance and Waste and the Environment & Enforcement Manager presenting the views of the Car Park Consultative Group and requesting that the Policy Development Group considers these alongside any recommendations it may choose to make to the Cabinet about the structure of fees from 2026/2027 onwards. It also provided the opportunity to make onward recommendation to the Cabinet on the advance notification of Christmas Car Parking, as recommended by the Consultative Group.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- **Parking Tariffs:** The Car Park Consultative Group had looked at different models from neighbouring authorities, some of whom had cheaper tariffs for longer stays as the Group wished to encourage longer stays in the town centres. After some discussion, the Group had settled on an inflation based rise which had not been done since 2023/24. Inflation was at 2.5% for 2024/25 and was estimated to be 3.2% for 2025/26. A 5% rise would see 10p added to all tariffs across the piece. This fell within the remit of the Section 151 Officer to implement.
- **Permits:** The Group had put forward new ideas to make the take up of permits more attractive to the public. These were set out within the report. The incentivised scheme was an area the Consultative Group had asked officers to consider in order to fill the vacant spaces in the Multi Storey Car Park. The introduction of a day permit was at the request of many users who did not have a need for the night element. This showed that the Group had listened to the customer base and had strived to deliver solutions that better served users needs.
- **Free Christmas Parking:** The report set out five free Saturday parking days in the run up to Christmas 2025 to support the public, local business and the high street. These were extremely popular with residents particularly when combined with community events including the Christmas light switch on.

Discussion took place regarding:

- There were significant cost pressures on the service with contractors increasing their prices (for example cash collection agents) and an inflationary rise was felt to be the fairest way forward after much deliberation.
- It was reiterated that the proposed 5% rise to parking tariffs would be over a 2 year period.
- The Consultative Group had looked at various other models including those used by neighbouring authorities, frontloading charges in order to make longer

stays more attractive and they had listened to residents and proactively sought feedback from them.

- Was it worth asking traders when were their peak times etc.?
- The difficulties involved in gathering real time data. The District Council did not have the equipment available to it as the County Council did, such as vehicle number measuring equipment.
- The possibility of rounding proposed figures up or down to make them more sensible to the customer paying by cash.
- Car parks were regularly checked for non-compliance and procedures were considered fairly robust. Enforcement information was regularly reported to the Service Delivery and Continuous Improvement PDG.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:

- i. The views of the Car Park Consultative Group be noted.
- ii. A 5% inflation rise be applied across all pay and display tariff bands and that this be factored into the budget setting process for 2026/2027.
- iii. It agrees to five dates for free parking in the lead up to Christmas 2025.

(Proposed by Cllr M Farrell and seconded by Cllr J Poynton)

Reason for the decision

This report aligned with the Corporate Plan to deliver sustainable parking options within communities. Therefore, supporting economy and growth within the district.

Notes: (i) * Report previously circulated.

(ii) Cllr L Knight requested that his abstention from voting be recorded.

11 PRESENTATION ON THE BUSINESS SURVEY (00:52:00)

The Group received and **NOTED** a presentation by the Economic Development Officer providing information in relation to the recent Business Survey. This included the following key points:

- The Business Survey was a new initiative for 2025.
- It was hosted on the 'Let's Talk Mid Devon' platform.
- It had been open for six weeks from March through to April 2025.
- There had been 96 visits to the webpage - 34 completed questionnaires – representing all business sectors - highest from the retail sector.
- The survey wasn't all questions – it included information about, and signposting to, business support and information.
- Key challenges to business growth had been identified as: increases in business costs and a reduction in consumer spending/ sales income, town centre decline, poor internet/ Wi-Fi (speed) and the suitability of premises.
- What could be improved to help businesses in Mid Devon? Some solutions were: business guidance and support, better road and transport links, repairs to pot holes and pavements (by Devon County Council), review of Business Rates, better and/or cheaper car parking, improved premises availability & cost and better internet & Wi-Fi availability & quality (another DCC initiative)
- In terms of what was already happening this included: one-to-one discussions with a number of the responding businesses, a business newsletter, the

sharing of business views with relevant services and with new programmes coming through UKSPF – for example, 'PROSPER 2'. Also collaborative events and work streams with relevant services, Business Rates drop-ins and Green Enterprise Grants

- 'Visit Mid Devon' promoted the Mid Devon brand, provided a network for local visitor economy businesses, included a focus on town centres and curated all that Mid Devon had to offer.
- There was also the 'Love Your Town Centre' programme.

Consideration was given to:

- The high demand for small business premises.
- The use of planning enforcement powers when land was used inappropriately. Two enforcement officers were now working very hard in this area. Members needed to report instances causing concern.
- There were undoubtedly challenges with planning legislation but the Economic Development Team did engage with land owners on a frequent basis.

The Chair encouraged the Group to read the recently published documents in relation to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

12 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TEAM UPDATE REPORT (01:15:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Place and Economy updating Members on projects and activities undertaken by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team during the last couple of months.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- All that had been achieved in the last three years regarding the delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund including, the Tiverton Work Hub, the Field to Fork campaign, various workshops, the Mid Devon Destination web page and a number of other significant campaigns that had been regularly reported on to this Group. Analysis had shown that 99% of the available funds had been spent which was excellent.
- Looking forwards, the Cabinet had recently approved a number of schemes for the future allocation of Prosperity Funds. There would need to be a very quick turnaround time this time, with the Government stating that all monies needed to be 'spent' by 31 March 2026. The format was slightly different this time round and there were tight restrictions, for example, the same business would not be able to be helped twice. Regular updates would be provided to the Group. The amount that would be allocated was significantly reduced this time round.
- Other activity undertaken by the Team over the past 3 months, as listed in the report, was summarised.

Consideration was given to:

- It was hoped that a similar type of 'Prosper Programme' would continue under the new arrangements.
- It was also hoped that the Devon Agri. Tech Alliance would continue.
- Various programmes under the Visitor Economy umbrella would continue.

- The Pannier Market Strategy Review would continue.
- The 'Employment Skills' programme was hoping to be extended.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

13 **WORK PROGRAMME DISCUSSION FOR 2025/2026 (01:34:00)**

The Group had before it the draft work programme * as it currently stood together with a slide ** which was shown at the previous meeting listing the emerging themes and streams of potential work heading in the Economy & Assets direction over the next 12 months and beyond.

The Group considered this information and a discussion took place regarding:

- The need to add the Pannier Market Strategy Review to the Work Programme.
- Update on internet provision within Mid Devon – what was being done to improve it?

It was **AGREED** that these two items be added to the Work Programme for the Policy Development Group for the coming year:

Note: * Work Programme and ** Emerging Theme slide previously circulated.

14 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (01:56:00)**

The items listed in the Work Programme for the next meeting were **NOTED**.

In addition to this the following was requested to be on the agenda for a future meeting of the Group:

- Community Asset Transfer update and presentation
- An update on the situation with the Cullompton and Wellington Railway Stations

(The meeting ended at 7.15 pm)

CHAIR