

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 26 May 2016 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

Mrs A R Berry, K Busch, R Evans, T G Hughes,
Mrs B M Hull, F J Rosamond and Mrs N Woollatt

Also Present

Councillors

R J Chesterton and C J Eginton

Present

Officers

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), John Bodley-Scott (Community Development and Regeneration Manager), Chris Shears (Economic Development Officer) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

1 Chairman - Election (Vice Chairman of the Council in the Chair)

RESOLVED that Cllr Mrs B M Hull be elected Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2016/17.

2 Vice Chairman - Election

RESOLVED that Cllr K I Busch be elected Vice Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2016/17.

3 Apologies and Substitute Members

There were no apologies for absence.

4 Public Question Time

There were no members of the public present.

5 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman had no announcements to make other than to say that this was the first meeting of an exciting new Group looking at a key area of the Corporate Plan and she very much looked forward to future meetings and discussions.

6 Meeting Management

The Chairman stated that she wished to move the 'Start time of meetings' forward as the next item of business, all other items to follow in the same order as they were on the agenda.

7 **Start time of meetings (00:05:26)**

It was **AGREED** to hold future meetings of this Group at 6pm during the remainder of the municipal year.

8 **Revenue and Capital Outturn 2015/16 (00:11:30)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Finance presenting the revenue and capital outturn figures for the financial year 2015/16.

The Head of Finance stated that the finances of the Council had finished in a strong position for the 2015/16 financial year with all cash balances being retained at the levels deemed necessary. Monitoring reports throughout the year had accurately predicted the final position. Overall there had been a 0.5% overspend which had related to one off items such as a drop in recycling income, GP surgery rebates and staffing redundancy payments. Had these not occurred all service areas would have ended the financial year on budget. The investment in Market walk had yielded a profit of £189k. Additional investment in the Charities and Churches Property Investment Fund had generated £66k and would generate further income in the near future.

It was stated that this Policy Development Group was very much about looking forwards and the Head of Finance was able to report that car parking vends for the first month of the new financial year were up over 2,000 compared to this time last year and cash receipts up by £10k.

Discussion took place regarding:

- GP surgery rebates and the fact that there would be some appeals during 2016/17 which would have an effect upon the accounts.
- It was predicted that the drop in recycling income would not recover and this would be factored into the budget.
- It was expected that next year's financial accounts would see a decrease in employee costs based upon previous redundancies.

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

9 **Economic Development and Regeneration Priorities (00:18:14)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Communities and Governance providing it with details of the Economic Development and Regeneration team's priorities for the current financial year.

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

- The Economic Development and Regeneration Service had been developing its priorities for 2016/17 under the themes of employment, skills, enterprise and place. The framework showed a number of objectives under each of these themed areas.
- The service was very much one of facilitating and collaborating with businesses and partners as well as about bringing income into Mid Devon.

- There had already been a successful partnership bid for European LEADER funding and Government funding for the Growth Hub services. The service also used their budgets as match funding to lever in further private and public funding into individual projects.
- As a team their knowledge base was growing as well as an understanding of best practice in other areas, for example, the Broadband for Rural North project in Lancashire.
- There was a focus within the team on looking for potential projects and initiatives and trying to ascertain their feasibility and chances of success.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Funding in relation to the Cullompton Farmers Market.
- Initiatives in relation to town markets would come through this Group.
- The work of the Portas project was not reflected within the report.
- A need to recognise that some projects would have an element of risk even if a strong business case had been presented up front.
- The Leader, the Chief Executive and the Economic Development Officer were in the process of visiting businesses and this had proved to be very beneficial so far. It was **AGREED** that a list of those visited already and those yet to be visited be circulated to the Group.
- Future reporting to this Group needed to better reflect targets and the measurement of results.

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

10 Economic Development Update (00:39:52)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Communities and Governance providing it with an update on the work and projects of the Economic Development and Regeneration team.

Current work and projects that would be developed in the coming financial year were summarised as follows:

- Strategic visits to local businesses thereby continuing to build up a rapport with the business community.
- The Economic Development Officer had been working in partnership with colleagues at Exeter City Council, East Devon District Council and Teignbridge District Council as 'Exeter and the Heart of Devon' (EHOD). This group had won an LGA grant for consultancy time to help develop their strategy. The strategy would be brought before the Policy Development Group for comment. Joint procurement by the partnership could be used to draw down further funding.
- The Growth Hub (GH) would be a service that signposted businesses to relevant support that could help businesses to develop and grow. It was broken into two elements, one which provided the back end support, including the website and phone line and the other which delivered the detailed diagnostics for businesses and then developed bespoke packages of support for them.

- The Council was looking to lead a pan EHOD bid for European funding to deliver a work hub / incubator space in Cullompton Town Centre. This new build premises would become a centre for businesses in their infancy, operating in the digital and data industries.
- A project was being taken forward to bring Mid Devon mills back into use as hydro generating systems. The project was likely to be a pan Europe project with the Council (representing the UK) working with Germany and France to share knowledge and best practice. There were several elements of the project which required funding to be sourced and pots had been identified which were being actively pursued.
- A lot of good work was taking place in the towns with various events being listed in the report. An update on progress against the Tourism Action Plan for 2016/17 would be brought to the PDG in due course.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The low numbers of women setting up new businesses and how this could be addressed. It was stated that a company called 'Cosmic' offered courses specifically aimed at providing digital training for women which may be of benefit to those women lacking in confidence with digital technology.
- Strong links with the Science Park was seen as essential, however there were problems with Broadband.
- The coach park in Tiverton which was being managed by the Museum. The Group requested that it receive information as to its usage as soon as possible.

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

(ii) Cllr Mrs N Woollatt declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as she owned one of the mills which it was hoped would be bought back into use and left the meeting during discussion of this project.

11 **Cullompton Townscape Heritage Initiative (00:06:23)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Head of Communities and Governance seeking approval to proceed with an initial application to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Townscape Heritage Initiative.

The Community Development and Regeneration Manager explained that the Council had an opportunity to apply for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) under its 'Townscape Heritage Initiative' which if successful could provide over £1m investment in Cullompton's historic built environment and help boost local economy. The HLF had already indicated its willingness to receive an application from Cullompton and officers had been undertaking preliminary work in order to make an initial submission by 31st August 2016. It would be necessary for the Council to allocate funds in the region of £12.5k initially in order to draw down a potential sum of £1m.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The need to manage expectations as very few applications were successful in their first attempt.

- Grants being available to provide training to owners of historic buildings and also for heritage builders to learn to use their skills in the right way.
- The potential of the Harlequin Valet site with the suggestion that the towns folk of Cullompton should be consulted.
- The lack of demand for 'A' level courses at Petroc in Tiverton with students preferring to go to either Exeter or Taunton.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that approval be given to proceed with an initial application to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Townscape Heritage Initiative and that:

- (a) MDDC to act as the accountable and lead body for this project;
- (b) In principal, MDDC to allocate staff and councillor time to the project over 6 years – to include Chairing and sitting on the Steering Group, managing and employing/contracting a project officer and input into the project work;
- (c) MDDC to allocate some funds (in the order of £12.5K initially with the option of further funding from MDDC or finding alternative funding in subsequent years) to the project in order to draw down potentially in the region of £1 million (tbc). The exact figure is dependent on the final structure of the bid, and whether other funding can be drawn down to offset it in future. HLF has indicated that without some cash input from the principle authorities the application will not succeed.
- (d) MDDC to corporately investigate drawing down other funds to contribute to this project e.g. Empty Homes bonus, S106 related to development of Cullompton, property portfolio.
- (e) MDDC to consider what it can do to facilitate the development of the gap site on the former Harlequin Valet site in Cullompton which continues to be an eyesore in the Higher Bull Ring and problem for neighbouring properties. The Higher Bull Ring is the heart of Cullompton town centre and this key site could be beneficial to the economy of the town and to the appearance of the Conservation Area.
- (f) MDDC to integrate the aims of the scheme into all relevant strategic documents relevant to forward planning, empty homes and property in Cullompton
- (g) MDDC to obtain indications of support from Devon County Council, Cullompton Town Council, Cullompton Town Team, Culm Valley in Business and the Cullompton Neighbourhood Plan Group.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

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

12 **Economic Profile (01:32:48)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * of the Head of Communities and Governance informing it of the intention to provide regular updates on the state of the Mid Devon Economy.

The Community Development and Regeneration Manager sought advice from the Group as to how they would like economic statistical information presented to it in the future since this information needed to be as meaningful as possible whilst bearing in mind the limited resources within his team. The vast majority of the information in the current format would be repeated at each meeting since it was produced on an annual basis.

It was reported that:

- There were high proportions of people in Mid Devon with good qualifications, however, despite this gross weekly pay was lower than average.
- The claimant count was the best indicator for employment levels.
- Mid Devon had exceptionally low unemployment levels.
- There needed to be a focus on skills retention.

It was requested that information be provided to show how many people actually commuted outside of the area where they lived in order to go to their employment. It was stated that less people would commute if there was better quality employment within the district. The towns would also be more vibrant if people chose to stay and work near the town where they lived.

A brief discussion took place regarding potential new development on the eastern side of Cullompton and the opportunities this may bring provided the necessary infrastructure surrounding the motorway junction was in place.

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

13 **Work programme 2016/17 (01:51:19)**

It was **AGREED** that, where possible, the following subject areas be included into the work programme for the Group over the next 12 months:

- Recognise that the local MP's were a powerful lobbying mechanism and invite them to attend a meeting to outline the Council led projects which needed their support.
- Culture and art and their contribution to regeneration.
- Updates in relation to the Broadband and Mills projects.
- Problems facing the agriculture industry
- Recognise that Devon is one of the largest food producing counties and consider setting up a food hub such as the one in Ludlow.
- Regular updates on the amounts of funding being drawn in and the numbers of new businesses in the district.
- A report on the tourism survey.
- A fresh look at car parking and its impact on the economy.
- Effects of devolution, could opportunities be maximised?
- Greater Exeter proposals

14 **Identification of items for the next meeting (02:02:25)**

The following items were identified for the next meeting:

- Economic Development update.
- Economic profile.
- Any item discussed in the previous agenda item which could be progressed and reported on.

(The meeting ended at 7.35 pm)

CHAIRMAN