

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 19 January 2017 at 6.00 pm

Present

Councillors

Mrs B M Hull (Chairman)
Mrs A R Berry, Mrs J B Binks, J M Downes,
R Evans, S G Flaws, F J Rosamond and
Mrs N Woollatt

Apology

Councillor

T G Hughes

Also Present

Councillors

Mrs J Roach, N V Davey and Mrs S Griggs

Also Present

Officers

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Jenny Clifford (Head of Planning and Regeneration), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development & Regeneration Manager), Chris Shears (Economic Development Officer), Alan Ottey (Market Manager), Roderick Hewson (Principal Accountant) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

48 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no apologies for absence.

49 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from the members of the public present.

50 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

51 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- She welcomed everybody to the first meeting of the new year.
- She informed the Group that three members of the Crediton Town Team were present to give a presentation on the projects they had undertaken within the town and their aspirations going forwards.

52 CREDITON TOWN TEAM

The Crediton Town Team had been invited to attend the meeting to provide a presentation to the Group on the projects and initiatives taking place in Crediton. The representatives who attended the meeting were Rod Brookes-Hocking, Rosemary Stephenson and Mike Summerton.

Key highlights within the presentation included the following:

- The team had come into being 4 years ago and was started by festival organisers with an arts background. Some had been previous project managers and were known as people who could pull groups together.
- There was a breadth of expertise amongst the team.
- They had undertaken a wide range of projects.
- One of the key projects in the calendar was the 'Cred Fest' which was held every two years and did much to aid social integration and cohesion within the town. Sport had been part of the festival and there were close links with the leisure centres.
- The Crediton Flag project had been simple in concept but had had a huge impact.
- The strong links with Germany and a shared reverence of St Boniface.
- The Community Hub Project was progressing well.
- A Town Square Weather Protection scheme was being prepared.

The Group were referred to the team's website which contained lots of information and images regarding the projects they had undertaken. The Group congratulated the team on what they had achieved so far and were particularly impressed with how they managed to bring sometimes conflicting groups together. The comment was made that the success of the team had come down to a few committed individuals as well as vital financial support.

53 PERFORMANCE AND RISK

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Growth and Chief Executive providing Members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2016/17 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The Economic Development & Regeneration Manager stated that it was the intention for future reporting to alternate between the national picture and local performance indicators so that the Group got an all-round picture in relation to the economy.

With regards to empty shop figures he had revised these so that they were more challenging and in line with those set nationally. The targets were achievable however and the Council was currently performing well against them.

The Group were informed about an incident that had occurred in the Pannier Market just before Christmas where a glass door had shattered onto one of the traders. Fortunately it had been safety glass and there had been no resulting cuts or bruises. It was felt that the cause of the problem had been to do with dirt getting into the channels holding the door in place. The Market Manager was now ensuring that these were cleaned out every month.

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

54 **FINANCIAL MONITORING**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.

The General Fund was currently forecast to be overspent by £52k. The main movements related to the Non Domestic rates 15/16 Devon pooling gain, Developmental Control staff vacancies and Discretionary Housing Payment funding being greater than budgeted.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Pay and Display car park income being down against budget.
- A tested and costed business case was needed before a Pannier Market roof could be included within the Capital Programme. The Chief Executive explained the importance of making investment decisions based on due diligence and risk-based assumptions.

Several questions were asked which the officer was unable to answer during the meeting since this was not his area but said that he would ensure the Group received an answer shortly after the meeting, these included the following:

- a) What was the actual figure for off street fines?
- b) Actual income figures in relation to the tolls at Tiverton Market.
- c) More information with regard to the vacant posts in Grounds Maintenance and where had these posts been advertised?
- d) More information with regard to renewable energy sources and business rates.

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

55 **BUDGET 2017/18 - UPDATE**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources considering options available in order for the Council to move towards a balance budget for 2017/18.

The Principal Accountant informed the Group that in November 2016 the budget gap had been £419k and had now been reduced to £231k. The main reasons related to the business rate pool and increases in tonnages for recycling. However, income had been reduced for garden waste permits and there was more pressure regarding New Homes Bonus going forwards. An updated report would be brought to the Cabinet meeting on 2 February where it was hoped the gap would have been reduced further still with Members having to decide how any remaining gap could be bridged.

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

56 MID DEVON DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR TOURISM

The Group had before it a report * from the Economic Development & Regeneration Manager updating Members on the current impact tourism has on Mid Devon's economy and how the Council could develop the sector over the next 5 years.

The contents of the report were outlined with the following points being referred to:

- 5% of all employment within Mid Devon was related in some form or another to tourism.
- The majority of visitors already lived within the region and of those the majority were older adults without children.
- The Destination Management Plan by its nature needed to be a partnership strategy with a strong brand.
- The face to face surveys had asked standard questions which meant that they were comparable across districts. Only 40% of respondents had mentioned anything they were dissatisfied with. Overall there had been very good satisfaction results.

The Group made the following comments:

- The results were open to interpretation and the sample of people surveyed had been small.
- The SWOT analysis had considered an ageing visitor profile as a weakness, however, they could be considered as a strength and the 'grey pound' needed to be looked at more positively.
- Surveys, by their very nature were just a snap shot of opinion at a particular moment in time.
- The Council needed to be careful about the amount of weight subscribed to some of the conclusions within the report.
- Interviews had been conducted at a limited number of locations.
- Mid Devon had to work harder at promoting itself compared to other districts due to not having a coast to attract visitors to.
- The survey had cost £6k to undertake, it was suggested that this may not have been a big enough investment given the limitations of the data and the importance to Mid Devon of moving forward in the right direction on tourism.
- Poor signage within Tiverton was a problem and previous concerns had not been addressed. Similar signage problems existed elsewhere in the district and better liaison was needed with Devon County Council.
- The Tiverton Coach Park needed to be more widely promoted and advertised.

Discussion took place regarding the Tiverton Attractions Group which had suffered poor attendance in the recent past but was showing some signs of reinvigorated interest. It was important for this group to be on board with the Destination management Plan especially in relation to the branding issue.

Members had been keen for work to be undertaken in this area and this had proved to be a good start. There were many opportunities that could be developed such as promoting and developing heritage roots, linking the market towns together, promoting the unspoilt countryside and celebrating some of the finest food producers in the country.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the draft Destination Management Plan be approved for consultation bearing in mind the comments and concerns of the Policy Development Group with regard to the small sample of people interviewed, the number of locations where this had taken place and the need for caution when considering the conclusions in the survey.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

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

57 **STRATEGY FOR TIVERTON 2017/27**

The Group had before it a report * from the Tiverton Town Centre and Market Manager outlining the Tiverton Town Centre and Market Strategy and Action Plan for 2017 to 2027. The officer explained that the market was key to the regeneration of the town. The strategy was centred around the themes that towns nationally revolve around. Most of the actions within the Action Plan for November and December had already been achieved. The good trading atmosphere needed to continue as did evaluations after each promoted event. Performance indicators were being monitored and the Market Manager had introduced a trader's newsletter.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The removal of street clutter – it was explained that this referred to the duplication of posts and better placement of litter bins, not the removal of seats.
- Regular cleaning regimes were now in place.
- The market needed to be warmer and more welcoming.
- The Council needed to consider more arts and craft trading stands and dedicated farmers markets.
- There was a deficit in income from the market which was being carefully monitored.
- The need for the market's potential and its aspirations to be realised.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the Strategy for Tiverton 2017/27 be approved.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

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

58 **LGA BREXIT RESPONSE**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Economic Development & Regeneration Manager informing Members of the Council's response to the Local Government Association on the possible effects of Brexit.

The Economic Development Officer was congratulated for bringing together a report when there were so many unknowns.

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

59 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE REPORT**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Economic Development & Regeneration Manager updating Members on the progress of key Economic Development Projects. This included the following:

Discussion took place regarding:

- The possibility, should an extremely strong business case be produced, for an idea to be considered within the Capital Programme, however, it would always be difficult to guarantee positive outcomes. Rigorous cost / benefit analysis would always need to be undertaken.
- Regarding Broadband – the Economic Development Officer informed the Group that he had had a recent meeting with Connecting Devon and Somerset and they were currently working through signing off a contract. A update would be provided at the next meeting.

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

60 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

In addition to the items already listed in the work programme, the following was requested to be on the agenda for the next meeting:

- Tourism leaflets promoting Mid Devon villages
- Broadband update

(The meeting ended at 8.10 pm)

CHAIRMAN