

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 17 May 2018 at 5.30 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

Mrs B M Hull (Chairman)  
Mrs A R Berry, A Bush, Mrs C Collis, J M Downes,  
S G Flaws, Mrs S Griggs, F J Rosamond and  
Mrs N Woollatt

### **Also Present**

#### **Councillors**

R J Chesterton and R Evans

### **Present**

#### **Officers**

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Jenny Clifford (Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration), Adrian Welsh (Group Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader), Catherine Yandle (Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security), Chris Shears (Economic Development Officer) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

## **1 Election of Chairman (Vice Chairman of the Council in the Chair)**

**RESOLVED** that Cllr Mrs B Hull be elected Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2018/19.

Cllr Mrs B M Hull then took the Chair.

## **2 Election of Vice Chairman**

**RESOLVED** that Cllr S G Flaws be elected Vice Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2018/19.

## **3 Apologies and Substitute Members**

There were no apologies for absence.

## **4 Declaration of Interests under the Code of Conduct**

There were no declarations of interest given.

## **5 Public Question Time**

There were no members of the public present.

## 6 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2018 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

## 7 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman welcomed Councillors A Bush and Mrs S Griggs onto the Group.

## 8 Meeting Management

The Chairman indicated that she would take item 8 and item 10 next with Performance and Risk following these items.

## 9 Presentation on Hydro Mills

The Economic Development Officer provided the Group with a presentation on the Hydro Mills project which included the following information:

- There were vast river and water networks across the UK providing a whole range of facets that could be effective including revitalising rural communities, hydro energy, integrated catchment management, the green economy and technological innovation.
- For Mid Devon this could mean that the district was able to build a strong foundation for a low carbon economy, it could provide excellent inward investment and marketing potential and greater community resilience in terms of energy and flooding.
- Numerous organisations were involved including:
  - Hydro Mills Group
  - Private Land owners
  - Environment Agency
  - South West Water
  - Western Power
  - Angler's Association
  - University of Exeter
  - Hydromatch
  - Government
- Exeter University had been proactively working to progress the project with masters's students undertaking research looking at the relevant environmental considerations, smart grid technology and replicable aspects.
- Other progress included the commissioning of Hydromatch to undertake work to obtain Environment Agency permissions. Heritage discussions to explore opportunities at key sites of historic interest and other sites of importance.
- Numerous funding bids were being developed and the result of an 'Energy Entrepreneurs' bid was due any day. An 'Innovation Funding Service' bid was also currently live.
- Potential barriers to the project moving forward included Environment Agency permissions, site ownership, endorsement at senior levels in organisations and funding.
- Next steps included EA permissions work (which would take 6 months), site ownership, meetings with the Pennon Group (and others) and the development and submission of funding bids between May to August.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Returns on investment would be long term as some of these schemes could run for up to and over 100 years.
- The University of Exeter would be taking on board the work that had already been undertaken by the Blackdown Hills crayfish project.
- There was the potential as a Council to sell expertise to others who may wish to undertake a similar project.
- River data had a value that could not only be used for the greater good but also had a monetary value.

Note: Councillor Mrs N Woollatt declared a personal interest as she was a mill owner.

## 10 Economic Development Service Update

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Chief Executive and Director of Growth updating it on progress with key Economic Development Service priorities.

The Group Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery provided the Group with a brief update on each of the projects listed within the report and discussion followed with regard to:

- A meeting had taken place earlier that day with Exeter City Council with regard to Broadband. There was a possibility of working with them on joint marketing materials for the broadband voucher scheme.
- The result of the bid to the Heritage Lottery for the Cullompton Townscape Heritage Scheme would be known next week and the Group would be informed about the result accordingly.
- A presentation would be brought before the Group regarding the results of the consultation exercise on the Tiverton Town Centre Masterplan.
- The initial budget for the Tiverton Shopfront Scheme had been £15k originally funded through the Government's High Street Innovation Fund and had been used to support shop keepers wanting to improve their shop fronts.
- Whilst it had seemed that the recent Tiverton Night Market event had been very well attended it had been difficult to measure this precisely and better technological measures were needed. It was also difficult to establish who had been visitors to the town and who had been local residents.
- The importance of working with relevant education partners to locally support skills including within the construction sector.

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

## 11 Performance and Risk for 2017/18

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report \* from the Director of Growth & Chief Executive providing Members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2017/18 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The number of businesses assisted which had been 261 against an annual target of 250.
- Shop vacancy figures were showing as just under 10% in the three major towns. It was difficult to compare these figures nationally as towns varied greatly with different factors affecting each one.
- Whether it was possible as a Council to do anything to encourage shop keepers to keep their shops open. This was a difficult area as some shop owners still received a rent even if the shop was closed therefore there was less of an incentive.
- The Tiverton Town Centre Manager was not always informed when a shop was going to close.
- The process involved in finalising the Tiverton Town Centre Masterplan would consider what should be offered in the town in a changing consumer world.

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

## 12 **Start time of meetings**

The Group **AGREED** to hold future meetings of this Group at 5.30pm during the remainder of the municipal year.

## 13 **Identification of items for the next meeting**

The following was requested to be on an agenda for a future meeting:

- An update on car parking
- A report listing the funding streams available to support projects and initiatives.

(The meeting ended at 6.31 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**