

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 14 March 2019 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

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

Apologies

Councillor

Mrs A R Berry

Also Present

Councillors

C R Slade and R Evans

Also Present

Officers

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

67 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr Mrs A R Berry.

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

No interests were declared under this item.

69 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions raised by the one member of the public present.

70 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the special meeting held on 29 January 2019 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

71 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

72 PERFORMANCE AND RISK FOR 2018/19

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 2018/19 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

It was explained that the report provided performance data up until the end of January 2019.

It was noted that the number of businesses assisted by the Economic Development team was above target and that progress was being made on the Tiverton Town Centre improvements.

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

73 FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Group received a verbal update from the Group Manager for Finance presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.

It was reported that in December 2018 the predicted unfavourable variance on the budget had been £65k this had now reduced to £45k representing a slightly improved position.

There was still a predicted overspend in the area of car parking and in property services, however some areas were showing a positive variance, for example, interest on investments.

74 GRAND WESTERN CANAL AND DEVON AND EXETER RAIL PROJECT

The Group received a report * from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration reporting to Members on the funding provided to two grant aided bodies under the Economy PDG.

It was explained that no formal funding agreement currently existed between Mid Devon District Council and the two grant recipients discussed within the report. A better understanding was needed with regard to the use of these grants going forwards so as to inform the Council's decision making with regard to the level of future grant support funding. A formal process needed to be put in place to review the grants given prior to the next round of budget setting. The Canal Manager had agreed to provide a full report to the Council on a regular basis going forwards.

The Devon & Exeter Rail Project Working Party had met twice a year to discuss issues relating to railway provision in Devon and in particular the rail services that run in and out of Exeter. Following changes to personnel, DCC had decided that it could no longer administer the group and it was decided to change the working group into a forum aligned to the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership with wider community involvement. The District Council had been contributing £3,500 annually to the Devon & Exeter Rail Project for a number of years, however, with the change of structure it seemed appropriate to review future funding arrangements.

Consideration was given to:

- The benefit of the Canal to Tiverton and the wider district of Mid Devon in terms of tourism, education and health and well-being.
- More in depth scrutiny being welcomed.
- As the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership was new forum the Council needed to know how any financial contributions it made would be used.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:

- a) That the contribution to the Devon & Exeter Rail Project be reviewed following formation of a new Rail Forum.
- b) That the Council continues to offer an annual grant of £45,000 for 2019/20 to the Grand Western Canal to support its maintenance.
- c) That an assessment be undertaken, in liaison with Devon County Council, prior to the financial year 2020/21 to inform decision making with regard to the level of future grant support for the Canal.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs N Woollatt and seconded by Cllr F J Rosamond)

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

75 **COST-RECOVERY AND COMMERCIALISATION IN GROWTH, ECONOMY AND DELIVERY**

The Group had before it a report * from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration presenting to Members steps to introduce cost recovery into the Growth, Economy and Delivery Service and to look at issues relating to further commercialisation within the service.

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

- Two examples of recent successful bids for external funding. One being the 'Connecting the Culm' Catchment Based Approach Study (Interreg funded) in partnership with the Blackdown Hills AONB. The other being the Mid Devon Destination Management Website (Leader Funded) in partnership with the Tiverton Museum and the Tourist Information Service.
- The need to propose charges that were consistent with those given for pre-application advice in the Planning department for example.
- The need to re-coup costs only.
- This would be a step by step process and would be monitored to see if fees were affecting the number of organisations contacting the Council.
- Often the Economic Development Officer was present at a pre-application meeting with a Planning and Conservation Officer whose time was being paid for by an applicant but his wasn't.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The cost / benefit of the proposed charges.
- Whether charging a fee would dissuade some businesses or individuals from contacting the Council for advice.

- Would some successful projects have come to fruition if a charging schedule had been in place? This was a difficult, hypothetical question to answer.
- Concern that some voluntary groups may not be able to afford to make contact with the Council.
- There were very few examples of economic development services operating on a partial cost-recovery basis across the South West, although many councils had moved straight to setting up arms-length commercial services companies which allow local authorities to make profit as opposed to only seeking cost recovery.
- The financial constraints upon the Council and the need to consider maximising income wherever possible.
- The need for more factual data in order to come to a more considered opinion.

It was **AGREED** that a more detailed report be brought back to the Group at their next meeting providing greater clarity about the possible effects of charging and whether discretion could be applied for certain businesses and non-businesses based upon their individual circumstances.

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

(ii) Cllr Mrs N Woollatt declared a personal interest as she is a mill owner.

76 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2018/19**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a draft report * by the Chairman of the Group, a final copy of this report would be submitted to Council on 24 April 2019.

The Group were informed that the Economic Development team had been unsuccessful in the LGC 'Driving Economic Growth Awards' the previous evening, however, the Group wished to congratulate the team on making it to the shortlist which was a significant achievement for a rural district council.

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

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

In addition to the items already listed for the next meeting it was requested that the following be added to the agenda:

- Cost-Recovery and Commercialisation in Growth, Economy and Delivery

(The meeting ended at 6.35 pm)

CHAIRMAN