

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 9 November 2017 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

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

Apologies

Councillors

Mrs C Collis and J M Downes

Also Present

Councillors

R J Chesterton, A Bush, Mrs C P Daw, Mrs S Griggs and
Mrs J Roach

Present

Officers

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Andrew Jarrett (Director of Finance, Assets and Resources), Jenny Clifford (Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration), Catherine Yandle (Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

40 **Apologies and Substitute Members**

Apologies were received from Councillors Mrs C A Collis and J M Downes who was substituted by F W Letch.

41 **Public Question Time**

There were no members of the public present.

42 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2017 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

43 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

44 **Performance and Risk for 2017/18 (00:02:15)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Growth and Chief Executive providing it 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.

Regarding the Corporate Plan aim 'Focus on business retention and growth of existing businesses' it was explained that the target for the number of Apprentice starts was the Government target calculated as 2.3% of full time equivalents posts. The Council had 9 apprentices as at 31 March 2017 and had 5 starters in September. The Council was holding an event the following week to promote apprenticeships to existing staff.

A brief discussion followed with regard to:

- The up to date figure for the number of empty shops in Tiverton had reduced slightly from 25 (as stated in the report) to 23. The number of empty shops in Crediton and Cullompton remained at 8 and 9 respectively.
- The need for more meaningful measures in relation to business retention and growth.
- The usefulness of receiving information about what other businesses were doing regarding Apprentice starts.
- The land supply being identified as a high risk. The Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration explained that this risk would be mitigated by the Local Plan review which would provide a new supply of commercial sites.

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

45 **Financial update for the six months to 30 September 2017 (00:11:03)**

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

The forecast General Fund deficit for the current year was £181k with the main items of variance reflected within the report, although it was reported that none of the overspends were in the area of Economic Development. The Group were also informed that there were two new lease agreements in Market Walk, however, the Pannier Market income was down.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Car park revenue was under budget. The Director of Finance, Assets & Resources welcomed ideas as to how revenue could be increased in this area. It was **AGREED** that the subject of car parking and all relevant data in relation to this be discussed at a future informal workshop. This would provide an opportunity to discuss all the various options in a more detailed and considered way.
- Set up costs in relation to the Three Rivers Development Company which had been incurred as a result of needing independent grant and tax advice.
- The Tiverton Masterplan which was listed in the Forward Plan might go some way towards addressing the shortfall in income for the Pannier market.

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

46 **Motion 540 (Councillor Mrs J Roach - 12 October 2017) (00:26:10)**

The following Motion had been forwarded to the PDG for consideration:

Motion 540 (Cllr Mrs J Roach – 12 October 2017)

‘This Council agrees to give serious consideration to seeking alternative methods of managing the Tiverton Pannier Market, to include a community interest company and a co-operative. Following these considerations Council will be given detailed information about the advantages and disadvantages of the options that were discussed. Council should then be able to decide whether to change their policy and pursue a different management model.’

Cllr Mrs J Roach stated that she felt the market was underperforming and that consideration needed to be given to alternative methods of management. She made reference to the Weymouth Pavilions model which had been implemented by a community interest company and had proven to be a success attracting big name acts with the knock on effect of filling the local hotels and restaurants. She commented that it would be worth looking at this model as a good example of what could be done. She made further reference to the year on year reduction in market income and stated that action needed to be taken as soon as possible to address the issues of concern.

Discussion took place regarding:

- It seemed sensible to have a full review of all the options and to factor this into part of the wider Economic Regeneration work stream.
- The need to consult with traders, various interest groups and stakeholders to seek their views and ascertain whether there was an appetite and enthusiasm for a change of approach. This feedback would be reflected back to the Group.
- Various other market models such as the one in Ludlow.
- The need to investigate all the options thoroughly and in detail.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to Council that the Motion be supported

(Proposed by the Chairman)

47 **Tiverton Market Environmental Strategy 2017-2022 (00:38:45)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Director for Growth and Chief Executive seeking approval to adopt the Tiverton Market Environmental Strategy so as to maximise opportunities to increase recycling, reduce the amount of waste and reduce our carbon footprint.

Reference was made to the ‘Environment’ being one of the priorities in the Corporate Plan. The Strategy had been out for consultation with some useful comments being made by Environmental Health colleagues in relation to food ‘best before’ dates and the ‘Community Food Fridge’. This had resulted in the deletion from the strategy of investigating the provision of a community food fridge.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Charity recycling bins were being considered with an offer from the Clothes Bank.
- An electric car parking point would be installed in the Lords Meadow Leisure Centre, however, the contract for this was limited in terms of other locations within the district.
- The approach to supporting environmentally friendly initiatives ought to be Council wide and not just limited to the market.
- The collection of textile waste from the market.
- The switch to energy efficient lighting and the need to address lighting being switched on during summer evenings.
- The Council was working with third parties, for example, traders bringing in heaters of their own volition.
- The introduction of wild flowers and areas of greenery was welcomed as well as a commitment to reduce plastics.
- How the Council was going to 'police' the wastage of power and electricity?
- How the Council was going to enforce the terms and conditions of contracts with traders.

It was **AGREED** that further clarity was needed with regard to the Council's approach to implementation and enforcement of the proposed strategy within the market and that a decision in relation to this Strategy ought to be deferred until the next meeting.

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

48 **Draft 2018/19 General Fund and Capital Budgets (00:52:38)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Director of Finance, Assets & Resources considering the options available in order for the Council to set a balanced budget for 2018/19 and agree a future strategy for further budget reductions for 2019/20 onwards.

The current draft budget gap for 2018/19 showed a deficit of £617k and a reconciliation of the major budget variances was contained within the report. 2018/19 would be the third year of a four year fixed funding settlement which would see a further reduction of £318k and then the complete removal of the remaining Revenue Support Grant of £179k by 2019/20.

Reference was made to a number of budget pressures including the pay award and reductions to various grants. The Business Rate revaluation exercise had impacted on the Council quite adversely, meaning that it had to pay more. The New Homes Bonus would be reduced from next year meaning that retaining sinking funds for the replacement of assets was all the more problematic. It was further explained that the budget gap would have been a great deal higher had managers not come forward with proposals for savings. There were still a number of issues that had not yet been resolved or were still to be fully evaluated, these were listed within the report.

The Group were informed that budget briefings would be held at the beginning of December in both Tiverton and Crediton and that a Members Away Day focussing on the budget was scheduled for early January 2018. There would therefore be ample opportunity for Members to contribute to the budget setting process.

Consideration was given to the following:

- The continuation of work with the Town and Parish Councils; co-operation was vital.
- The maximum amount a district council could increase Council Tax by was limited to 1.99% (or £5). However, the Council only got to keep 11.2% of the Council Tax it collected whereas every pound raised by Town and Parish Council's as part of their precept could be retained.
- Discretionary versus non-discretionary services and the need for honest and difficult conversations to take place.

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

49 **HOTSW Productivity Strategy 2018-2036 (01:12:38)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director for Growth and Chief Executive informing Members of the Heart of the South West Partnership's Productivity Strategy and to provide Members with an opportunity to steer Mid Devon District Council's response to the Consultation. The deadline for receiving responses was 30th November 2017.

The Strategy set out the long term ambitions of the partnership to generate economic growth by raising productivity in the region.

The main issues and questions were listed as:

- What would be an appropriate target for growth?
- Which of the proposed initiatives were important to Mid Devon District Council?
- What are the 'golden opportunities' – important sectors for Mid Devon?

Discussion took place regarding:

- The need to get hydroelectricity into one of the key sectors.
- Developing pilot schemes for green spaces would be a way of promoting and recognising the natural assets of the district.
- By increasing productivity this would create opportunities to increase wages.
- The South West map contained within the Strategy did not highlight Mid Devon as a growth area and seemed very Exeter centric. This was viewed as very disappointing especially as it did not reflect local ambitions.
- The need to grow higher skills in this area especially amongst the young. Events that brought together high tech businesses, other employers, education providers and early secondary school age children were seen as a very useful way forward.
- It was essential to get the buy in from employers as they had a responsibility to the community they operated in.
- The implementation plan would follow in Spring 2018 after the Strategy had been agreed.

In conclusion, it was **AGREED** that officers would respond to the consultation with comments from the Group summarised as follows:

- It was important not to miss out on opportunities for spins offs from economic growth taking place in other areas of the region.
- Improving skills was crucial to achieving greater productivity.
- Digitalisation was a key factor.
- Fostering and encouraging aspiration and ambition was vitally important and seen as fundamental to the success of the region.

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

50 **Economic Development Service Update (01:43:15)**

The Economic Development Team Leader provided an update in relation to Economic Development projects.

Further highlights within the report were reported as follows:

- Mills Project - the Council was expecting to hear the outcome of its bid to DCLG for funding under the ESIF Low Carbon Programme by the end October. If the bid was unsuccessful it would look at other opportunities for funding.
- Rural Broadband – still had not heard officially that the ‘Expression of Interest’ had been unsuccessful. It was hoped that an official stakeholder group would be established as this was such a vital issue.
- Exe Valley AONB – the Economic Development Team Leader would be convening the AONB Working Group in November and its recommendations would be brought to a future meeting of this Group.

The Group wished the Economic Development Team well with the Cullompton Townscape Heritage Scheme bid.

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

51 **Identification of items for the next meeting (01:49:08)**

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

- Market Environmental Strategy
- 2018/19 budget update

(The meeting ended at 7.21 pm)

CHAIRMAN