

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 6 September 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 and
Mrs N Woollatt

Apologies

Councillor

F J Rosamond

Also Present

Councillors

R J Chesterton and R Evans

Also Present

Officers

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

23 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr F J Rosamond.

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

There were no declarations of interest given.

25 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions from the one member of the public present.

26 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2018 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

27 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- She reminded the Group that there would not be an informal workshop after the formal meeting this evening but that it would take place on Tuesday 25th September at 5.30pm.

- Due to personal circumstances she would not be able to attend the next meeting of the Car Parking Working Group on 11 October. A replacement volunteer was sought from the Group but none were forthcoming.

28 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK FOR 2018/19 (00:06:00)**

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.

The contents of the report were outlined and a brief discussion took place with regard to:

- The fact that there had been an increase of 40 new business rate accounts between May and June and overall an increase of 100 since last year.
- Recent data in relation to the number of empty shops had only been provided for Cullompton due to timing factors when creating the report and summer holidays.

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

29 **FINANCIAL MONITORING (00:08:01)**

The Group Manager for Finance provided the Group with a verbal update regarding financial information relating to the income and expenditure in the year to date.

It was explained that it was still very early on in the financial year but that the current overspend was predicted to be approximately £242k. A significant area of income falling under the Economy PDG's remit was car parking. There was predicted to be an overspend in this area due in part to the building works affecting the Multi Storey Car Park (MSCP). However this had been offset by income from street fines and the fact that the MSCP was currently open 24 hours a day and did not require locking up and security costs as before.

The information provided was **NOTED**.

30 **TIVERTON TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION MASTERPLAN SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD) (00:10:02)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration presenting the results of the Tiverton Town Centre Masterplan SPD consultation.

It was explained that the public consultation had run across the summer and had asked for feedback on the Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) exhibition boards displayed at Phoenix House, in the Pannier Market and online on the Mid Devon website. In total, there had been 55 responses received during the consultation period. These would be used to help develop the contents of a draft Masterplan SPD which would be subject to a further round of public consultation.

Discussion followed with regard to:

- The poor level of response and whether the Council could do something differently to encourage the public to respond. It was explained that the exhibitions had been well attended but that perhaps people were waiting to respond once the proposals were further developed at the next round of consultation.
- More had been done to encourage feedback through social media channels than any other consultation the Council had undertaken.
- Despondency amongst residents in replying to a large number of public consultations.

Note: * Report previously circulated

31 **SECOND GRIMSEY REVIEW OF TOWN CENTRES (00:18:10)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * of the Head of Planning, Economy & Regeneration briefing it on the second Grimsey Review of town centres.

Bill Grimsey had produced a report in 2013 entitled 'The Grimsey Report. An Alternative Future for the High Street' which had contained a number of recommendations and had followed the 'Mary Portas Review' of 2011. In 2017 he had been invited to embark on a review of his previous work to see what had changed, what had worked and what had not. This second review had culminated in 25 recommendations set out under these headings: Create a more supportive environment, Government and planning and smarter use of technology. In his report he had set suggested that there were three barriers as to why progress was often not made: business rates, the complex layers of local government and financing change.

The report before the Economy PDG set out what the possible implications were for Mid Devon. All three towns were set to have Masterplans and the Economic Strategy for the District was being produced. In Tiverton a new Town Centre Partnership was currently being established with engagement from a variety of different businesses in the town. There was a great deal of community activity generally across the three towns with good practice of shared community space such as the Culm Valley Integrated Centre for Health in Cullompton.

The Group were also informed that the Government intended to set up a panel of experts to investigate issues that currently affect the health of high streets and would advise on the best practical measures to help them thrive now and in the future.

Consideration was given to:

- The timing of the report which was felt to be helpful for the Council's developing Economic Strategy and the Masterplanning process.
- The effect of internet shopping.
- The 'Millenium' generation visiting towns for other reasons than previous generations might have done such as to visit food and entertainment establishments.
- Whether expensive regeneration projects were warranted when it might be that towns just needed tidying up.
- The impact of Business Rates.

- Town centre retailers needing to recognise their changing relationship with shoppers and to work with the internet retailers.
- It was felt that there was an increasing prevalence of unsavoury behaviour in Tiverton during the night time and this needed to be addressed. It needed to become a more attractive, safe and clean place to visit. It was discussed that improvements would need to be made to the top of Phoenix Lane in the near future.
- Car park pricing needed to be relative to what was offered with the town.

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

32 **CONSIDERATION OF WHETHER TO SEEK DESIGNATION AS AN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY FOR THE EXE VALLEY (00:48:41)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration. Members had requested that the Economic Development Team look into the feasibility of obtaining Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) status for the Exe Valley. The recommendation had been that the Group review the different options presented for conserving the environmental quality of the Exe Valley that were considered at a recent meeting of the Environmental Policy Development Group (PDG) on 4th September 2018 and to determine what comments they wished to forward to the Cabinet.

The Environment PDG had made the following recommendation:

“RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the Council consider option 1 to seek full AONB Designation.”

Discussion followed with regard to the economic factors affecting the possible designation of AONB status:

- Concern was expressed regarding the inflationary effect on house prices. Some of the people who had grown up in the Blackdown Hills area could not now afford to buy property in this area.
- There were not as many attractive elements to the proposed area as there were in places like Exmoor or Dartmoor and concern was expressed that not all of the area proposed would qualify for this status even if small pockets might.
- The substantial cost implications in terms of project development work and the ongoing delivery of a possible AONB management plan.
- The difficulties involved in quantifying the return on any investment.
- The effect upon agriculture, in particular the milk industry.
- Members expressed concern about whether the proposed area of coverage was the right one in size and geography given the qualities of the natural area, the need to consider the appropriate scale of any designation, and the proximity to other existing AONBs in the area.
- Option 4 ‘Take no further action at this stage’, was the preferred option from the majority of the Group.

The Group requested that their comments be forwarded to the Cabinet so that they may consider them in conjunction with the recommendation of the Environment PDG.

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

33 FUNDING AND RESOURCE OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT THE COUNCIL'S EMERGING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (01:14:06)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Planning, Economy & Regeneration which had been provided in response to a request from the Economy PDG to indicate a range of funding and resource opportunities for Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton.

The report provided a broad cross section of funding and other resource opportunities, including award schemes, loans and competitions that could support the emerging priorities of the Council's Economic Development Strategy. It also made reference to challenges and the income generation opportunities for Economic Development through grant applications.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- A lot of the funding streams available could be applied for by the Council. It was emphasised that they were relevant to the public sector as well as the business community.
- Income generation was key to the financial stability of the authority going forwards, it was now no longer just about making cuts.
- The need for all funding opportunities, successful or otherwise to be reported to this group in a meaningful way although it was stated that there was already a performance indicator showing how much funding had been applied for and of that how much had been successful.
- The Council would be in a much better position to apply for funding once the Economic Strategy was approved as that would provide a clear understanding of what it was the Council wanted to achieve.
- The Council had been successful in obtaining £4m for businesses and organisations across the District; were it to introduce charging for this service the return could be quite significant.

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

34 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICE UPDATE (01:30:05)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Planning, Regeneration & Growth updating Members on progress with key Economic Development Service priorities.

Consideration was given to the following areas:

Devon Hydro and Smart Grid Project ('Mills Project')

Works had been undertaken by Hydromatch Ltd in delivering a full feasibility study on Tiverton Weir and this had progressed on to pre-application discussions with the Environment Agency.

It would be necessary to register before March 2019 in order to qualify for any feed-in tariff. The Council had already begun this process with regards to the Tiverton Weir.

Enquiries and Investments

An update was provided on some of the businesses the team had worked with:

- The Goonvean development was now well under way with 64,000 square feet being occupied and a further 30,000 square foot planned. The Economic Development Officer would let the Group know how many jobs had been created as a result of this.
- There was a live planning application from Lidl which the GED Team would be commenting on.
- The Hitchcock site was almost fully developed.
- Discussions were being had with landowners around the three towns with a view to bringing sites forward.
- It was reported that it was a positive time for indigenous growth with lots of investment opportunities possible.

Cullompton Heritage Project

Historic England had advised that the timing of any bid to fund a scheme for Cullompton needed to coincide with delivery of the relief road. It was agreed that this was seen as vital for the future prosperity of Cullompton.

Tiverton Market Events

It was reported that there had been no trouble at the recent evening events in Tiverton and that there had been a good atmosphere.

Discussion took place regarding what the Electric Nights events were actually bringing to the town. The Town Centre Manager responded by stating that these events had attracted people from far away. Food fairs were popular throughout the country and these events had introduced artisan food and crafts to the town. The reputation of Electric Nights was growing in and outside of the district which helped to generate income for local traders.

It was suggested that perhaps the turning on of the Christmas lights should take place at least a week earlier than was planned for 2018 but it was explained that this would have clashed with other events.

Notes:

- (i) * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.
- (ii) Cllr Mrs N Woollatt declared a personal interest as she was a mill owner.

35 REGIONAL AND SUB REGIONAL PROJECT GOVERNANCE & STRUCTURES (01:53:15)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a pictorial summary * of the governance and structure arrangements of various regional and sub-regional projects and the role of Mid Devon District Council within them.

The Chief Executive and Director of Growth talked the Group through the various structures and explained where he and the GED team fitted in.

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

36 COACHES IN TIVERTON (02:04:30)

It had been requested that an item be placed on the agenda to discuss coach visits to Tiverton and what was being done to encourage more coach parties to visit the town.

It was explained that the Tourist Information Centre took the coach bookings and informed the Town Centre Manager when they were taking place. He undertook to greet each coach when it arrived and to make the drivers in particular feel welcome. Tiverton as a place to visit by coach was now being advertised in a coaching magazine but it would take time to build up a reputation. A lot more promotion would be undertaken when the town partnership was fully established. The only criticism he had received was the location of the coach park as it was not in an ideal spot.

Officers welcomed suggestions from Tiverton Ward Members as to any improvements that could be made such as better signage and more careful management of the arrival times of multiple coaches. The importance of increasing the number of coaches visiting the town was recognised and officers should ensure that every effort is made to explore ways to improve the effectiveness of the coach parking arrangements to increase visitor numbers where possible.

37 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

No further items were identified to be on the agenda for the next meeting other than those already listed.

(The meeting ended at 7.41 pm)

CHAIRMAN