

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 10 January 2019 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, F J Rosamond and
Mrs N Woollatt

Apology

Councillor

Mrs S Griggs

Also Present

Councillor

R Evans

Also Present

Officers

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), 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)

49 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr Mrs S Griggs.

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

Cllr Mrs N Woollatt declared a personal interest in relation to item 10 as she was a mill owner.

51 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

52 **MINUTES**

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

53 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- She reminded those present that there would be a special meeting of the Group on Tuesday 29th January to discuss the draft Economic Strategy.

- She also reminded the Group that the Council had been shortlisted in the LGC (Local Government Chronicle) Awards for 'Driving Economic Growth'. The Chief Executive, Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration and the Economic Development Officer would be attending the final judging panel in London on 23rd January to make a presentation along with other shortlisted organisations. The Council was one of only 8 that had been selected. The final awards ceremony is being held in London in March.

54 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK FOR 2018/19 (00:03:30)**

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 since the report had been published the figures for empty shops had changed slightly but this was a situation that changed on a daily basis. A further update would be brought to the March meeting.

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

55 **FINANCIAL MONITORING (00:05:04)**

The Group received a verbal update report from the Group Manager for Financial Services presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year. This included the following highlights:

- At the last meeting it had been reported that the forecasted overspend for 2018/19 would be £168k, this had now reduced to £94k.
- There had been some improvement in the Revenues and Benefits area with some extra grants proving to be a bonus.
- Fees in relation to Planning had also improved during the last two months of December 2018.
- There had been some underspend in Customer Services area due to salaries.
- The Housing Revenue Account had previously shown a favourable variance of £25k, this had now improved to a favourable variance of £45k.
- Overall this represented an improved position.

56 **BUDGET 2019/20 - UPDATE (00:06:59)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) reviewing the revised draft General Fund budget for 2019/20.

In October there had been a predicted budget gap of £692k, however, the Council had now received the provisional grant settlement from central Government which had brought some good news. The Council had been fortunate to receive some recognition of its rurality through an increase to the Rural Services Delivery Grant. The settlement had also brought an unexpected bonus of £33k in relation to a redistribution of excess Business Rates levy. As part of the settlement the Council had also been given the freedom to raise its Council Tax by up to 3%. However, there was still a budget gap of £253k meaning that consideration needed to be given

to using a temporary transfer from ear marked reserves to meet the difference needed to secure a balanced budget.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- The Tiverton redevelopment project.
- Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) borrowing and when it is prudent to borrow money from them and when it wasn't.
- Treasury decisions were made on a daily basis depending on relevant circumstances at that particular moment.
- It was recognised that a lot of work had been undertaken to reduce the budget gap within the Council as well as receiving a better than expected settlement from Government.
- When preparing the budget, accountants looked at every single cost centre and realigned the budget taking into consideration what had happened in the previous year. A prudent, balanced and pragmatic approach had been employed.
- Recent funding in relation to a primary care facility in Crediton would be underwritten by the NHS. A secure contract would be drawn up to protect the Council against any loss. It was explained that institutions such as the NHS and other local authorities were amongst the most secure organisations to lend to.
- Many local authorities carried a lot of 'cash' and arrangements were in place to secure the best return when lending this 'cash'. Some investments were made in the very short term e.g. overnight whilst others were placed for a month or more. Investments were made with organisations within the Counterparty framework, whereby each had an appropriate credit rating and were considered very low risk.

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

57 **SHOPFRONT ENHANCEMENT SCHEMES (00:29:15)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration providing Members with an update on shopfront enhancement schemes and seeking Members approval to continue / re-instate such schemes in each of the three main market towns in the District.

The officer explained that similar schemes had worked very well both locally and nationally and represented a good way of encouraging shop keepers to improve the look of their businesses. The idea was to create a 'pot of money' within in each town which would then attract additional funding. It was predicted that a local steering group would administer the distribution of these funds.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- Some businesses only took a part of the amount that was offered to them.
- Some of the names had been redacted in the list of those who had previously benefited from the shopfront scheme for data protection reasons.
- Particular properties with an obvious need for improvement had been proactively approached to apply for funding.
- Investments usually lasted for three years.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that it approves a seed fund totalling £15,000 to maintain / reinstate shopfront enhancement schemes for the three main market towns in the District.

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

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

58 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICE UPDATE (00:41:15)**

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

Discussion followed with regard to:

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

- A full application to the Environment Agency had been submitted at the end of December with the aim of achieving approvals in March.
- The deadline of 31 March 2019 to register for the Feed In Tariffs (FIT's) and how this affected interested householders.
- The complexities involved in the Thorverton Mill system.
- The current lack of clarity regarding how the Government intended to support renewable industry in the future.

Exeter and the Heart of Devon (EHOD)

- The partnership was now looking to update its joint economic strategy to reflect changing roles and areas of focus for each local authority and to ensure that the partnership continued to evolve.
- Funding provided by Devon County Council to create business hubs, for example the Nook in Cullompton and facilities at the Hayridge Centre.
- The need for an update to Members regarding Broadband issues within Mid Devon. It was noted that the Scrutiny Committee were due to receive a presentation from Connecting Devon and Somerset in March, however it was suggested that the Economic Development Officer work with the Scrutiny Policy Officer to provide further updates to Members generally.

LEADER Programme

The programme was now closed for new applications. It was explained that there may be an opportunity to share in the national underspend for this programme.

Destination website

In partnership with the Tourist Information Service (TIS) and Tiverton Museum the Council had submitted an application to the LEADER fund for a destination website to help promote the District. The successful applicant would be informed in February 2019.

Master planning: Tiverton town centre

The master plan would be progressing towards stage 2 of the consultation.

Devon and Somerset Metro project

- Initial feasibility studies were being undertaken to establish possibilities in relation to timetables and the physical possibilities of being able to site a modern station in the proposed location. This needed to be established before the finer details could be considered.
- There were other issues to consider such as the rail industry's investment programme and possible amendments to the DfT franchise.
- The sparsity of land and car parking provision should a station in Cullompton receive the go ahead. People would be encouraged to walk and cycle to a potential station but there would always be a large number of passengers who would want to use their cars.
- There was a commitment to progress this from all those involved.

Market events

A monthly Farmers Market had now been introduced. The lead up to Christmas had been good and a special event for Remembrance Day with displays of poppies by local school children had been well received.

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

59 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (01:10:00)**

It was noted that the draft Economic Strategy would be discussed at the special meeting on 29th January. However, it was requested that a review of all the Council's websites be undertaken for the March meeting particularly in relation to the mobile interface which appeared to be using old technology.

(The meeting ended at 6.45 pm)

CHAIRMAN