

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 16 July 2020 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

J M Downes (Chairman)
N V Davey, R J Dolley, Mrs S Griggs,
D F Pugsley, R F Radford and A Wyer

Apology

Councillor

T G Hughes

Also Present

Councillors

A White and B G J Warren

Also 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), Rob Fish (Principal Accountant), Dean Emery (Group Manager for Revenues and Benefits) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

12 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Cllr T G Hughes had sent his apologies for the meeting.

13 PROTOCOL FOR REMOTE MEETINGS

The protocol for remote meetings was noted.

14 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

15 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

There were no interests declared under this item.

16 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2020 were confirmed as a true and accurate record.

17 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00:02:53)

The Chairman stated that 12 chairs had recently been placed in Crediton Town Square and these had made an enormous difference in both providing a place to sit

for the public and helping to create a convivial atmosphere. He hoped the same sort of initiative could be undertaken in the other towns.

18 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT (00:03:36)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security providing it with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2020/2021 as well as providing an update on key business risks.

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

- This was the first set of data measured against the new Corporate Plan.
- Some measures had been affected by the impact of the pandemic and the Council having to reallocate resources. One of these measures was in relation to empty shops and the vacancy count. This had not been done in April but it was hoped a full shop survey would be undertaken by the end of July 2020. However, data had been added about the town centre units owned by the Council.
- The new Corporate Plan aims in relation to this Group were referred to.
- Several risks falling under the umbrella of this Group had increased in severity as a result of the pandemic. These included:
 - Economic Development Service
 - Economic Strategy
 - Infrastructure Delivery

It would be important for this Group to monitor these increased risks and the mitigating actions at each meeting going forwards and to also think about how data in relation to these risks is presented. It was recognised that the full implications of the pandemic in relation to these risks would not be known for some time.

- This report reflected the current position but there was still a lot of uncertainty. The situation regarding the current economic position in both Mid Devon and Devon as a whole was constantly changing. It was not possible to see at the current time the impact of positive interventions.

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

19 **REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN 2019/20 (00:15:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from Deputy Chief Executive (S151) presenting the revenue and capital outturn figures for the financial year 2019/20. This report had been discussed by the Cabinet on 9th July 2020 and the recommendations within it approved.

The contents of the report were outlined in addition to a brief update on the financial position as a result of Covid 19:

- The Council had suffered significant losses in terms of income since the start of the pandemic and lockdown particularly in the areas of leisure and car parking.
- The various tranches of funding compensation from the Government were explained which included an income protection scheme.

- The authority had ended the year with a £232k deficit which had been funded from the General Fund Reserve. The areas that related to the Economy PDG amounted to £133k and there were three main areas that had contributed to this variance from budget. These included the Tiverton Town Centre Regeneration Project, units in relation to Fore Street, Tiverton and Market Walk, Tiverton. There had been a loss of rental income from the Londis and Tony Pryce units. However, negotiations were underway to secure a new tenant at one unit and options for remodelling another unit were being considered.
- The Group requested that more information be provided to it in relation to the Fore Street units and the flats above as well as the old 'Curiosity' shop and whether anything could be done to improve its visual appearance.
- The effect of out of town supermarkets on town centres. It was explained when any such development proposals came forward a retail impact assessment was undertaken and the impact on town centres was assessed within the planning system.

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

20 COVID 19 ECONOMIC RESPONSE UPDATE (00:29:33)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration providing it with updated information regarding the Growth, Economy & Delivery team's COVID 19 emergency economic and community response activities. It also informed Members of the Devon wide economic recovery work and sought Members endorsement for the current business support and economic recovery activities.

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

- The situation in terms of the effects and response to the pandemic was constantly changing and there had been a number of developments since the report for the meeting had been published.
- Covid 19 had affected different businesses in different ways. The easing of lockdown restrictions had been welcome news for the tourism industry in Devon and Cornwall but it was important not to become complacent.
- The number of businesses assisted and the amounts provided, as outlined in the report, was reiterated.
- Community support had continued with vulnerable people required to shield being supported with food parcels. This would be scaled down at the end of July once these people were no longer required to shield. However, efforts would be made to ensure that vulnerable people had alternative arrangements in place to support their needs after 1 August.
- The Council had worked closely with CHAT who had received 5 times more enquiries for help with food than normal.
- Emergency community hardship grants, funded by Devon County Council, had also been issued although the sums of money involved had been small. It was expected that people would need considerable financial help in the coming months as the full effect of the pandemic and loss of income impacted residents of Mid Devon.
- An action plan in relation to the re-opening of town centres had been considered by the Cabinet on 9th July. The plan included informational and

directional signage as well as providing key information to the public as they move through town centres. The Council would be updating its messaging as a result of having to wear face coverings in all shops as from 24th July.

- The re-opening of café's, restaurants and pubs on the 4th July had presented challenges to business owners but the town councils had been very helpful in providing essential support and information at very short notice. Specific thanks were extended to the Clerk at Tiverton Town Council who had been very helpful in organising a webinar for local traders. This had been very well received. Similar support and assistance had also been provided by Crediton and Cullompton Town Councils in conjunction with the Clerk of Tiverton Town Council.
- 'Love your Town Centre' funds had been distributed. Crediton Town Council had used this to provide the seating referred to by the Chairman earlier in the meeting.
- Planning for recovery was taking place on a number of different levels. The Group were referred to the 'Team Devon Covid 19 Economy and Business Recovery Prospectus'. This was a lobbying document setting out how the region could benefit from funding opportunities. It focussed on 4 key areas which were, businesses, places, people and opportunities. A number of action points were listed which the partnership were working hard to implement. The document provided a good basis for the recovery plan and had achieved effective collaborative discussion in its production. It also had support from local MP's. The Group considered that what was contained within the document was very promising but also hoped its aspirations were realistic and forthcoming.
- The context of the Discretionary Grant Scheme was explained. The Council had been able to use 5% of the total grant allocated to it under the national scheme to help businesses under this scheme. The Council was doing all it could to access any unspent monies in the national scheme to further support local businesses in Mid Devon.

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

21 **HYDRO MILLS PROJECT - TIVERTON WEIR (01:03:00)**

The Group received a verbal update from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration regarding the Tiverton Weir Hydro Mills Project. This included the following information:

- Extensive discussion had taken place with the Environment Agency in order to progress this project.
- A report would be presented to the Cabinet on 6th August seeking not only support for the project but also an agreement to proceed with a planning application. Cabinet approval to fund the project as part of the capital programme would also be sought.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- How this project aligned with the Council's commitment to climate change targets and the eventual aspiration to become carbon neutral.
- Other mill projects within the district and how they could be progressed. The Group requested to be kept updated.

22 **START TIME OF MEETINGS (01:11:00)**

The Group **AGREED** to continue to meet at 5.30pm on Thursday evenings.

23 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (01:16:00)**

The Group requested that its attention be focussed on Covid 19 economic issues only, for the immediate future, but also felt that it was important not to lose sight of other important issues. Therefore it was suggested that the wording of this agenda item be amended for the time being to state 'future items for discussion *post* Covid 19'.

(The meeting ended at 6.50 pm)

CHAIRMAN