

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 14 January 2021 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

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

Apologies

Councillor(s)

T G Hughes

Also Present

Councillor(s)

R J Chesterton, R M Deed and R Evans

Also Present

Officer(s):

Adrian Welsh (Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader), Ian Chilver (Group Manager for Financial Services), Dean Emery (Corporate Manager for Revenues, Benefits and Recovery) and Sally Gabriel (Member Services Manager)

46 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00-02-53)

Apologies were received (retrospectively) from Cllr T G Hughes.

47 REMOTE MEETING PROTOCOL (00-03-23)

The protocol for remote meetings was noted.

48 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00-03-37)

There were no questions from members of the public present.

49 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (00-03-42)

No interests were declared under this item.

50 MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING (00-04-03)

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2020 were confirmed as a true and accurate record.

51 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00-04-32)

The Chairman voiced concern with regard to the grave news of the escalation of the pandemic and the ongoing affect on the economy and the residents of Mid Devon.

The main role of the Group would be to continue to monitor the management and administration of the affect of the pandemic on the district as a whole.

52 COVID 19 ECONOMIC RESPONSE UPDATE (00-05-10)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration providing it with an update regarding the Growth, Economy and Delivery team's latest COVID19 emergency economic recovery work and seeking Members' endorsement for the current business support and economic recovery activities.

The Strategic Manager for Growth Economy and Delivery informed the meeting that since the publication of the report so much had changed as the country was now in another lockdown situation and therefore there was a need to focus on the variances to the published report:

- The relevant figures in relation to the number of positive cases of coronavirus across the country, the increase in the number of deaths and the percentage of new cases in Mid Devon
- The roll out of the vaccination programme
- The impact on the economy of Mid Devon following another lockdown situation and the period of time it would take for the country to recover from the recession
- The different Government support schemes that were now in place and the additional sum of £7.3m of Government funding which was due to be received and the total amount of government funding received to date (£30.6m)
- 3 more officers had been relocated to assist the team with grant payments
- The timing of the Chancellors budget and the impact that this may have on Business Rate relief
- The Covid Support Hub had been reinstated; all clinically vulnerable people would be required to register for assistance, although many people had supports mechanisms in place. The Financial Hardship Fund was seeing a number of repeat applications. Across the district there had been an increase in local stakeholder services.
- A Town Centre Health Check was underway in Cullompton and it was hoped that the health checks would be extended to the other main towns as soon as staff resource allowed. In addition to this, and with the assistance of seconded leisure staff, a business survey had been undertaken of town centre businesses in the three main towns to better understand the effect of the pandemic on their businesses. Brexit preparedness, feedback on safety measures in the town centres etc.. Key findings were outlined which included the need for training for the creation of webpages. Officers had been putting those businesses in contact with the LEP digital training programme which many of the businesses had already benefitted from.
- The Reopening of the High Streets initiative continued and whilst the country was in lockdown, work would be undertaken to review arrangements in the town centre and refresh pavement stencilling and signage as necessary in readiness for future easing of restrictions
- The Cullompton High Street Heritage Action Zone Project continued
- Devon recovery work continued and the detailed work was explained

Consideration was given to:

- The impact of the pandemic/lockdown on independent stores in the main towns
- The Income Compensation Scheme
- The impact of the pandemic on the budget
- The roll out of the grant support schemes
- The need to review the signage in the towns
- Whether there was any tourism support grants available

The Chairman on behalf of the Group recorded thanks and appreciation to staff for the work that was taking place.

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

53 **FINANCIAL MONITORING (00-56-34)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a month 8 financial monitoring report * which was presented by the Group Manager for Financial Services.

Key highlights within the report were listed as follows:

- Month 8 reporting showed a forecast improvement of £131k which now indicated a surplus of £109k
- The uncertain times that we were living with and how the figures could fluctuate
- Any surplus monies would be added to reserves to support any future gaps in budget
- The Medium Term Financial Plan and estimates of budget gaps for future years
- November saw a second period of lockdown which from a financial perspective stalled the recovery in service activity and therefore income
- The income compensation scheme was active and the first payment of £530k relating to return period April to July had been received. The second return (August to November) had been accelerated and submission was currently in progress.
- A further £53k had been received in furlough monies for November
- The variances outlined within the report
- Month 8 reporting for the Housing Revenue Account which showed a forecast reduction in the deficit by £34k to £324k

Discussion took place with regard to the Income Compensation Scheme and the recruitment of a Market Manager for Tiverton Pannier Market.

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

54 **BUDGET 2021-2022 - UPDATE (1-08-29)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) reviewing the revised draft budget changes. This had been previously considered by the Cabinet on 7 January 2021 and the Group was asked to discuss any changes that it may require prior to the formal recommendation of the budget proposals to Cabinet and Council in February.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- The current snapshot of where the council was at the current time, the deficit was down to £490k but that there was more work to do.
- Key movements and assumptions shown within the report highlighting the Government Income Protection Scheme, the Autumn Statement, the funding settlement, the New Homes Bonus, the Lower Tier Service Grant and an adjustment to the pay settlement
- The ongoing unknown impact of the pandemic on the budget

Discussion took place with regard to:

- Whether Members had any additional saving suggestions, savings on grass verges maintenance was suggested together with additional income generation
- A possible reduction in services and that difficult decisions would have to be made
- Any increase in Council Tax above the capped level would require a referendum

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

55 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (1-35-52)**

The Group requested that COVID19 activities continue to be it's only consideration at the current time (other than those reports which were statutorily necessary to come to each meeting).

(The meeting ended at 7.08 pm)

CHAIRMAN