

## **MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MINUTES** of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 9 September 2021 at 5.30 pm

### **Present**

#### **Councillors**

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

### **Also Present**

#### **Councillors**

R J Chesterton, R M Deed, R Evans, Mrs E J Lloyd and  
Miss J Norton

### **Present**

#### **Officers**

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Adrian Welsh (Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader), Amy Dugard (Consultation and Youth Involvement officer), Zoe Lentell (Growth and Regeneration Officer), Sally Gabriel (Member Services Manager) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

## **17 Apologies and Substitute Members**

There were no apologies for absence.

## **18 Protocol for hybrid meetings**

The protocol for hybrid meetings was noted.

## **19 Public Question Time**

There were no members of the public present.

## **20 Declaration of Interests under the Code of Conduct**

No interests were declared under this item.

## **21 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2021 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

## **22 Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- a) He welcomed the Environment PDG Members joining the meeting via Zoom. The Doughnut Economics item was an issue that both PDG's were interested in as well as the whole Council.
- b) He reminded the Economy PDG Members that 4 informal PDG workshops had been set up between now and Christmas and Zoom appointments had been sent out by the clerk. These would be held to discuss and develop areas within the Economic Strategy such as Agriculture, Place, Infrastructure and Employment & Skills.
- c) He stated that he would be bringing forward item 10, 'Taste Mid Devon' to follow the Covid recovery update.

## 23 Doughnut Economics (00:07:00)

The Group received a presentation from Peter Lefort, the Impact and Partnership Development Officer from the University of Exeter, with regard to the concept of Doughnut Economics.

Members of the Environment Policy Development Group had been invited to attend the meeting for this item since this was a concept that was also of interest to them.

Cllr Lloyd introduced the item stating that this subject was a good opportunity for Policy Development Groups to be more proactive in developing policy. Through the use of this concept there was an opportunity to translate ambitions into real opportunities in a sector where decision making was becoming increasingly more complex. It provided an opportunity for teams to work more collaboratively within a supportive framework.

Mr Peter Lefort from Exeter University had been invited to attend the meeting to explain the concept of Doughnut Economics and its relevance to Mid Devon in greater detail. Key elements of this concept were outlined by way of presentation which included the following:

- There was a difference between a 'complicated system' and a 'complex system'. Complicated systems were not simple but understandable, a correct answer existed and resolution required expertise. Complex systems were not fully understandable, no correct answer existed and they required perspective.
- With Doughnut Economics there was a need to move away from a linear perspective and replace it with an attempt to view a situation more holistically.
- Within 'the doughnut' the outer ring represented the ecological ceiling within which existed the 'safe and just place for humanity'. The inner circle represented the social foundation where such issues as food, health, education, housing, work, justice and political voice existed. Beyond these boundaries were complex issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, land conversion and chemical pollution, all co-existing within and circling 'the doughnut'.
- Inaction was no longer a valid choice and business 'as usual' was not an option if climate change was to be addressed.
- Every decision would have a negative impact somewhere and there was a need to acknowledge this way of thinking in that we cannot control all of these systems.

- Economic growth was not always the 'right' thing to strive towards. There was no one right way to achieve something.
- Collaboration was key.
- An example was provided of a decision taken by Cornwall Council to introduce a cycle route showing the impacts of this decision on a number of areas.

Discussion took place regarding:

- This concept touched on all areas of the Council's work and had a wider remit than that of just the Economy Policy Development Group.
- The 'doughnut' model had been adopted by Cornwall Council in 2019 and positive effects had already been seen. Officers had found it particularly helpful in helping to facilitate the decision making process.
- The model shown illustrated that there was a danger of 'overshooting' with particular ambitions. Competing priorities could present significant challenges. A way of tackling this would be to measure the health of an area and try to understand where the social flaws existed. Each decision should be looked at individually and assessments made in each case relating to the positive and negative impacts.
- Public engagement had been greater as a result of Cornwall using this model.
- There was a need to investigate how this could work for Mid Devon and to map out relatable examples that pertained to the district.
- It was suggested that the Economic Development team hold discussions with experts in this area as well as the Devon doughnut collective in order to investigate this concept further and bring relevant information before the Cabinet since this needed to be assessed as a concept affecting the Council as a whole.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Cabinet receive more information on the concept of Doughnut Economics and that this information include specific examples of how it could work within Mid Devon.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Reason for the decision:

The Doughnut Economic model provides a framework to balance social and environmental needs and therefore may be of benefit to the residents of Mid Devon as well as the wider community.

**24 Covid recovery update (00:45:00)**

The Group received, by way of presentation, an update with regard to Covid recovery initiatives across Devon. This included the following:

- The general state of the UK economy and the effect of the pandemic which had been showing some recovery in recent months.
- The Government were predicting a return to the pre-pandemic state by the end of 2021.
- Different sectors were bouncing back in different ways showing different types of recovery.

- Mid Devon generally had a lower than average unemployment rate but also lower than average salaries when compared nationally.
- There was a significant labour shortage in a number of sectors.
- There was a mismatch between the skill sets available and the types of jobs being offered.
- People who were hardest affected in Mid Devon were also the lowest 20% of earners.
- Data was showing increased levels of food poverty.
- Town centres had been showing a decrease in footfall figures.
- Immediate short term challenges included labour shortages, the need for upskilling and reskilling.
- Medium term challenges included business being taken away from the high streets due to online shopping.
- £731k had been given by Defra to support framers.
- Devon Work Hubs would be looked at as a priority especially in the rural areas.
- Evidence showed that businesses were wanting to grow where they could.
- Town Centre regeneration initiatives were still moving ahead.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The skills gap, how it was measured and what could be done to address this? It was explained that labour shortages were in particular areas such as HGV drivers, qualified chefs in the hospitality sector and the construction industry. It was vital to tap into what Team Devon were doing making sure those that needed to were involved in the skills programme. The Economic Development team were working with Petroc to progress this where possible.
- Concerns regarding more skilled employees moving into the area (and thus increasing the demand for housing) making it more difficult for Mid Devon residents to get onto the property ladder.
- The need to provide accessible information and support to those most in need and who did not have access to information technology.

It was requested that the slides presented this evening be circulated to Group Members after the meeting since they contained useful statistics that could be relayed to Parish Councils

## 25 Meeting Management (01:19:00)

The Chairman informed the Group that he was moving 'Taste of Devon' to be the next item of business.

## 26 Taste Mid Devon (01:20:00)

The Group received, by way of presentation, information with regard to the recently launched 'Taste Mid Devon' campaign. This included the following:

- This was a promotional campaign designed to attract Mid Devon people and tourists back to a large number of excellent eateries within the district and to support the hospitality industry.

- There were two fundamental principles to the campaign, growing the local economy and supporting the food and drink sector.
- 21% of all Mid Devon businesses were related to the food and drink sector.
- Posters were displayed in strategic locations, social media forums had been targeted and well as a dedicated section on the Visit Mid Devon website with clickable links providing further information.
- Food and drink trails were being drawn up providing a fun and interactive way of experiencing all that Mid Devon had to offer in terms of eating and drinking establishments.
- Members could help by informing constituents about this campaign, by 'liking' social media posts and visiting establishments themselves and leaving comments and photographs on the website.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- The website was kept up to date via a partnership arrangement with Tiverton Museum.
- The team were monitoring the effects of the campaign through various channels including checking search engine results.
- Residents could sign up to receive a newsletter.
- It was important to link the various platforms together to ensure there was better engagement.
- Consideration would be given to drawing up an information pamphlet for those people who did not access social media forums.
- All eateries had been contacted within Mid Devon and offered the opportunity for a free listing on the website.

The Chairman thanked the officers who had provided the information this evening, it had been very informative and he had been encouraged by the enthusiasm which had been shown for this initiative.

It was **AGREED** that the team come back to the Group in 3 or 4 month's time providing an updated presentation on the campaign using the data and information provided to this meeting as a benchmark.

## 27 **Peninsula Transport: Consultation on Regional Transport Strategy Vision (01:42:00)**

The Group had before it a report \* from the Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery providing an opportunity for Members to consider a response to Peninsula Transport's consultation on a Regional Transport Vision.

The following views were expressed:

- This was an important document and it was necessary for Mid Devon to be, bold, ambitious and brave about what it wanted in it.
- At the moment the consultation related to the future infrastructure 'vision' and was therefore quite high level. Mid Devon officers would work with colleagues at Devon County Council to develop the strategy further following the consultation.

- Disappointment that the consultation process was already well underway and Members had not had a lot of time to discuss it. Engagement with Members would have been appreciated at an earlier stage.
- Improvements to regional transport was seen as key to economic recovery and as a way of responding to climate change.
- Public transport and access to reliable transport information electronically needed much improvement.
- A joined up approach was vital such as working closely with the Forward Planning team.
- The strategy fitted in with the Council's Corporate Plan.
- The final strategy would influence the distribution of funding.

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

## 28 **Identification of items for the next meeting (01:55:00)**

The following was requested to be on the agenda for the next or a subsequent meeting,

- Update on progress with regard to the working relationship with the NFU
- Update on the Peninsula Transport Strategy as to what the final submission was
- More information with regard to the skills gap (to be provided as part of the next Covid response update)
- Update on the 'Taste Mid Devon' campaign at the January 2022 meeting

(The meeting ended at 7.28 pm)

**CHAIRMAN**