

ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

26 MAY 2022

WORK PROGRAMME & POLICY DEVELOPMENT 2022/23

Reason for Report: To identify and prioritise the PDG's work for 2022/23.

RECOMMENDATION: The PDG's work programme (as currently sent out in Appendix A) be updated.

Financial Implications: No direct implications.

Budget and Policy Framework: No direct implications

Legal Implications: None

Risk Assessment: N/A

Equality Impact Assessment: N/A

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The PDG's work programme should be consistent with the Corporate Plan or recommend changes to reflect budget pressures.

Impact on Climate Change: No direct implications for this report.

1.0 **Background**

1.1 Members of the PDG will appreciate that the PDG has a key role in investigating and advising Cabinet on economy related policy matters which:

(a) are pertinent to the Council's existing 'Economy' priorities set out in its Corporate Plan at <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/media/348008/20200312corporateplan20-2024v6.pdf>

(b) are pertinent to the PDG's strategic service responsibilities namely:

- Economic Development
- Inward Funding and investment
- Business support and development
- Tourism
- Town Centres
- CCTV
- Car Parking
- Business Rates

and

(c) look ahead and in that regard continue to be ambitious but realistic (even if demanding) particularly taking account of:

- the medium term budget forecasts; and
- the needs of and feedback from, the communities within Mid Devon.

1.2 Given the wide range of such work, the PDG is invited to identify the areas of policy work it would like to concentrate on during 2022/23, being the last year

of the current Council term. The current work programme which contains matters carried forward from 2021/22, is set out in Appendix A.

1.2 As indicated in paragraph 1.1 above, when identifying the work to include in its programme, it is strongly recommended that consideration be given to the medium term budget pressures and the review or prioritisation of economy focused actions within the Council's Corporate Plan particularly for the year ahead. For example, in deciding to investigate the potential impact of 2023/24 budget pressures on existing priorities as part of its work programme in the first six months of the current civic year, the PDG could:

- effectively engage a range of key stakeholders in helping to identify how lower service priorities could be changed for the better (or reluctantly compromised), in the public interest;
 - provide detailed advice to Cabinet in the autumn and ultimately full Council in February 2023 as part of the budget setting process;
- and
- outline an effective process / path which will highlight the key policy development role of the PDG in promoting the Council's leadership of economy focused projects / services beyond 2022.

1.3 Furthermore, to assist with the identification of its work programme, feedback from the 2021/22 residents' survey is set out in the remainder of this report. Section 2 considers general issues pertinent to all PDGs and Scrutiny Committee. Section 3 covers feedback specific to the environment for more detailed consideration as part of the Economy PDG's work programme.

2. **Residents' Survey**

2.1 There were 1683 responses to the survey. Residents were asked to reply to 33 questions – with a mix of closed 'tick box' questions and open 'feedback' questions. Open feedback questions included:

- What single thing can the Council do to improve quality of life in your community?
- Are there any particular service areas which you feel should NOT reduce their expenditure?
- Is there anything else you think the Council should consider a priority when setting the budget?
- If you have any specific issues not covered in this survey, please comment below.

2.2 When asked how well MDDC keeps residents informed, 8% replied very well informed, 37% well informed, 37% not well informed, and 14% not well informed at all; with 'don't know' covering the deficit in the 100% response. There were 48 specific comments from respondents about increased communication, engagement and consultation with residents. Ideas and comments included:

- Provide local written updates from the District Councillor e.g. in neighbourhood magazines;

- Increase interaction with the local community, e.g. community events or walkabouts;
- Greater consultation about forthcoming changes/regularly seek views;
- Allow residents to be more involved in decisions that affect me;
- Enable citizen participation in working groups; and
- Revert to pre-covid opening hours of Phoenix House.

2.3 There were 13 comments requesting the Council ensure focus is wider than just on Tiverton. Residents asked for greater focus on rural areas and for other towns, to be treated in line with Tiverton.

2.4 In response to the specific question, 67% of respondents said it is very important that the Council tackles climate change. A further 23% said it is fairly important (90% in total).

3. **Survey Responses re: Town Centres**

3.1 When asked which discretionary services residents would you most like to see protected, 52% of respondents to the particular question said 'town centre regeneration' (option to choose up to 5).

3.2 There were 32 comments on improving/developing town and village centres, residents would like to see:

- action to revitalise town and village centres;
- investment in the high streets;
- increase in entertainment facilities e.g. bowling alley;
- action to improve appearances of town centres;
- an increase of trees and flowers; and
- support and guidance to town/parish councils to help reopen shops and pubs.

4 **Survey Response re: Support Local Businesses**

4.1 62% of people who responded to a question on this issue, said it is very important to support local businesses and high streets, and a further 32% said it is fairly important.

4.2 There were 13 comments on supporting local businesses, including:

- increased support to small businesses and retailers;
- reduction of business rates; and
- encouraging local businesses over large scale national businesses.

5 **Survey Response re: Parking**

5.1 There were 25 comments on parking, with many requesting free parking to help regenerate trade in the towns, and a number requesting reduced parking fees in Tiverton.

5.2 There were a couple of comments made about ensuring that the District has the skills needed for the local area and the local economy.

6. Survey Response re: Supporting people who lose their jobs

- 6.1 42% of people who responded to the question on the importance of supporting individuals who lose their jobs, said it is very important to support such people and 44% said it is fairly important.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Taking account of the matters covered in this report, the PDG is invited to (i) discuss and reflect on specific comments and themes which have emerged from the survey results; and (ii) identify policy development projects it would like to undertake in 2022/23.

Contact for more Information:

District Solicitor and Monitoring Officer: ktrickey@middevon.gov.uk

Policy Research Officer: crobathan@middevon.gov.uk