

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 26 May 2022 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

J M Downes (Chairman)
J Buczkowski, S J Clist, Mrs C Collis,
N V Davey, R J Dolley and R F Radford

Apologies

Councillors

Mrs S Griggs and J Wright

Also Present

Councillors

Mrs C P Daw and B A Moore

Also Present

Officers

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Andrew Jarrett (Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Richard Marsh (Director of Place), Karen Trickey (District Solicitor and Monitoring Officer), Matthew Page (Corporate Manager for People, Governance and Waste), Adrian Welsh (Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery), Paul Deal (Corporate Manager for Finance), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader), Jason Berry (Economic Development Project Manager), Nicola Cuskeran (Interim Corporate Performance Manager & Safeguarding Officer), Tina Maryan (Area Planning Officer), Christie McCombe (Area Planning Officer), Sally Gabriel (Member Services Manager) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN (CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL IN THE CHAIR)

RESOLVED that Cllr J M Downes be elected Chairman of the Economy Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2022/2023.

2 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Cllr N V Davey be elected Vice Chairman of the Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2022/2023.

3 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllr Mrs S Griggs and Cllr J Wright, who was substituted by Cllr S Clist.

4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present and none had registered to ask a question in advance.

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

No interests were declared under this item.

6 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2022 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

7 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had the following announcements to make:

- He informed the Group that item 13 on the agenda, 'Revenue and Capital Outturn Report for 2021-2022', would be taken as the first item of business.
- He requested that all future items on the agenda explain what part of the Corporate Plan they relate to.

8 **START TIME OF MEETINGS FOR 2022/2023**

It was **AGREED** that the start time of meetings for the remainder of the municipal year should remain at 5.30pm.

9 **REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN REPORT FOR 2021 - 2022 (00:10:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive presenting the Revenue and Capital Outturn figures for the financial year 2021/22 for both the General Fund (GF) and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Corporate Manager for Financial Services outlined the contents of the report and explained that the general fund underspend of £29k was an excellent return and showed a good degree of financial forecasting.

Consideration was given to:

- Reduced levels of income due to the pandemic including car parks, leisure and business rates.
- The reduction in levels of Government funding received for the Council.
- Higher contract staffing levels due to sickness and unfilled vacancies.
- The significant grants provided by the Government which were passed onto residents.
- The movement of reserves remained 10% above the minimum agreed by the Cabinet.
- The Treasury position had shown a greater return than forecasted.

The Chairman passed on the thanks of the PDG to the Revenue and Benefits team for all their work in redistributing the Government grants in such a timely manner. He also thanked the Finance team for their hard work in bringing the budget in as close to target as possible given the extremely challenging circumstances.

Note: *Report previously circulated and attached to the minutes

10 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND UPDATE (00:15:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Place providing Members with information regarding the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) government report (launched in April 2022) and the amount of funding allocated to Mid Devon. The report also outlined a way forward with regard to the formulation of the required Investment Strategy to inform Mid Devon's UKSPF planned expenditure.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- This was a crucial source of funding which was part of the Government's 'Levelling Up' agenda.
- The Council's allocation was just over £1m and would be spread over 3 years.
- An investment plan would need to be drawn up by 1st August 2022 and then approved by Government.
- A stakeholder group had been established to support the development of the MDDC investment plan.
- Preliminary feedback was given from recent networking events and a job fair.
- The Council was working closely with Devon County Council in what was an evolving process and still in the early stages of development.
- It was hoped economies of scale could be achieved across the authorities involved.

The Chairman stated that whilst this was not as much funding as had been hoped for (and was spread over 3 years) even small amounts could be beneficial and the Council needed to ensure the funding received was used to best effect across Mid Devon.

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

11 JUNCTIONS 27 AND 28 FOCUS (00:21:00)

The Group had requested at the previous meeting that they receive information with regard to possible development opportunities at J27 and J28 on the M5 and that a discussion take place thereafter. The Chairman asked that the Group be given a steer from officers as to what it could do to help facilitate progress in this area going forwards.

In order to facilitate discussion the Group received two presentations:

Firstly from the BE Group presenting the 'Culm Employment and Skills Strategy':

- The BE Group had been commissioned to undertake an in depth study which could feed into the Masterplan.
- A base line analysis had been undertaken which provided information in relation to potential opportunities. This included an assessment of industrial property demand where unfortunately opportunities were limited at the current time.
- Green construction and greener energy opportunities were an attractive option given the good connectivity within the area. There was a potential to attract high value investment in this area.

- Liaison with local colleges was taking place in order to provide the necessary skills.
- There was an increase in demand for more energy efficient buildings.
- Age related care facilities were also identified as an important opportunity providing employment and support for the local community.
- Business start-up facilities and on going support was crucial.
- Since the pandemic the whole dynamic of office working had changed in terms of the need, scale and type of office space required by businesses. One advantage of this was more home working and the need for employees to travel less to the larger cities.

Consideration was given to:

- Higher costs involved in greener construction and would these be passed on to businesses?
- The need for substantial infrastructure improvements which were always extremely expensive. A 'cocktail' of funding would be required to support delivery of such interventions.
- The need, already identified by the PDG, for more incubator / start up space within the district.
- Development was needed for the benefit of Cullompton as a whole.
- A strong desire for development not to take place in a piecemeal fashion.
- 'Green retro fitting' would need circa 2500 employees, currently there were circa 40, this presented an exciting opportunity for colleges to offer training opportunities.
- The study will be extremely helpful in shaping the Garden Village scheme, its relationship with Cullompton and the need for it to be holistic in nature.
- Small scale units and incubation space was perceived to be vital to its success.
- The Garden Village had the benefit of a nearby town centre, it would support growth in the district, it would provide an opportunity to develop our own businesses and if employment could be increased it would reduce the amount of commuting outside of the district.

It was **AGREED** that the Economic Development team should undertake some focused work to consider what MDDC might do to support the development of small scale industrial units, incubation space and other economic development initiatives in Cullompton and the wider Mid Devon district.

The second presentation was provided by the Eden Project, the key highlights of which were as follows:

- Original proposals had changed due to the pandemic. Land ownership had also changed in some locations.
- Consideration is being given to identify trends in the way people were living their lives and how they were spending their money.
- This was significant site with anybody travelling to Cornwall having to pass by it.
- Local businesses, such as food producers, could be heavily promoted.
- Respect would be maintained for the landscape.
- There was a potential to provide a service station 'for the future'.

- Electrification and renewable energy would be a significant factor within the development.
- A workshop was planned to look at the Masterplan and the technical implications of the proposals, a public consultation exercise would take place after that.
- The Project team were keen to hear from Mid Devon elected Members regarding their views on development ideas and encouraged them to engage with the Project team.

Consideration was given to:

- The lack of adequate infrastructure, for example, highways and public transport, as expressed following the previous presentation and the costs involved in correcting this.
- Whether adequate facilities could be provided for significant numbers of lorry drivers.
- Changes in what was being proposed now compared to previous proposals.
- The effect upon Tiverton traders and would development affect the number of people visiting Tiverton?
- A new Local Plan was being developed which could facilitate some of these new ideas albeit existing Local Plan provisions were still in place.

It was **AGREED** that once progress had been made in the development of proposals, the necessary parties return to update the Group as it was keen to support projects that would bring an economic benefit to the residents of Mid Devon.

Notes: (i) Cllr R J Dolley declared a personal interest in that he sponsored three sports clubs in Cullompton. He also stated that he knew people who owned land in Sampford Peverell.

12 **WORK PROGRAMME AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT FOR 2022/2023 (01:39:00)**

The Group had before it a report * from the District Solicitor and Monitoring Officer setting out the role of the PDG including the results of the residents survey and the current work programme.

It was explained that this was an opportunity for the Group to focus on the areas that fell under its remit and to specifically identify areas of work that it wanted to focus on bearing in mind the feedback from the residents survey.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- How the Group had changed its focus from merely receiving reports for information to being more proactive in its approach.
- The need for the work programme to be strongly linked to the Corporate Plan at all times.
- The results of the residents survey and the areas falling under the responsibility of the group particularly, tourism, car parking and support to businesses.

It was **AGREED** that the Group should receive a quarterly update on the work programme and that discussions take place with the relevant officers to ensure key

elements with the survey results feature in the work programme going forwards. Also that consideration be given to the impact of second homes and Council Tax.

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

13 **CORPORATE PLAN MID POINT REVIEW (01:46:00)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Chief Executive considering the progress against delivery for the Corporate Plan at its midway point. This had previously been presented to the Cabinet on 5 April 2022. Feedback was now being sought from Policy Development Groups in order to inform an update to the Cabinet in July.

The Chief Executive explained that the Corporate Plan had been agreed just prior to the pandemic and therefore it was not as far along as originally hoped but that some progress had been made. He informed Members that it was now prudent to revisit the plan to establish what could be realistically be completed in the timeframe to 2024.

The following issues were identified:

- The Corporate Plan was a vital document setting out what the Council wanted to achieve. Resources, including officer time, needed to be used to best effect in order to achieve the aims identified within it.
- The challenges presented as a result of the pandemic and the current and future 'cost of living crisis' upon the Council being able to achieve its goals whilst supporting its local residents suffering financial hardship.
- There was a lack of desire to remove ambitions from the Corporate Plan even providing for these challenges.
- Staff turnover at 20% and the challenges this presented.
- High energy costs affecting local businesses and whether or not they could survive.

It was **AGREED** that the Economic Development team would make contact with businesses to gain an understanding of the effect of increased energy costs upon them so that a body of evidence could be built up to inform debate with Government.

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

14 **TEAM WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE (02:07:00)**

The following update was provided by way of presentation on the work of the Economic Development team since the last meeting:

- Up to Easter the ED Team had been fully engaged in managing and delivering the Covid-related Business Grants, with a total of £1.97 million of grants being distributed to struggling businesses in the last round of funding.
- Since Easter members of the team had been re-engaging with ED projects.
- Tiverton Job Fair, 25th May – a joint project with Tiverton JobCentre Plus (DWP) to provide a job fair at Tiverton Market for local employers and job-seekers.
- Tiverton Public Realm – Phase 1 – signposting.

- Cullompton Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) – concept design for public realm enhancements approved for consultation by Cabinet; distribution of first grants.
- Initial Asylum Seekers Accommodation at Tiverton Hotel – coordination of Community Support for 70 asylum seekers.
- Household Support Fund, £144k distributed to Households in need between October 21 and end of March 2022.
- Household Support Fund Mark 2 – (now supported by Revs and Bens team).
- Homes for Ukraine – current work – facilitating wraparound support from VCSE for Ukrainian guests.
- Visit Mid Devon – Leisure, Tourism & Hospitality Business event on 18th May. Very useful presentations on digital marketing, the benefits and opportunities for shorter food supply chains. Also, tourism recovery and the future of tourism in the south west.

Consideration was given to the language issues faced by Ukrainian guests and the apps available via the internet and iPhones to help with this. The majority wanted to work and become independent.

15 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (02:23:00)**

It was **AGREED** that items for the next and future meetings should be informed by the discussions this evening, by current priorities and always be linked to the aims of the Corporate Plan.

(The meeting ended at 7.55 pm)

CHAIRMAN