

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TEAM UPDATE REPORT**

**Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr Richard Chesterton  
**Responsible Officer:** Richard Marsh, Director of Place

**Reason for Report:** To update members on activities undertaken by the Economic Development Team during the last quarter.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That members note the contents of the report.

**Financial Implications:** The report is an information report and does not of itself have any financial implications.

**Budget and Policy Framework:** The activities described in the report help to deliver the Council's Corporate Plan and the objectives and actions identified in Mid Devon's Economic Strategy. There are no further budget implications that have not been subject of previous reports.

**Legal Implications:** There are no legal implications arising from this information report.

**Risk Assessment:** There are no further risks associated with the updates in this report that have not already been reported.

**Equality Impact Assessment:** No equality implications have been identified.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** The work of the Growth, Economy and Delivery team supports the corporate objectives for the economy:

- Bringing new businesses into the District
- Business development and growth
- Improving and regenerating our town centres
- Growing the tourism sector

**Impact on Climate Change:** The impact of individual projects on climate change has been included in the individual reports that will have already been presented to committee.

### **1.0 Background**

1.1 This report provides an update on activities carried out by the Economic Development Team over the last two months, since the last committee meeting.

1.2 During this period the largest piece of work has been developing detailed project plans for the interventions outlined in the Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan. In the absence of any indication from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Community (DLUHC) to the contrary, we have to assume that they are happy with the content of the Investment Plan and plan accordingly. Four of the proposed interventions will be directly delivered by the Economic Development team, including the initiatives under the 'Love your

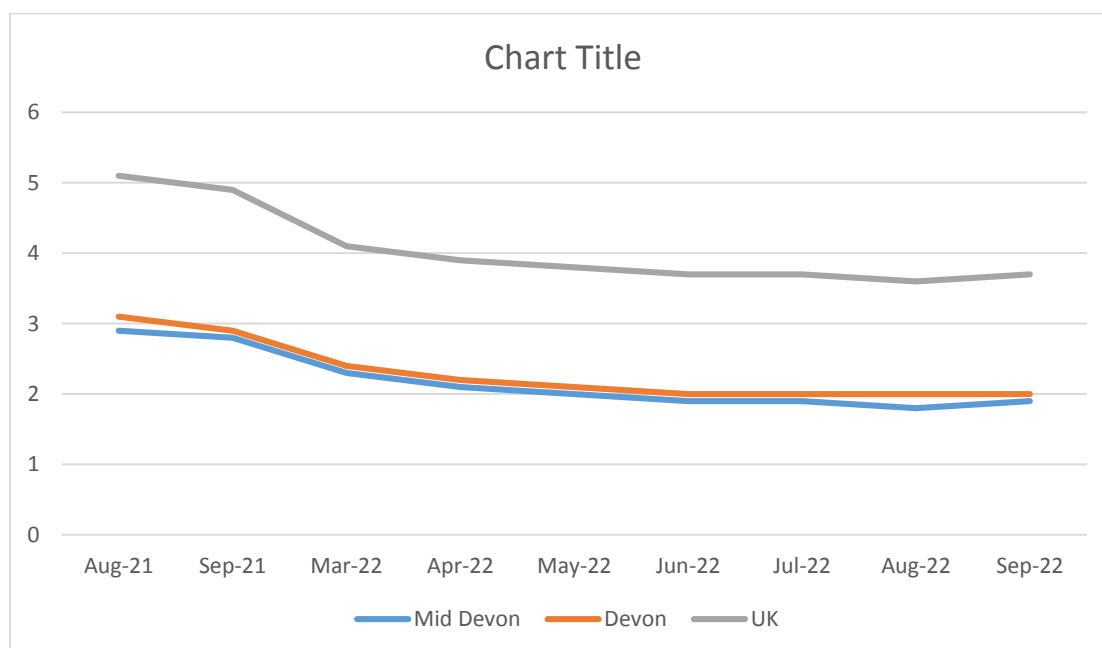
Town Centre' programme, the Work Hub Development programme, Farm to Fork initiative, and Supporting the Visitor Economy. Members of the team have each taken a lead on developing these projects and will report back on progress, once we have approval from DLUHC to begin implementation.

## 2.0 Job Fairs - Unemployment Statistics

2.1 MDDC Economic Development team has been working with JobCentre Plus in Tiverton to put on Jobs Fairs at the Pannier Market. The latest event on the 5<sup>th</sup> October saw 17 employers and over 250 participants. Feedback from the employers have been positive and they would like to return to further job fairs held in the future. Several individuals achieved interviews from the event and were successful in receiving employment. We have one last event being held on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November being a 'Wellbeing and Moving Forward' event for those with disabilities. The next events will be held in the New Year with hosting one in Cullompton as a priority.

2.2 The latest unemployment statistics show a slight rise in unemployment levels in September. However, this is well within expected annual fluctuations, as the autumn often brings a slight increase in unemployment due to the end of seasonal work.

Area	Aug 21	Sep 21	Mar 22	Apr 22	May 22	Jun 22	Jul 22	Aug 22	Sep 22	Mar 20-Sep 22
Mid Devon	2.9	2.8	2.3	2.1	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.9	-18%
Devon	3.1	2.9	2.4	2.2	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	-16%
UK	5.1	4.9	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.7	7%



### 3.0 Shop Vacancy Surveys

3.1 Each quarter, members of the team carry out a shop survey in Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton. The latest survey for October shows that vacancy rates in Cullompton remain extremely high and well above the national average of 13.9% (Local Data Company). Over the year, rates in Tiverton and Cullompton have been rising gradually, but rates in Tiverton and Crediton remain well below the national average. Crediton has continued to maintain very low vacancy rates

	<b>Crediton</b>	<b>Cullompton</b>	<b>Tiverton</b>
<b>Jan-22</b>	6.8%	14.1%	6.6%
<b>Apr-22</b>	5.8%	14.0%	7.0%
<b>Jul-22</b>	5.8%	18.6%	7.5%
<b>Oct-22</b>	4.1%	22.1%	8.9%

3.2 The Local Data Company notes the following factors which have contributed to poor trading figures across high streets nationally:

- Extreme staff shortages
- Increasing pay rates demanded by staff and pay competition from other sectors making trading margins more difficult
- Covid loan payback and increased VAT since April 2022
- Making up lost ground for sometimes severe loss of business during Covid lockdowns
- Rapid increases in the price of goods and materials, some of which cannot be passed onto customers
- Rapidly declining loss of disposable income among potential shoppers and business customers linked to large increases in the cost of living and mortgage rates, with pay rates not keeping pace
- The Bank of England has recently reported that the risk of imminent recession and difficult business conditions has increased significantly during 2022 and 2023. The Devon Federation of Small Businesses has reported that many of its members are concerned about their future.

3.3 The launch of Shopfront Enhancement Schemes in Tiverton and Crediton and the initiatives planned under the 'Love your Town Centre' banner and funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund, will hopefully go some way to alleviate this situation.

### 4.0 Cullompton High Street Heritage Action Zone

4.1 After a second round of recruitment we are appointing a part time Cullompton HAZ Project Office, who will be working three days a week on managing the grants programme. We currently have four grant applications in process, with the first two schemes being delivered on the ground.

4.2 Consultation on the public realm projects has now been completed, and the comments and results of this consultation are being considered by the design team and incorporated into the final design. Rising costs of materials due to the current economic situation, and delay in delivery of this project are the greatest risk to its delivery.

## **5.0 Crediton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme**

5.1 We are currently in the process of preparing to launch a Shopfront Enhancement Scheme in Crediton to mirror the one being launched in Tiverton very soon. We hope to have this launched by the New Year to help the businesses in the town centre upgrade their shopfronts or signage.

## **6.0 Homes for Ukraine**

6.1 We continue to support the Council's involvement in the Homes for Ukraine programme, helping to commission the necessary support for Ukrainian families as they settle in the UK. Over the last few months in conjunction with the Corporate Manager for Public Health, Regulation and Housing we have commissioned Churches Housing Action Team (CHAT) to provide a Ukrainian support worker to undertake welcome visits, and to support and sign-post guests to essential services; and Citizens's Advice to provide specialist technical support with benefits and other financial and legal issues. More recently, with the possibility of further housing support needs emerging at the end of the initial six month period, we have now contracted with CHAT to provide a housing resettlement scheme which will actively work with hosts to maintain hosting arrangements, and support Ukrainian households transfer to the Private Rented Sector if required.

### **Contact for more Information:**

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### **Circulation of the Report:**

Cllr Richard Chesterton  
Cllr John Downes  
Leadership Team

### **List of Background Papers:**