

**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**

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

## 1.1 Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF)

Since the last Committee meeting, the Economic Development Team has received confirmation of our successful funding bid for SPF from the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC). Mid Devon District Council has secured £67,748 for capital projects and £61,398 for revenue projects (plus a further £20,000 capacity funding to cover the costs of forming the bid). The funding confirmed is for year 1 (2022/23) only; confirmation of funding of SPF for years 2 and 3 is subject to successfully spending allocated funding in year 1 first. The Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) only closed for applications on 30 November, so we do not expect to hear the outcome from this bid until after Christmas. Year 1 funding must be spent (not committed) before the end of March 2023; to that effect, we have prepared a delivery plan for year one projects to ensure swift and meaningful use of the funds given the short timescale.

## 1.2 Unemployment Statistics

The latest unemployment statistics for November 2022, as shown by claimant count, are as follows:

### Total Claimant Count (age 16+)

Area	November 2020	November 2021	November 2022	Oct 22 to Nov 22	Nov 21 to Nov 22	Nov 21 to Nov 22
lacu:Devon	20,095	12,670	9,480	360	-3,190	-25%
lacu:Plymouth	10,175	7,180	5,425	235	-1,755	-24%
lacu:Somerset	15,595	10,260	7,930	240	-2,330	-23%
lacu:Torbay	5,555	3,305	2,500	105	-805	-24%
ladu:East Devon	3,200	2,010	1,525	80	-485	-24%
ladu:Exeter	3,545	2,305	1,725	55	-580	-25%
ladu:Mid Devon	1,830	1,260	925	50	-335	-27%
ladu:North Devon	2,800	1,700	1,440	75	-260	-15%
ladu:South Hams	2,100	1,290	925	-10	-365	-28%
ladu:Teignbridge	3,410	2,155	1,505	70	-650	-30%
ladu:Torrige	1,935	1,140	840	5	-300	-26%
ladu:West Devon	1,275	815	595	35	-220	-27%
country:United Kingdom	2,604,825	1,881,715	1,524,395	35,055	-357,320	-19%

- After a long period of falls in Claimant Count since post-Covid re-openings, the count in Devon has begun to rise.
- The overall claimant count rate for working age population (16-64) in Devon was still low at 2%, compared with 3.6% for the UK. In Mid Devon, this is 1.9%.
- Total number of claimants in Mid Devon in November was 925. This is 50 higher than in October.
- Usually in Devon in November, Christmas vacancies often help the claimant count rate – this appears to not have materialised this year.
- The rate for under 25s in Mid Devon rose by 10 people (140 in October and 150 in November). Comparably with the other Districts, there were

rises everywhere except in Torrridge, where it fell by 5 people. The largest changes were a rise of 25 in Teignbridge and 20 each in East Devon and Exeter.

- The rate for over 50s in Mid Devon rose slightly by 5 people with a mixed picture across the County. There were small falls in Exeter, South Hams and Teignbridge and rises elsewhere. The largest rises were in North Devon (+25 claimants) and Torrridge (+20 claimants).
- High economic inactivity rates for the over 50s age group are expected now to beginning to be impacted by the rising cost of living, with a subtle return to the workplace taking place for some people, but also rising claimant counts in some areas.

The Economic Development Team has worked with the DWP on a number of careers fairs. The next events are due to take place in February.

### **1.3 Town Centres Update**

Each quarter, members of the team carry out a shop survey in Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton, monitoring shop vacancy rates. The next survey is due to be completed in January 2023 and will reported at the next Economy PDG.

This PDG has previously requested wider town centre health reports. In addition, to shop vacancy rates, these look at other indicators alongside each other to give us a more complete picture as to how a town is performing such as: crime statistics, parking vends, bus ticket sales (where this data is shared with us). The Forward Planning team has commissioned a Retail, Tourism and Leisure Study, which they are in the process of awarding a contract for. Amongst other things, this study will compile full town centre health checks for Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton. Therefore, we propose sharing this information with the PDG when it's been published (projected for summer 2023) and then continuing with regular reviews for each town, reporting on an individual town at a time.

The Tiverton and Crediton Shopfront Enhancement Schemes, which recently received approved by Economy PDG and Cabinet, launched in December 2022. Information about the schemes have been shared with the towns via the local business groups and through direct emails to businesses. In its first week, the team received five enquiries. These schemes complement the Heritage Action Zone Shopfront Improvement Scheme running in Cullompton, which is also open for applications.

Tiverton's Public Realm Enhancement Project is progressing with the new pedestrian fingerposts scheduled for installation early in the New Year.

Work continues on the Crediton Masterplan; a tender exercise recently completed and we're progressing the appointment of consultants.

The team welcomed a new Heritage Action Zone Project Officer in November 2022 who is progressing the grant schemes in Cullompton. Public consultation for the public realm improvement works in the Higher Bull Ring is in the final stages, looking at specifics such as locations for benches and electrical sockets.

## 1.4 Visitor Economy

The Visit Mid Devon project continues to support our leisure, tourism and hospitality businesses in partnership with Tiverton Museum (TIC service). To date the website and social media platforms have been a useful tool to support our businesses and town centres. We continue to offer a free business listing to Mid Devon's leisure, tourism and hospitality businesses in order to support them through this difficult time. The project allows us to build good relations with the sector and identify how we can help them going forward. We strive to increase the number of hits to the website through creating interesting and engaging blogs (supporting the shop local campaign etc) and promoting the project through a range of channels such as Visit Devon's guide and Facebook ads.

As a recap for the 2022/23 year, in addition to the above:

- The [Visit Mid Devon website](#) has received 55,000 views with 47,000 unique visitors this year, which is nearly a 30% increase from last year. We have published 237 listings to date, which promote our businesses and key towns and villages.
- We held a successful networking event in May, which aimed to support our leisure and tourism businesses following the pandemic. 84 businesses registered to attend. Guest speakers such as Kate Doodson from Cosmic and Alistair from SW Tourism Alliance were well received, including business support stands and we had great feedback from those who attended. We learnt about the value of social media and other innovative technology for business success and the areas of growth for Tourism
- We produced the [Farm Shop and Market Trail](#) as part of our [Taste Mid Devon](#) campaign, which we presented at the Mid Devon Show in July. We concentrated on promoting Taste Mid Devon this year in order to support our local producers. We also created the [fishing and fisheries guide](#) and are looking to do more information leaflets next year. We know from the networking event that accommodation businesses would welcome leaflets promoting dog-friendly places to visit (eateries/attractions).
- We ran several paid promotional campaigns during April to July across Facebook and Instagram promoting our local attractions and producers as well as things to do during school holidays. These campaigns resulted in an increased following and we now have 3,000 followers on Facebook and 1,600 followers on Instagram and from their success, we are running similar boosted campaigns at least quarterly. The Autumn campaigns focused on half-term activities and pumpkin picking.

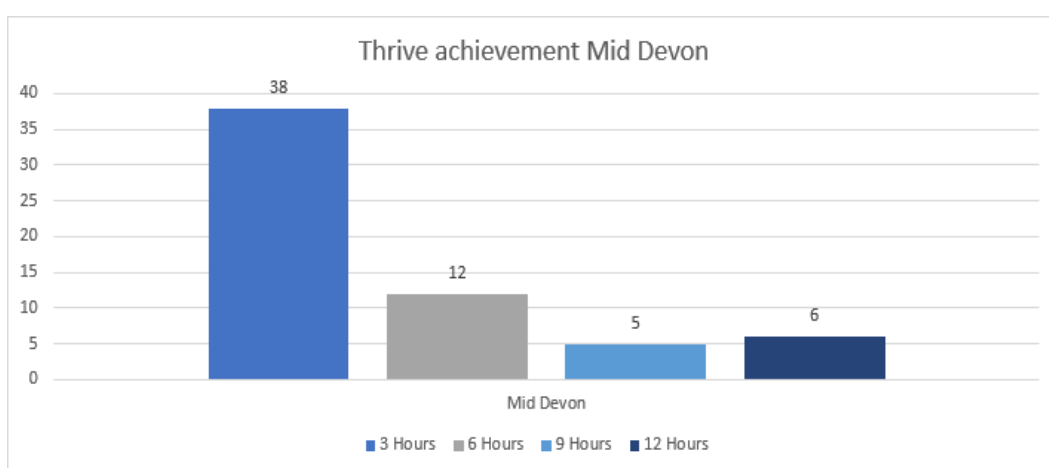
Looking ahead, we hope that there will be opportunities through the Shared Prosperity Fund to support new projects, diversifications and business growth for Mid Devon's Visitor Economy.

## 1.5 Business Support

Mid Devon Officers are looking into options regarding need and provision for flexible workspace in Mid Devon.

There are a number of free training and support programmes that our businesses can access at present, including:

- The [Digital Boost Devon programme](#), which offers targeted advice and specialist digital support for businesses across Devon. The programme aims to develop knowledge, strategy and insights for SMEs to gain competitive advantage through their digital offer, operations and business models.
- The [Thrive Programme](#) launched in 2022 continues until the end of March 2023. Businesses can access a tailored support service with 1:1 sessions and access to training and webinars on specific business topics, up to four 3-hour modules of free support. There is also a specialist branch of Thrive focusing on agricultural business support. The graph below shows take-up in Mid Devon to date. We are working with Devon County Council with a view to extending this provision through the Shared Prosperity Fund.



**Contact for more Information:**

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**Circulation of the Report:**

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**List of Background Papers:**