

Report for: Economy PDG

Date of Meeting: 4 January 2024

Subject: Economic Development Team Update

Cabinet Member: Cllr Steve Keable, Planning & Regeneration

Responsible Officer: Richard Marsh, Director of Place

Exempt: N/A

Wards Affected: All wards

Enclosures: N/A

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

To update members on activities undertaken by the Economic Development Team during the last two months.

Recommendation(s):

That members note the contents of the report.

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

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.

2.0 Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF)

2.1 Prosperity Programme Grants

- 2.1.1 We received 13 expressions of interest under round 2 of the Prosperity Programme. Of these, nine have been invited to Full Application, two have been referred back to the application for more information and two were declined (one with the option to reapply to a later round and one did not meet the scheme criteria). In addition, we are expecting a further six applications carried forward from round 1 (where the applicant deferred to round 2).
- 2.1.2 Expressions of Interest fall within each of the Prosperity Programme themes but the Visitor Economy theme has the highest requests (both number and grant value).
- 2.1.3 The Funding Panel meet on 17 January to determine grant awards. All applications are scored and priority given to those that score the highest where remaining grant budgets permit. However, where budgets do not allow all potentially successful applications to be supported, the Panel can make tentative grant awards from 2024/25 subject to receipt of funding from Government.
- 2.1.4 The next round of applications closes on 31 January with funding decisions by end of February. A summary of grant decisions from both upcoming Funding Panels will be shared with the PDG at the next meeting.

2.2 Field to Fork

- 2.2.1 We have offered grant funding to Food Drink Devon towards a networking scheme to support Mid Devon producers. The grant will provide free or subsidised membership to Mid Devon Food and drink businesses who will be new to the network. Food Drink Devon are an established network of food and drink businesses and membership includes mentoring, network events and publicity opportunities. This project will operate for two years and provide between 8 and 24 free new memberships in each year.
- 2.2.2 In addition to the membership support, we are also working with Food Drink Devon along with Devon Food Partnership and Heart of the South West Growth Hub to host a food and drink networking event in Mid Devon. This will provide network opportunities for new Mid Devon Food Drink Devon members, showcasing opportunities and a number of information sharing / training elements, this is likely to take place in late spring.
- 2.2.3 We are currently finalising details with Devon County Show to be able to support a number of 'new small producer' stands at the Devon County Show. This will allow up to eight Mid Devon food and drink producers to experience a much larger, three day trading opportunity in May 2024. A similar scheme supporting Mid Devon producers to attend Mid Devon Show at their 2023 event worked well, allowing 10 producers to attend and reach new markets. The offer with

Mid Devon Show will be repeated in 2024 with the addition of a 'Taste Mid Devon' marquee to promote the producers collectively.

2.3 Visitor Economy

2.3.1 Project work continues on both the Walking Festival and Tiverton Swan Trail. The programme for the Walking Festival is being collated, with the initial content to be featured in a promotional campaign in January to encourage holiday bookings in Mid Devon.

2.3.2 Eight local artists have engaged with the project to decorate one or two of the swans each. The Facebook page for the Trail (<https://www.facebook.com/TheFlockThatRock>) is now live and will feature regular video clips and photographs of the artwork in progress. The swans are with the artists until the end of January, when they will return to us for an anti-graffiti lacquer coating before being ready for installation by the end of March. Landowner engagement has completed and the Planning Application for the Swan Trail will go to Planning Committee in February (reference 23/01875/FULL).

2.4 People and Skills

2.4.1 Under the Shared Prosperity Fund, we receive funding in 2024/25 for a third pillar of project support: People and Skills. Under this pillar, we outlined delivery of three skills programmes:

- Green Skills
- Supported Employment (formerly known as 'Ability not Disability')
- Youth Skills (helping young people access employment)

2.4.2 Supporting Green Skills, the team has awarded a grant to Apricot Centre, towards a Regenerative Agriculture Training, Skills and Employment Project. This project will train new entrant farmers and growers, and partner them with established farm businesses, to grow their regenerative business or help them transition to regenerative systems; increase carbon sequestration and biodiversity through these methodologies (Level 2, Level 3 and 4 training courses). The project will also support existing farm businesses to retrain in Regenerative Agriculture methodologies. Apricot are working with Barton Farm in Tiverton to support training in Mid Devon, as well as from their base in South Hams. Due to the delivery timescales, this project will start in January 2024.

2.4.3 The team is in discussions with Devon County Council over the potential to support an Employment and Skills Hub project to deliver the remaining project outputs under People and Skills. Led by County's Economy Enterprise and Skills team, the Hub is based on an agile, responsive, place-based approach to supporting communities, not currently engaged with the current offers, to access employment, education, and training. It will be staffed by advisers who

work alongside individuals in an informal environment to support the journey into employment and further education.

2.5 General

2.5.1 The next Be Grant Ready workshop will be held on 24 January 2024. Six places are currently booked, with 14 still available.

2.5.2 The next round of Vibrant Town Centres opens for applications on 1 March 2024 with a closing deadline of 31 March 2024. For the next two rounds, the scheme will be expanded to allow applications from Bampton as well as the three main market towns (Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton). As with previous rounds, this project supports delivery of the Shared Prosperity Intervention E6: *Local arts, cultural, heritage & creative activities*. In particular, it looks to support arts and cultural events and programmes. As we have achieved our target outputs for E6, promotional material for the next rounds will specifically encourage activities and events that tie-in with the walking festival programme to also support E8: *Campaigns to encourage visits and exploring of local area*.

3.0 Town Centre Health

3.1 Quarter 4 shopfront surveys are due to take place in January, with data reported to the following PDG in March.

4.0 General Updates

4.1 Local Visitor Economy Partnership

4.1.1 The Heart of the South West LEP has commissioned Tomorrow's Tourism to develop a business plan for two Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs), one in Devon and one in Somerset.

4.1.2 Surveys with tourism businesses and stakeholders across Devon identified that there was support for the development of a county-based LVEP and recognition for the ambition and activity relating to the visitor economy being undertaken by existing DMOs (Destination Management Organisations) and Local Authorities.

4.1.3 In October, representatives from the County's Destination Management Organisations, Local Authorities and other key sectoral stakeholders attended a workshop to look at the role of a potential LVEP for Devon. Workshop attendees concluded that the following would be appropriate lead priorities for the LVEP:

- Advocacy and leadership activity
- Better data to inform economic impact, direction and performance

- New product development
- Position and profile
- Skills and workforce
- Sustainable tourism

4.1.4 A further workshop in December, looked at potential partnership and governance frameworks and proposals for an outline plan (for the purposes of applying to Visit England for LVEP status). We await the collated results from this workshop and will share this with Members upon receipt.

Financial Implications

The report is an information report and does not of itself have any financial implications and require any decisions. The report is however providing members with information which is pertinent to the utilisation of SPF and REPF grant monies as well as other grant funding.

It is hoped that the report demonstrates that the Economy and Growth team is achieving in line with expectations in terms of the successful utilisation of grant monies and other financial resources.

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.

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.

Equalities Impact Assessment

It is acknowledged that there is a relationship between economy and equality whereby disadvantaged groups of people can have greater or lesser opportunities for economic advantage depending on the climate and growth potential. Economically disadvantaged individuals are socially disadvantaged individuals whose ability to compete in the free enterprise system has been impaired due to diminished capital or credit opportunities as compared to others in the same or similar line of business who are not socially disadvantaged. There are unfortunate intersections between socioeconomic status and those with protected characteristics or from marginalised or minority communities putting them at greater risk of social and therefore economic disadvantage. Social and digital isolation issues across a rural district has the potential to exacerbate these risks.

Mid Devon's Prosperity Programme and the Economic Strategy outline key projects to tackle these risks and grow the economy. They are supported by equality assessments and communication plans.

Key strands of the work of the Economy and Growth team continue to seek to address and tackle causes of inequality and deprivation.

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

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

Date: 12 Dec 2023

Statutory Officer: Maria DeLeiburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 12 Dec 2023

Chief Officer: Richard Marsh

Agreed by Corporate Director

Date: 12 Dec 2023

Performance and risk: Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

Date: 14/12/2023

Cabinet member notified: yes

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Zoë Lentell, Economic Development Team Leader

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Background papers: