

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY & ASSETS POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 19 September 2024 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

J M Downes (Chair)
M Farrell, G Cochran, M Fletcher, L Knight,
N Letch and A Stirling

Apology

Councillor

R Roberts

Also Present

Officers

Andrew Jarrett (Deputy Chief Executive (S151)), Richard Marsh (Director of Place & Economy), Paul Deal (Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience), Adrian Welsh (Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery), Zoë Lentell (Economic Development Team Leader), Linda Perry (Economic Development Officer) and Sarah Lees (Democratic Services Officer)

Councillors

Online

S Keable, J Buczkowski, G Duchesne, D Wulff,
E Buczkowski, A Glover and G Westcott

Officers Online

Dr Stephen Carr (Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager)

16 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllr R Roberts.

17 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public.

18 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

No interests were declared under this item.

19 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 20 June 2024, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

20 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair stated that the Group had received a very interesting briefing session prior to the meeting on the assets owned by the Council. He requested that if this had stimulated any thoughts or ideas around the area of assets that needed further discussion by the Policy Development Group that Members should bring these to the attention of the Clerk for the next or subsequent meeting.

21 PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD Q1 (00:06:00)

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED**, summary information * reflecting performance in the Economy & Assets areas for quarter 1 2024/2025.

The following was highlighted on the Performance Dashboard:

- The Dashboards were intended to provide an 'at a glance' representation of performance in the Economy & Assets area.
- The Dashboards allowed Members to easily see whether service areas were 'on track' and the use of pie charts and RAG (Red/Amber/Green) ratings were used to facilitate this.
- There were three corporate risks in relation to this Policy Development Group (PDG).
- Reference was made to the recent funding announcement regarding the Cullompton Relief Road, this would be monitored going forwards. Further reference was made to the amber rating in relation to capital slippage on the percentage of projects.

The Chair stated that the Dashboard showed an overall positive position for the areas falling under the remit of this Group.

Note: * Dashboards previously circulated.

22 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - GENERAL FUND (GF) (00:08:00)

The Group were presented with a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive presenting the updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which covered the period 2025/2026 to 2028/2029 and took into account the Council's key strategies and demonstrated it had the financial resources to deliver the new Corporate Plan.

The contents of the report were outlined with particular reference to:

- The MTFP covered a period from 2025/26 to 2028/29. Normally this would be a 5 year plan but the Council was currently awaiting greater clarification from the new Government and the Chancellor's budget announcement on 30th October 2024. The 5th year will be added following this.
- The MTFP focussed on a framework of principles those being: (i) General Fund Reserves (ii) Optimise Income Generation (iii) Allocation of Revenue Resources (iv) Allocation of Capital Resources
- The MTFP built on a number of assumptions around inflation which were shown in Appendix 1.
- Overall the result of pressures on the budget left a £1.2m gap rising to 4m by year 4 if the Council took no action.

- Over the summer officers had looked at options which had been RAG rated as red, amber, green in terms of risk and deliverability.
- If the green and amber savings were accepted this would reduce the £1.2m gap down to circa £400,000
- All Policy Development Groups would be asked to look at possible savings which would then be presented to Cabinet.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Whether there were any indications regarding the level of Local Government funding emerging following the election of the new Government?
- It was explained that some 'snippets' of information were coming through regarding planning fees and housing targets and funding but little else at the current time.
- The 30th October Government budget would be very important in terms of setting the direction and intention of the Government towards lower tiers of government.
- It was hoped that since the new Government had not been in power for very long, next year's Local Government settlement would roll forward but this would not be known until approximately the middle of December.
- The Local Government settlement only represented 10% of overall funding.
- The level of Council Tax increase that district councils' could set was expected to be 2% or £5, whichever was highest.
- Conversations had been taking place with Town and Parish Councils' regarding them acquiring assets at an agreed price but no firm offers had been received yet.
- There would still be a shortfall for next year's budget even if the proposals set out in the report were agreed, therefore Members were encouraged to come forward with additional suggestions for savings.

The Group **NOTED** the following:

1. The updated MTFP for the General Fund covering the years 2025/26 to 2028/29;
2. The principles and approach to balancing the General Fund Revenue Budget outlined in paragraph 6.2;
3. The emerging budget pressures included within Appendix 3;

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:

The green and amber round 1 budget proposals as set out in Appendix 4a, be approved.

(Proposed by Cllr L Knight and seconded by Cllr G Cochran)

Reason for the decision

As set out in the report.

Note: (i) * Report previously circulated.
(ii) Cllr N Letch requested that her abstention from voting be recorded.

23 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TEAM UPDATE REPORT (00:24:00)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED** a report from the Director of Place and Economy updating Members on projects and activities undertaken by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team during the last quarter. It also provided an update on plans for review of the Economic Strategy for Mid Devon.

The following was highlighted in the report:

- Work continued on the delivery of the final phase of the Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Fund Delivery Plan. Following completion of the second quarter, the team would undertake the next round of monitoring reviews to measure progress against projected outputs and outcomes. This would be completed by the end of October 2024 and an update would be presented to the PDG in November.
- Planning Permission was granted for the 'Change of Use' of the Market Centre building. A second Planning Application was now live for the physical amendments to the building to facilitate the improved workspace. The team were tendering for the contractor to deliver the works with the aim (subject to Planning Permission being granted) of this commencing in early November. In addition to the Prosperity Funding, the team had secured a small 'Quick Wins' grant from Devon County of £5,000 towards this project.
- The walking festival was underway and the team had received positive feedback so far. More venues had come forward since the advertisements had gone live and an evaluation of the projects would be undertaken upon completion.
- The Swan Trail would cease at the end of September and on 7 November there would be an auction to 'sell off' the swans.
- The team had proactively participated in the Mid Devon Show providing a marquee, support and advice in relation to the 'Field to Fork' campaign. There had been much positive engagement with the public.
- The team had used the 'People and Skills' funding to work with Devon County Council and partner authorities on an 'Employment and Skills Hub'. The support included a dedicated advisor offering free 1:1 employment and skills advice, signposting and more direct support with identifying training opportunities available. The Council had two hubs in Mid Devon: one in Cullompton Library and one in Tiverton at Old Heathcoat School Community Centre.
- The Economic Strategy was due for review. A series of workshops would be organised for the PDG to help develop this. It was hoped by doing this Members and officers would gain a better understanding of what 'economic success' looked like. It would be a chance to gather together relevant data and to answer questions such as: What kinds of outcomes did we want as a Council and where were efforts best placed? Experience gained from delivering the Shared Prosperity Fund would be helpful. This work would be undertaken alongside development of the Destination Management Plan. Dates for the workshops would be circulated to the Group in due course. It was requested that one of these workshops be open to all Members to make contributions and suggestions. It was agreed that this would be a good idea.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The loss of funding from the European Union and the impact of this in the future in terms of not being able to deliver such diverse projects in the future.

The Chair wished to record the Group's thanks to the Economic Development Team for all their hard work and dedication in delivering these projects so successfully.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

24 **GREEN ENTERPRISE GRANTS UPDATE (00:46:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Director of Place and Economy providing an update on the Green Enterprise Grants and overview of post project evaluation.

The contents of the report were outlined with particular reference to the following:

- Following a successful bid to the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (Local Growth Fund), the team had run a Green Enterprise Grant Scheme offering small capital grants (between £500 and £5,000) to carbon reduction projects that could be delivered by 31 December 2024.
- A pilot scheme had been run to explore demand.
- A cross team approach had been used working collaboratively with Planning colleagues and the Climate Sustainability Specialist.
- Businesses were expected to match 50% of the cash needed to run each carbon reduction project.
- No projects had required planning permission and the cost of each had not exceeded £25k.
- Businesses had been encouraged to come forward with projects that could be delivered quickly.
- Delivery timescales had been quite restrictive.
- Over 13,000 kg CO₂ emissions had been avoided.
- A list of successful case studies had been created as a result of this project.
- The grant scheme was viewed to be a successful pilot project and there was the potential to run a second phase subject to securing funding

The Chair thanked the team for the 'extraordinary' work they had undertaken in relation to this project.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

25 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (00:40:00)**

The items already listed in the work programme for the next meeting were **NOTED**, however, it was stated that there would be a presentation from 'Apricot' at the next meeting and not 'COTIE' as indicated in the work programme. This would provide the Group with information regarding regenerative farming.

(The meeting ended at 6.21 pm)

CHAIRMAN