

MINUTES of a MEETING of the ECONOMY & ASSETS POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 6 March 2025 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

J M Downes (Chair)
G Cochran, M Farrell (Vice-Chair),
M Fletcher, L Knight, J Poynton, R Roberts
and A Stirling

Apology

Councillor

N Letch

Also Present

Officers

Richard Marsh (Director of Place & Economy), Adrian Welsh (Strategic Manager for Growth, Economy and Delivery), Linda Perry (Economic Development Officer) and Sarah Lees (Democratic Services Officer)

**Councillors
Online**

J Buczkowski, S Keable and L G J Kennedy

Also in

Attendance

Debbie Stafford (Senior Economic Development Officer – Youth & Inclusion, DCC), Ben Davies (Employment and Youth Hubs Manager, DCC) and Sarah Flower (Mid Devon Hub Co-Ordinator, DCC)

38 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllr N Letch.

39 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

40 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

No interests were declared under this item.

41 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 28 November 2024, were approved as a correct record and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

42 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair had no announcements to make.

43 EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS HUB PROJECT PRESENTATION (00:08:00)

Representatives from Devon County Council (DCC) provided the Group with a presentation on the Employment and Skills Hub project. This included the following summary information:

- The Hub service was based on a successful approach developed via the Exeter Youth Hub which was set up in 2021.
- It was open to anyone looking to move into employment, education and training with a particular focus on people who had struggled to engage with existing provision or self-advocation.
- The Hub worked within the community for the community, tailoring support to specific needs. Although the service offer was consistent across all the Hubs, how it responded to need would vary depending on local demographics, sectors and employers, existing provision etc.
- There was a 'warm handover' and networking was fundamental to Hub success and outcomes.
- It was an 'in person' service offered across two locations in Mid Devon.
- Hub advisers worked alongside individuals in an informal environment to support their journey into employment and further education.
- Virtual / online support was available to those who may struggle to access an 'in-person' service or who preferred a combination.
- For those looking to self-serve or who only needed a light touch intervention, further advice and information could be found on the DCC Employment and Skills website.
- Hub locations were in Tiverton Library and 'the Bookery' in Crediton. There had been:
 - Over 120 referrals
 - 55 people supported
 - 7 into employment / self employment, 18 into training/education
 - 21 disabled, 3 care experienced
 - 147 outputs which was 132% of total outputs (111) and 219% of targets up until the end of Q3
 - 46 outcomes which was 56% of total outcomes (82) and 115% of targets up until the end of Q3
- Three different case studies were presented illustrating how the project had helped particular individuals.
- A long-term clear offer for individuals which was:
 - A proven model of person-centred triage and supported employment.
 - Strategic collective action, providing economies of scale and removing areas of duplication.
 - One team informed of the whole skills and employment offer including; supported internships, supported employment, Careers Hub projects,

Multiply Numeracy, Skills Bootcamps, Digital Series, Digital Skills Partnership, T:Levels and Apprenticeships.

- Maximising local funding to provide a high-quality experience across in-person, virtual and self-serve support.
- Standardized and Shared Management Information system mapped to Shared Prosperity Funding (SPF) Outputs and Outcomes.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The project spread its net widely proactively seeking links with community groups such as Churches Housing Action Team (CHAT), wellbeing Schemes and volunteering agencies.
- There were strong links with adult learning schemes and mental health services.
- The 'One front door' approach was a key to success.
- Constructive working relationships with District Councils was also key, the hub project could not operate where this relationship failed to exist.
- There were mental health difficulties with approximately 50% of the people who engaged with the project. Building up an individual's confidence was vital but this often took considerable time. Engagement with the project was voluntary, it was not mandated by other agencies.
- Hubs needed to situate themselves in locations which offered easy access for those wanting to use them.
- The security of funding for the project moving forwards was unknown.

The Chair thanked the Devon County Council representatives for attending and providing the presentation to the Group which had been very interesting. He requested that they be invited to return in 12 month's time to provide an update on progress by which time there may be more information available on the future funding situation.

44 **PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD Q3 (00:47:00)**

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED**, a slide * showing performance information in the Economy & Assets area under the General Fund. The following was highlighted:

- There was an amber rating for Car Parking Income and the projected outturn.
- Capital slippage of projects was shown with a red rating. This was primarily due to a delay in starting the Cullompton Relief Road project and swimming pool projects at the Leisure Centres.
- The vast majority of ratings however were shown as green and many projects were over delivering in terms of output.

Discussion took place with regard to:

- Business Rateable Value targets were not shown on the Dashboard, why was this? It was explained that this was more than likely due to the fluctuations in this area and it was not within the Council's gift to be able to set these accurately. The Director of Place and Economy stated that he would check with the service lead in this area and report back to the Group.

- A slight decline in Car Park income could be due to revised permit rates and/or a reflection of the current national economic position.
- Optimism was high within various railway forums that progress regarding the Cullompton Railway Station was being made and the local MP's were lobbying hard.
- A lot had been achieved over the past 2/3 years to support local traders and businesses through the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) such as business grants, shop front enhancement schemes, the Mid Devon Show etc. The team would continue to do what it could wherever possible but were probably at the limit of what they could within the SPF although it was noted that this had been extended for a further year at a lower level. Future Government funding in this area was very uncertain.
- Tiverton Pannier Market continued to perform very well on Friday's and Saturday's, however, Tuesday's were still proving to be challenging. The Market Strategy was currently being revised and would be brought to the Group at a future meeting.
- The next meeting of the Car Parking Working Group would be taking place on 17th March the results of which would be reported back to this Group at the June meeting.

Note: * Slide previously circulated.

45 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TEAM UPDATE (00:58:00)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Place and Economy providing an update on activities carried out by the Growth, Economy and Delivery Team since the last Policy Development Group Meeting.

A presentation was provided which summarised activities as follows:

- The Tiverton Work Hub which was now fully up and running.
- 'Field to Fork' support to businesses, showcasing events, planned workshops and the forthcoming photography campaign.
- Visit Mid Devon promotional work, various campaigns and working with the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP).
- People and Skills – business support, the Prosper Business Support Programme and the Devon Agri-Tech Alliance project delivery.
- A slide showing the reduced revenue and capital funding available next year through SPF4. This brought into focus the reduced amount of funding available next year compared with the current year.
- There would be a Business Rate Relief Drop in Session on 20th March 2025 at Phoenix House to provide advice to businesses.
- The Economic Strategy Review – the last session with all Members was due to take place on 3rd April. The Strategy would also be informed by the upcoming business survey.
- Emerging themes for the PDG Work Programme for the coming year which included:
 - Business Survey Results
 - Continued formulation and publication of Economic Strategy Review
 - Devon and Partners Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) Growth Plan

- The formulation of Destination Management Strategy
- Shared Prosperity Year 4 Updates
- New business (commercial) floor space delivery
- Town centre vacancy rates

Consideration was given to:

- Town Centre footfall data was now captured using mobile phone technology, this provided much more sophisticated information than previous techniques.
- Visitor spend was under pressure and this was reflected in the reduced car park income. Businesses were also being negatively affected by changes in Business Rates.
- Vacancy rates being higher than the national average and what could be done to address that.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

46 **CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025 (01:29:00)**

The Group had before it and **NOTED** the * Chair's Annual Report for 2024/2025. The Chair indicated that whilst this provided a useful summary of the work that the Group had undertaken during the previous 12 months he also wanted the Group to use it as a tool to plan for the year ahead. The intention was for this report to highlight the successes of the previous year, the highs, the lows, the challenges, the opportunities created and it also needed to set out the realistic aspirations for the coming 12 months. He hoped that it could be used to inform an agenda item at the first meeting of each new municipal year.

The officer highlighted the key achievements during 2024/2025 many of which had been included in his presentation under the previous item. These included but were not limited to the following:

- The Swan Trail.
- The Walking Festival.
- Business presence at the Mid Devon Show.
- Meet the Producer competition.
- Devon Agri-Tech Alliance.
- 22 businesses supported through the Food and Drink programme.
- Shop Front Enhancements.
- Media campaigns.
- The Heritage Asset Zone work in Cullompton including the cultural programme.
- The Crediton Masterplan had been adopted.
- Key infrastructure including the receipt of funding for the Cullompton Relief Road.
- Progress on J28.
- National Rail initiatives.
- The setting up of a new Strategic Business Forum.
- Administration of the Green Grants Scheme.

The Chair stated that on behalf of the Group he wanted it placed on record that this was an exceptional list of achievements given how small the team were. He wished to express his gratitude for the hard work and dedication shown by all those in the team. The Economy & Assets PDG was unlike other Policy Development Groups in that it was not service driven and relied upon different funding streams which were constantly fluctuating and unpredictable.

The Chair hoped that the final slide given in the team update presentation, listing the emerging themes, could be used as a prompt for a work plan discussion at the next meeting.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

47 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (01:37:00)**

The items already listed in the work programme for the next meeting were **NOTED**.

In addition the following was also requested to be on the agenda:

- Car Parking Working Group Update
- Work programme discussion for 2025/2026

(The meeting ended at 7.08 pm)

CHAIR