

Economic Development Update

This last 6 months have seen Economic Development in Mid Devon truly putting our Council on the map and developing our services and relationships with the business community.

The Economic Development Officer (EDO) has played a leading role in developing two funding bids to deliver the Growth Hub service for the Heart of the South West. The approach that the EDO has taken has led to national interest in our bids. In October he was asked to attend a meeting at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in Westminster to present about the approach he has taken to developing a Growth Hub service and to provide advice and guidance to other groups across the UK.

The EDO has also helped to develop our role as part of Exeter & the Heart of Devon (EHOD), developing shared economic activities across Mid Devon, East Devon, Exeter and Teignbridge. They are operating as the EHOD Economic Partnership. The group is now undertaking joint procurement of our business support services to achieve economies of scale and to enable our own funding to be matched with pots of European funding. This will effectively double the money that we are putting towards business support in Mid Devon without any extra expense on our part (we will also get more business support delivered for the same money).

The Economic Partnership is also developing a joint Economic Strategy and exploring how they approach inward investment in a manner that is fair across all of the local authorities involved. This work has recently resulted in Mid Devon attracting a business that is currently based in Exeter to relocate into Tiverton. The EDO has led this activity working with his counterparts in Exeter and in a manner that satisfies the needs of all parties concerned. The business operates in the Professional, Scientific and Technical services sector, and has large national and international clients. They are looking to rapidly grow over the next 3 years and could become a significant employer in Mid Devon.

The EDO has also attracted a company to Mid Devon Business Park, expanding their existing operation from Wales into England. This company has taken on unit space and purchased a plot on Mid Devon Business Park, some of which they will develop to occupy and the rest will be let out to other businesses.

The EDO is also working with local businesses to help them grow their activities, and this is proving to be fruitful. For example, a business near Halberton, operating in the distribution sector, has recently had an opportunity to greatly increase the scale of its activities. The EDO has been supporting the business and creating links between them and UKTI and the Chinese British Business Council to help them establish export channels across Europe, America, Australia and even China. The company is also being supported to help expand its manufacturing capabilities and is relocating (locally) to enable their team to grow significantly in order to support the increased demand for their products.

The EDO is sits on the regional steering group for Better Business for All (BBfA). Through this role he is developing a pilot project with TESCO to support their

supplier network and improve relationships with regulatory services. If the project proves successful, it will be rolled out nationally.

Some of the issues being faced by Economic Development include:

- Delivery timescales for various public funded projects (for example, the LEADER project could take businesses up to 6 months to get an application approved)
- Lack of flexibility in some of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) supported programmes (for example, the Unlocking Business Investment programme has put so many barriers in front of one of our fastest growing businesses that they are unable to access the support it should offer)
- Time and workload of Economic Development (there are numerous projects being worked on at the moment and this puts a limit on what can be done strategically and in terms of delivery)

The EDO has been trying to get these issues addressed so that businesses can be better supported.

With the LEADER project, the decision making panel has agreed to deal with outline applications electronically, and this will shave a couple of months off the application process, making it more accessible for businesses that require funding in a timely manner.

With the Unlocking Business Investment programme, the EDO is working with his Economic Development counterparts to lobby the LEP to encourage those working on the programme to try to find ways to help businesses, rather than find ways not to support them.

With regards to the workload and time available to the Economic Development team, the EDO has researched a European programme that allows local authorities to tap into graduates from across the EU at no cost. He is now pulling together some project roles and basic job descriptions that can be used to attract interns to support his activities. There is also work being undertaken to support members of staff at MDDC to become SFEDI accredited (this is the nationally recognised accreditation programme for business advisors). Several members of staff from our Community Development team and some of our regulatory services are scheduled to be put through the programme so that they are better able to support business clients on behalf of the local authority.

Please note that the EDO has not provided business names in this document, as most of the activities he is involved in with the business community are of a commercially sensitive nature. He does not want to breach the trust he is building with businesses by putting details of their activities into the public domain, until they are happy to do so.