

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 15 September 2016 at 6.00 pm

Present

Councillors

Mrs B M Hull (Chairman)
Mrs A R Berry, J M Downes, K Busch,
Mrs S Griggs, F J Rosamond and
Mrs N Woollatt

Apologies

Councillor

R Evans

Also Present

Councillor

R J Chesterton

Also Present

Officers

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Andrew Jarrett (Director of Finance, Assets and Resources), Jenny Clifford (Head of Planning and Regeneration), Amy Tregellas (Head of Communities and Governance and Monitoring Officer), Andrew Cawdron (Finance Manager), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development & Regeneration Manager), Chris Shears (Economic Development Officer), Alan Ottey (Market Manager) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

24 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllr R Evans.

25 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

26 MINUTES

The Minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

27 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had no announcements to make other than to state that, Andrew Cawdron, the Finance Manager, would support the Group in the future regarding any financial matters.

28 FINANCIAL MONITORING - 3 MONTHS TO JUNE 2016

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.

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

- The forecasted General Fund deficit for the current year was currently showing as £202k.
- There was a £20k deficit for market income however the Market Manager was actively seeking new traders and it was still early in the financial year.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Footfall figures for Tiverton being down. The question was asked as to how footfall figures were collected and what they were measured against. It was confirmed that in relation to the market counts were undertaken on market days and at three different time slots throughout the day. It could not be possible to guarantee 100% accuracy but they would typically be within 10% and would indicate a trend.
- The Group had responsibility for holding service managers and their budgets to account for the areas that fell within the Economy remit. This would be especially important during the budget setting exercise at the end of the year.
- The fact that this Group was now responsible for overseeing car parking and there would be an update on vends at the next meeting and regular six monthly reviews.
- There had been a need to incur some expenditure in relation to commissioning some work to support the Local Plan, for example, traffic assessment modelling, the Council did not have this type of expertise in house.
- There needed to be further clarity regarding the areas the Group would be responsible for in terms of financial monitoring and the Constitution needed to reflect this.

The Finance Manager stated that in future the report would be clearer in terms of showing which committee various budget lines came under.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

29 BUSINESS RATES CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Following a request made at the last meeting, the Director of Finance, Assets and Resources and the Finance Manager provided the Group with a presentation regarding the Business Rates Consultation exercise currently being run nationally.

This included the following relevant information:

- The Government required a response from local authorities by 26 September 2016. More technical consultation would be issued in the autumn and

legislation itself in early 2017. By April 2017 the first pilot scheme would commence.

- A document containing thirty six questions had been sent to all local authorities.
- Currently 50% of Business Rates were retained nationally with Mid Devon District Council keeping 13% of what it collected.
- A key principle of the new scheme would be that 100% of Business rates would be retained by Councils nationally but the Government needed to decide how to allocate 'fairly' across the country and between different authorities.
- The Government wanted to reward growth whilst recognising the need to manage risk in a new system.
- The first group of questions covered a review of Councils to establish a new baseline for each Council and their 'relative' need'.
- The second group of questions covered how to account for tax growth but no details were provided on how local tax growth would be reflected in future funding allocations.
- The third group covered how to transition to the new scheme funding levels which could be more or less for an individual Council. It was not possible at this stage to say whether Mid Devon would benefit or be penalised by the new system.
- Even if the Council received more monies in the future it would have more responsibilities and as a result more risk which would require more ear marked reserves to provide a buffer against possible funding swings.

The Director of Finance, Assets and Resources stated that he would draft a response to the questions and copy it to all Members the following week together with the slides that had been shown during the meeting.

30 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK Q1**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from The Head of Communities and Governance providing Members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for the first quarter of 2016/17 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The number of apprentices working for the Council was not seen as an adequate indicator for the aim 'Focus on business retention and growth'.
- It was confirmed that performance indicators were being looked at corporately.
- The Group were requested to identify the indicators that it would find meaningful in the future. Some existing indicators were based on annually produced national statistics which may not have much meaning locally.
- The question was asked as to why the 'annual target' for the number of empty shops seemed to be higher than on the 'actual number' for the previous year, surely the target should be lower. It was confirmed that officers would look at these targets again.
- It was reiterated that the funding to support economic projects reflected Mid Devon District Councils share of the Exeter & Heart of Devon Business Support Funding (£53,092) and the Devon Enabling Fund (£3,750).

- A structural survey had been commissioned to identify the cause of the bow in some of the glass doors of the market. However, this was no longer as serious as first thought and possibly related to badly fitted hinges.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

31 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Head of Communities and Governance providing it with an update on the work and projects of the Economic Development and Regeneration team.

Discussion took place regarding the following projects:

Supporting Key Business and Inward Investment Opportunities

- At the last meeting a potential investment with Hitchcocks, a horticultural business, had been mentioned, this was now advancing to the final stages.
- It was requested that the business projects in this section be listed in the report in future.

Exeter and the Heart of Devon (EHOD)

It was confirmed that the workshop referred to at the last meeting had now taken place with all the planning leads to discuss how economic development teams would feed into the planning process. An update would be provided at the next meeting.

Better Business for All

TESCO were undertaking an engagement exercise with the supplier network seeking honest opinion as to what the issues were. The Council was working to partner with them in order to get feedback on the regulatory services in the south west and how the Council could help to improve the relationship with the supplier network.

Growth Hub

It was reported that the bid for the diagnostic and bespoke support element of the Growth Hub had been successful. Devon County Council would be the contract holder and sitting under that would be a partnership of 5 delivery organisations which would deliver detailed diagnostics to businesses across Devon and Somerset.

It was further reported that there would be workshops and all sorts of activities to support the business community to ensure collaborative working. The project had ambitious targets and as soon as the contract was signed the Group would be informed as to what those targets were. Through the district's involvement it had ensured a strong presence in the governance of the project.

Incubator Space / Work-hub project

A feasibility study would be undertaken to explore possible expansion in the Hayridge Centre.

Tourism

A verbal update would be reported at the next meeting regarding the Tourism Strategy consultation.

The 'face to face' survey sent out to 200 businesses and which had been very detailed had been an adjunct to a number of other means of gathering feedback from the local community on the strengths and weaknesses of current provision to tourists.

Tiverton Coach Park

The Chairman stated that it was disappointing there had only been 5 bookings since April. The Head of Communities and Governance stated that the relevant officer would be actively marketing Tiverton to coach companies in the near future.

High Street Innovation Fund

- The Cullompton Farmers Market were in the process of revising their business plan and the website was a part of that. Members would be updated following the meeting as to what the sum of £9,500 allocated to them had been used for.
- The question was asked as to why footfall figures were down for Tiverton despite money being allocated to the Tivvy Bumper Trail and the Access Tiverton project? It was explained that the Museum had reported higher visitor number as a result of these two projects. The Tivvy Bumper Trail had been launched during the summer holidays and it maybe that family's had been away for much of the summer having an effect on footfall within the town.
- The Tiverton Dementia Action Alliance project was still in the early stages, part of the next stage would be to roll out training so that shop staff, for example, knew how to deal with somebody having difficulties.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

32 **TIVERTON TOWN CENTRE ACTION PLAN AND MARKET STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Group received an update from the Tiverton Town Centre and Market Manager regarding the recent consultation on the Tiverton Town Centre Action Plan and the Market Strategy *. It was explained that there had been some recent staffing changes in that the previous Town Centre Manager had now left and that for the next 12 months at least, Alan Ottey, the Market Manager, would be covering the Town Centre Manager post for 2 and a half days while Zoe Lentell and Alan Ottey would be covering the Market Manager role for 2 and a half days each.

The Group were informed that a consultation had taken place with some helpful responses. The intention was now to amalgamate both documents into one since they were closely linked and one document would provide more clarity as to the overall vision. The finalised version for approval would be brought before the Group at their next meeting.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Strong leadership from the Council was needed together with a strong partnership with and between local businesses.
- The 'drab' appearance of the town as visitors walked from the Multi Storey Car Park up through to the High Street. The back of the shops was seen as being particularly off putting. The Group were reminded that a Tiverton Town Centre Masterplan was being commissioned which would address these very issues as well as the future role and function of the town centre and regeneration as a whole.
- The expertise of the Tiverton Town Centre Manager would be shared with colleagues in both Crediton and Cullompton.
- It was stated that previous attempts to bring groups together within the town had not been very successful, however, the new Town Centre Manager explained that it took time and that a positive attitude needed to be fostered whereby, having learnt from lessons in the past, opportunities for collaborative working for the benefit of the town needed to be promoted and encouraged.
- Food markets and arts and crafts were nationally the most popular reasons for people visiting markets.
- The Council was working with Petroc in trying to encourage young people to think about what it took to run a business.

Note: Tiverton Town Centre Action Plan and Market Strategy previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

33 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

In addition to the items already listed in the work programme, the following was requested to be on the agenda for the next meeting:

- An update on car park vends
- An update on Rural Broadband
- Budget planning for 2017/18
- Verbal update on the Tourism Strategy consultation
- The Joint Exeter and the Heart of Devon (EHOD) Economic Development Strategy.

(The meeting ended at 7.40 pm)

CHAIRMAN