

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 18 May 2017 at 6.00 pm

Present

Councillors

Mrs B M Hull (Chairman)
Mrs A R Berry, Mrs C Collis, J M Downes, R Evans,
S G Flaws, F J Rosamond and Mrs N Woollatt

Also Present

Councillor

R J Chesterton

Present

Officers

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Jill May (Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development & Regeneration Manager), Alan Ottey (Tiverton Town Centre and Market Manager) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

1 **Election of Chairman for 2017/18 (Vice Chairman of the Council, in the Chair)**

RESOLVED that Cllr Mrs B Hull be elected Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2017/18.

Cllr Mrs B M Hull then took the Chair.

2 **Election of Vice Chairman for 2017/18**

RESOLVED that Cllr R Evans be elected Vice Chairman of the Group for the municipal year 2017/18.

3 **Apologies and Substitute Members**

There were no apologies for absence.

4 **Public Question Time**

There were no members of the public present.

5 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2017 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

6 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Mrs C A Collis as a new Member to the Group. She hoped that she would find it enjoyable and interesting.

7 Performance and Risk for 2016-17

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Director of Growth and Chief Executive providing it with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2016/17 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

The contents of the report were outlined with the following areas being highlighted:

- The number of business rate accounts was up on the target figure for the year which was seen as positive.
- The number of Apprentice starts was lower than targeted for.
- Up until the end of March 2017 the number of empty shops across the district was below what had been expected which was seen as being very positive, however, in recent weeks the number had increased in Tiverton and Cullompton.
- Unfortunately commencement of the cleaning contract for the Pannier Market had been delayed in order to procure as part of a wider process incorporating the entire corporate estate (to achieve better value). However, essential cleaning had taken place.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The types of Performance Indicators that would best reflect Corporate Plan targets, for example, levels of unemployment or the number of business sites available.
- The Peer Review had focussed very much on economic issues.
- Service managers were being tasked with thinking about future activities and how these could be measured against the agreed set of corporate objectives.

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

8 Apprenticeship Levy Briefing

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a briefing paper * from the HR Group Manager providing an overview of the Apprenticeship Levy. The Director of Corporate Affairs and Business Transformation explained that as from April 2017 the way the Government funded apprenticeships in England were changing. Employers with a pay bill over £3 million were expected to pay 0.5% of their pay bill towards a new 'Apprenticeship Levy' to be spent purely on apprenticeship standards to increase skills within the workplace. For Mid Devon District Council this meant that the amount it had to pay would be approximately £50k per year. The Council had 24 months to spend the money otherwise it would be returned to central Government.

It was further explained that the amount of money the Council had to pay might go up simply because it employed more apprentices. It did mean that the pot of money could be used for additional staff development as it was not age related. The Council

was working with Petroc on this and the scheme was still very much in the early stages.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Apprentices were able to gain a qualification such as a BTEC at the end of their apprenticeship.
- Often apprentices were able to apply for positions within the Council at the end of their placements.
- Many businesses considered having an apprentice as the norm.
- Mid Devon District Council apprentices had been asked for their views on how to attract younger people to work for the organisation.

Note: * Briefing paper previously circulated, copy attached to the signed minutes.

9 **Feasibility of running a Farmers Market in Tiverton**

The Group had before it a report * from the Town Centre and Market Manager providing Members with information on the feasibility of holding a 'Farmers Market' in Tiverton Market and to appreciate the implications and to decide which option should be adopted.

The officer outlined the contents of the report which included the following:

- The need to analyse the customer base, footfall within the town and local demographics.
- Ascertain whether there was a desire for a Farmers Market. What publicity would be needed and how to attract customers.
- Other questions that needed answering included:
 - What would be the best day of the week to hold it on?
 - Mid week or weekend?
 - How would traders be recruited?
 - When would restocking take place?
 - How 'local' is 'local'?
 - Should there be more encouragement to trade farmers produce at the normal market?
- Resources were very limited.
- A number of options were available ranging from doing nothing to sourcing a private operator.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The need to avoid competition with other Farmers Markets in other towns within the district. The Cullompton Framers Market had declined in recent years and any competition with Tiverton would not be beneficial. Days and times of any potential new markets would need to be a crucial consideration so as to avoid clashes.
- Quality produce would be a key factor in attracting customers.
- There was a general consensus that Sunday was not a good day to hold a market.
- Promotion and publicity costs.

- The potential benefits of using social media as an advertising tool.
- Possible missed opportunities to work with Cullompton and Crediton by inviting them to the British Street Foods Awards on Sunday 21st May.
- A minimum number of traders in the region of 12 to 15 would be needed to make a venture viable.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that trade on the normal retail market be encouraged to encompass all goods and produce found on a Farmers' Market and promote it as part of the offer of Tiverton Pannier Market.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs N Woollatt and seconded by Cllr F J Rosamond)

Note: (i) * Report previously circulated, copy attached to the signed minutes.

(ii) Cllr S Flaws requested that his vote against the decision be recorded.

10 Economic Development Service Update

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Chief Executive and Director of Growth updating Members on progress with key Economic Development Service priorities.

Additional information was provided in relation to the following projects:

Mills / Hydro Project

Developments in this area fitted in well with the need to look at higher productivity projects. This was an exciting area of development both nationally and internationally. A Business Plan was being developed and an application would be made for European funding at the end of May 2017.

Broadband

It was now clear that Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) was not meeting the needs of rural districts. Conversations were taking place regarding another scheme but there was nothing to report at the moment. The plea for reliable Broadband was reiterated as it was severely affecting businesses in rural wards. It was stated that consideration was being given to inviting an officer from Devon County Council to come and give a Member briefing by way of an update to Members.

Cullompton Springfest and Electric Nights

Both these events had been very successful. The South West heat of the British Street Food Awards would be held at the Tiverton Pannier Market on 21st May 2017.

A brief discussion took place regarding the positive nature of the report and how exciting some of the opportunities presented within it were.

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

11 **Manufacturing and Engineering Sector - Briefing Paper**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Economic Development and Regeneration Manager regarding the Manufacturing and Engineering Sectors within Mid Devon. This report was one of a series that considered the employment and economic value of various sectors of the Mid Devon economy.

The contents of the report were outlined with the following information being highlighted:

- Mid Devon was strong in this area compared to other districts.
- The main areas of manufacturing activity were in the food and drink sector, textiles, paper and paper products and metal fabrication.
- Some of the largest companies working in the district were at the top end of their markets and trading globally.
- However, the high proportion of food and drink businesses within the sector which leaves manufacturing vulnerable.
- Because of the heavy reliance on the food and drink industry there were pressures on other areas of the manufacturing industry.
- The introduction of more technology would inevitably reduce employment within this sector.

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

12 **Tiverton Shopfront Facelift Grant Scheme**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Chief Executive and Director of Growth updating Members on the progress of the Town Shopfront Enhancement Schemes.

The Tiverton Shopfront Facelift Grant Scheme was set up in 2015 with £15k from the High Street Innovation Fund to provide small grants to encourage shop-owners / tenants to improve the physical state and visual appearance of their shopfronts in order to enhance the retail environment and preserve conservation features.

Currently, there was approximately £10k uncommitted spend within the scheme. The Town Centre Manager continued to promote the scheme through his regular newsletter and in liaison with the Conservation Officer to target specific properties for improvement.

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

13 **High Street Innovation Fund**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Chief Executive and Director of Growth updating Members on the completion of the High Street Innovation Fund phase 2. A summary of the projects which had been supported was provided within the report. It was explained that the Fund was now fully allocated and the programme was now closed.

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

14 **Feedback from the Cabinet Member of Planning and Economic Regeneration walking leaflets**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration provided the Group with the rationale behind the recent Cabinet decision regarding walking leaflets. He explained that there had been a long discussion at the Cabinet meeting but one or two other Cabinet Members had considered that the walking guides could be developed in parallel with the other tourism work that was planned reducing the need for additional resource. The Group were informed that some of the guides, which were still relevant and up to date, had recently been welcomed by some parishes and had been brought back into use.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The external facades of some industrial units in rural landscapes being very visible and out of keeping with the surroundings. The Cabinet Member stated that once the Local Plan process had been progressed the Planning Department would consider this as part of the Design Guide for the district. He stated that an appropriate design guide was just as important for industrial units as it was for houses.
- The disappointment by some Members of the Group with the Cabinet decision. They had felt that resources needed to be focussed in other areas particularly the projects listed in the Economic Development report discussed earlier in the meeting.
- Other Members of the Group had considered that the walking leaflets had presented an opportunity to raise revenue by advertising and it had been considered essential to have a tourism guide and website.
- It was pointed out by the Chief Executive that there had still been no change to the underlying resource available to progress this work.

15 **Start time of meetings**

The Group **AGREED** to hold future meetings of this Group at 5.30pm during the remainder of the municipal year.

16 **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 a future meeting:

- Green screening for industrial estates (for consideration at some point in the next 12 months).
- Peer Review comments in relation to the Council's economic aspirations (for the 7 September 2017 meeting).

(The meeting ended at 7.35 pm)

CHAIRMAN