

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **ECONOMY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 7 September 2017 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

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

Apologies

Councillor

F J Rosamond

Also Present

Councillor

R J Chesterton

Also Present

Officers

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Adrian Welsh (Group Manager Growth, Economy and Delivery), John Bodley-Scott (Economic Development Team Leader), Chris Shears (Economic Development Officer), Catherine Yandle (Internal Audit Team Leader), Roderick Hewson (Principal Accountant) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

29 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllr F J Rosamond.

30 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

31 **MINUTES**

Subject to the addition of Councillor Mrs S Griggs having attended the previous meeting the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2017 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

Councillors J M Downes and Mrs N Woollatt wished to pass on their apologies for having missed the previous meeting. This had been an oversight and was unintentional.

32 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman reminded the Group that there would be an informal workshop on Thursday 5 October at 5.30pm to begin discussions on the Economic Strategy and any other relevant matters.

33 **PERFORMANCE AND RISK FOR 2017/18 (00:02:30)**

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 2017/18 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

Consideration was given to the following:

- The Chairman commented that it was disappointing to note the number of empty shops within the district but she had thought that Tiverton was looking particularly good at the moment, especially the flowers within the town.
- The number of empty shops in Crediton being less than in Tiverton and Cullompton. A possible reason for this was that Crediton had its own retail economy with a consolidation of shops and businesses around the centre of the town.

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

34 **FINANCIAL MONITORING (00:07:08)**

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

The Principal Accountant outlined the key highlights within the report which were as follows:

- The forecasted General Fund deficit for the current year was £130k.
- The most significant service movements for the previous month were an income shortfall in Leisure Services and for the Building Control Partnership.
- Car parking income was down against budget for the first quarter due to pay and display machine replacements but it was still too early to predict a year end forecast.
- Market income was down as was footfall within Tiverton.
- Expectations regarding leisure income had been over ambitious. As part of the Medium Term Financial Planning process a more realistic view would need to be taken.

Consideration was given to:

- It was hoped that as part of the autumn statement the Government would make an announcement regarding the ability for local authorities to raise planning fees.
- Clarification was sought regarding the numbers of day and night car parking permits. The Principal Accountant stated that he would seek further information and report back to the Group.
- Discussions had commenced on leisure service provision going forwards.

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

35 CAR PARKING UPDATE ON INCOME AND VENDS (00:24:31)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report presenting the car parking outturn position for 2016/17 and providing an update on the first 3 months of 2017/18. A working group had been established during 2015/16 which had considered such matters as usage levels, benchmarked charges against neighbouring councils, possible free periods, reviewed concessions and had considered the economic consequences. As a result a new charging strategy had been introduced in 2016/17 following an extensive consultation process.

The car parking outturn figures for 2016/17 reflected a successful position where income was increased by £73k and the number of vends, notwithstanding the omissions in May and June, were maintained broadly at 2015/16 levels. The position for 2017/18 was slightly below 2016/17 levels for income at the current stage.

Discussion took place with regard to the following:

- Whether or not it was possible to receive information on the number of night time vends? Complaints had been received from local residents who had a night time permit (which commenced at 6pm) but if they returned home from work before this time they had to pay for parking which might only last half an hour. The Principal Accountant stated that he would take this example back to the Car Parking Manager and report back to the Group.
- The link between the number of shops and car parking vends falling within Cullompton.
- It was within the remit of this Group, through the autumn budget setting process to recommend a way to balance the books in this area. The Chief Executive cautioned that it was not possible to both spend more money and reduce income given the current financial position.
- The following comments were made with regard to the new pay and display car parking machines:
 - More people might park if they felt they were getting better value for money;
 - Why were there three different types of pay and display machines in three different but neighbouring authorities, why hadn't there been any joined up thinking?
 - The sign displaying the RingGo telephone number had been greatly reduced in size and was no longer obvious to the customer.
 - The new machines were complicated with small hard to read instructions on what to do.

It was requested that the Group received a breakdown on how much had been saved by the Council by operating the new pay and display registration number machines. What was or would be the cost/benefit to the Council? This request would be taken back to the relevant officer and a response provided to the Group.

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

36 **DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN CONSULTATION (00:42:03)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report from the Director for Growth and Chief Executive informing it of the results from the consultation on the Destination Management Plan.

It was explained that the Destination Management Plan was sent out for consultation to tourism businesses and other stakeholders. 13 responses had been received as well as requests for two face-to-face interviews.

Discussion took place regarding:

- Initially the number of organisations requested to take part in the consultation had been between 300 and 400.
- There was a partnership approach regarding improving tourism within the district. It needed to be business led with the Mid Devon Attractions Group working hard to make improvements. The Council wanted to facilitate the process where it could.
- Plans to improve website information were welcomed.
- The difference between grass cutting undertaken in Cornwall compared to Devon. It was felt Devon County Council needed to take more responsibility in terms of the effect the lack of grass cutting was having on the impressions taken away by tourists.

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

37 **BROADBAND - PRESENTATION ON RECENT BID SUBMISSION (00:47:50)**

The Economic Development Officer provided the Group with a presentation in relation to a recent bid submission regarding rural Broadband provision.

An exciting opportunity existed to apply for funding to enter into a programme to provide a fibre network within Mid Devon. An expression of interest had been made to the relevant funding body as well as details of a discrete project which it was very much hoped if successful could be expanded. The current situation was that whilst some parts of the district received a reasonable service, within other areas, the service provided by commercially, or via the 'Connecting Devon and Somerset' programme provided limited coverage. However, demand was high from residents and businesses and the poor coverage was providing a barrier to growth.

Details regarding the proposed project were as follows:

A loop would be created linking the villages between the Link Road and the A377 as well as the Link Road between Crediton and Tiverton along the A3072. Creating a ring was a very resilient way for building a network to enable wider coverage. The principal villages on the loop between the A361 and A377 would be:

- Withleigh (210m above sea level)
- Templeton (260m)
- Cruwys Morchard (218m)
- Pennymoor (239m)
- Puddington (206m)

- Black Dog (197m)
- Morchard Bishop (173m)
- Lapford (150m)

Who would benefit?

- As well as local residents, approximately 670 tourism businesses and 550 agricultural businesses.
- House prices had the potential to increase by 5%.

Why pick this route?

- The area was currently outside the remit of Connecting Devon and Somerset (the CDS programme).
- The height of each location was relevant.

The process

- Expressions of interest would be considered by late autumn with a full bid needing to be submitted by the beginning of 2018. The team were preparing as though the expression of interest would be successful and were busy considering the options that could be explored.

What happens now?

- Need community buy-in
- Establish route and submission sites
- Identify and contact landowners
- Create a business plan and evidence base

Other key activities

- Explore commercial opportunities
- Working with partner organisations
- Costing the fibre roll-out
- Look at alternative solutions if unsuccessful

Councillor support

- Local knowledge and contacts would be vital.
- Councillors could help in identifying existing infrastructure and could lobby for information from Connecting Devon and Somerset for direct project support.

The Group were asked to comment on the following discussion points:

- Where this project was best placed to sit within the committee structure of the Council. Both the Economy and the Community Policy Development Groups had a keen interest in this area.
- How should the Council engage with the community?
- Was this the right approach or should the private sector lead on this?

Discussion followed with regard to:

- A network ring of 12km which would enable additional beacons to be added would not be nearly as expensive as installing an optical fibre network. This would allow for greater coverage over the district but at this stage the team had been required to identify a smaller project that could be expanded upon.
- Parish Councils would be an obvious useful vehicle for local intelligence.
- There would be time to consider a whole range of options once the bid was successful.
- The business plan to address such matters as financial forecasting, likely on-costs, was the crucial next stage.
- There was a unanimous agreement that this was a project that the Council should pursue and quickly. The project area could be expanded in time but needed to start somewhere. It was very timely given that this had been a very significant problem for the district for a considerable amount of time.
- Further work was needed by the Cabinet Member and officers before deciding which committee to align this project to.

Note: A proposal to establish a working group was not supported at this stage.

38 ECONOMIC BRIEFING ON DIGITAL ECONOMY & TECHNOLOGY (01:21:25)

The Economic Development Officer provided the following information with regard to the digital economy and technology sectors:

There were approximately 225 technological and digital businesses within the district, many of which had suffered or had to relocate as a result of poor connectivity. In the wider Tiverton area there were 64 businesses, around the wider Cullompton area there were 58 and around Crediton 86. This left approximately 17 other technological and digital businesses within the district and it was anticipated that all businesses would benefit from the rural Broadband project.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The business plan would need to address capacity issues.
- The help of local Ward Members would be much appreciated especially the identification of landowners.
- Consultation with the public was also of vital importance.
- Timescales were very tight.

39 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (01:36:25)

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 regarding the current Economic Development projects, especially in relation to the Mills project.

(The meeting ended at 7.10 pm)

CHAIRMAN