

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at East Devon Business Centre, Honiton on 8 October 2009

Present:

Councillors:

Iain Chubb (Chairman)
Trevor Cope (Vice Chairman)

Malcolm Florey
Graham Godbeer

John Jeffery
Bob Peachey

Officers:

Nigel Harrison – Economic Development Officer
Chris Lane – Democratic Services Officer
Mark Williams – Chief Executive

Simon Witts, Director of Safety, Quality and Training, Flybe

Also Present

Councillors:

Ray Bloxham
Paul Diviani
Jill Elson
Peter Halse

Helen Parr
Sara Randall Johnson
Pauline Stott

Apologies:

Derek Button
Steve Hall
Ben Ingham

Stuart Luxton
Andrew Moulding
Tim Wood

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 9.10pm.

***9 Public question time**

There were no questions from the public raised at this point of the meeting.

***10 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview/Scrutiny – Economy Committee held on 3 September 2009 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***11 Flybe Learning & Skills Academy**

Members welcomed Simon Witts, Director of Safety, Quality and Training, Flybe to the meeting. He gave an update on progress with the Flybe Learning and Skills Academy

Members noted that Flybe had recently completed a £2 billion investment in its aircraft fleet, which had helped reduce aircraft emissions by 40%. There were over 1000 staff employed at Exeter which made it East Devon's biggest employer, with 550 of those being engineers. It also had Europe's biggest regional aircraft maintenance facility, with 90% of this facility being used by other airlines.

*11 **Flybe Learning & Skills Academy** (Cont)

Simon Witt's explained Flybe's training philosophy, which put customers at its heart. They aimed to provide vocational and academic training for all staff. Work should start shortly to build the Learning & Skills Academy and also a 160 bed hotel, to BRIAM standards. The overall cost would be £24 million, with £4.5 million provided by the Learning & Skills Council and £2.8 million provided by the Regional Development Agency.

It was Flybe's aim to expand its training provision, there would be capacity in the building for training other organisations and also for training tourism and hospitality organisations. The overall aim was to drive up the skills level in the South West and also to establish a centre of engineering excellence.

During discussions the following points and questions were noted:

- the Committee welcomed excited by what was happening with this development and were pleased to see opportunities provided in East Devon for engineering excellence;
- how did Flybe link with schools and colleges to attract students? They had created the Airline Masterclass, which went out to schools and colleges to try to engage students with the aviation industry;
- Flybe needed students with good academic and practical skills and had not filled its current quota of Trainees because it could not find enough students with the right skills;
- the need to tell young people that engineering was an exciting and clean environment to be in;
- vocational training was very expensive to provide. How did Flybe fund it? Funding had been gained from the Government by providing qualifications through Exeter College and the University of Exeter;
- Flybe provide placements for work experience students? There were up to four work experience students with Flybe during the summer;
- the advertising of what Flybe had to offer could be improved within schools and colleges;
- that Flybe hoped to join together the services provided for passengers at Exeter Airport such as bus and taxi provision and check in staff;
- what is Flybe's perception of East Devon District Council and how could we improve our support? East Devon had given Flybe and the Airport a lot of support;
- in response to a question regarding Flybe's future plans for expansion. It was noted that Flybe wished to create a sustainable business. Any expansion would have to be right for the company and on its own terms.

RESOLVED

1. that the Economic Development Manager write to Flybe to thank Mr Witts for making his presentation to the Committee and to congratulate the company on the progress being made with the delivery of the Learning and Skills Academy;
2. that the Council welcomes Flybe's commitment to investment in skills training and development and expresses its willingness to play a part in ensuring that other local businesses and local educational establishments are made aware of and benefit from the opportunities that will become available.

(Councillor Sara Randall Johnson declared a personal interest in this item as an employee of Flybe)

***12 Devon Employment Space Strategy**

Nigel Harrison, Economic Development Manager presented an update on progress on the Devon Employment Space Strategy. Members noted that the Local Plan departure applications for employment land had sought to overcome the gap in the employment land supply in East Devon. Members received a paper presenting the additional major sites identified in East Devon for development purpose in 2009.

Members were pleased to see that the employment land supply had been increased and that the District Council could continue with Local Plan departure applications. It was a great success for the Council that this extra amount of employment land had been allocated. However, much of this land was in the Western side of the District and there was still much work to do to provide for the eastern side of the District in towns such as Axminster, Honiton and Seaton. More employment opportunities were needed in the rural areas and market towns of East Devon.

Some concern was expressed about the manner in which the final draft Devon Employment Land Strategy had been written and whether some of the figures contained in it were accurate. It was hoped that East Devon's position could be more accurately portrayed in the completed version. There was also a need to establish a partnership with the private sector to make progress to provide more employment land.

During discussions the following additional points and questions were noted:

- why had the public not been invited to propose the provision of more sites for employment land, similar to the process to find more housing sites in the District?
- the importance of completing the Local Development Framework process was emphasised;
- the development of small employment units in redundant farm buildings ought to be encouraged;
- Chambers of Commerce ought to be encouraged to identify potential employment sites within their area;
- Members also ought to be encouraged to investigate employment land sites both in their own area and in areas other than their own ward.

RESOLVED

that the Committee welcomes the priority accorded the development of managed workspace in Axminster, Seaton, Exmouth and Honiton by the Draft Devon Employment Space Strategy and calls upon the Council to examine how through co-operation with private and public sector partners, these facilities might be delivered for the benefit of new and emerging small businesses in East Devon.

***13 East Devon Business Centre**

Members discussed the role of the East Devon Business Centre's within the Council's Economic Development Service. Members were provided with a tour of the facilities by Nigel Harrison, Economic Development Manager and Tammy Down, Facilities Manager. It was recognised that staff at the Business Centre were ambassadors for East Devon District Council and the economic development service.

It was noted that the cost and income account for 2009/10 showed that the Business Centre was very close to being cost neutral and staff were congratulated on this achievement.

*13 **East Devon Business Centre**

During discussions the following points and questions were noted:

- that but for the issue of the total internal recharge expenditure of £20,660 recharging the Business Centre would be profitable. It was questioned whether this figure could be presented further down in the accounts, below the profit line?
- that in past years the Business Centre had run at a loss;
- the possibility of Mid Devon District Council investigating building something similar, due to the success of the East Devon model;
- concerns expressed that some of the costs seemed to increase greatly in the second half of the year. The figures could be presented in a slightly different way;
- what was the turnover of businesses at the Business Centre. It was currently two and a half years;
- what outreach work does the Business Centre do? It hosts and organises East Devon Business Forum meetings, which involves contact with many of the businesses in East Devon and also helps business communicate with East Devon District Council by acting as a “middle man”.

RESOLVED

1. that the Committee notes the support available to business through the East Devon Business Centre and congratulates the Centre’s staff for their continuing commitment to the delivery of these services.
2. that the Council consider how the East Devon Business Centre might in future establish effective links with the Exeter Science Park and thereby contribute to ensuring that the opportunities available there were communicated to businesses throughout the District;
3. that a further report be made to the Committee in 6 months when the business plan for the Business Centre had been prepared, with the last three years cost and income figures provided as a comparator.

Chairman

Date.....