

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 25 February 2010

- Present:** Councillors:
Iain Chubb (Chairman)
Trevor Cope (Vice Chairman)
- Malcolm Florey
Graham Godbeer
Stuart Luxton
- Bob Peachey
Tim Wood
Steve Wragg
- Also Present** Councillors:
Paul Diviani
Jill Elson
Steve Hall
Peter Halse
Stuart Hughes
- Stephanie Jones
Ann Liverton
Graham Liverton
Andrew Moulding
Helen Parr
- Officers:
Karime Hassan- Corporate Director
Chris Lane – Democratic Services Officer
Tony Collins – Exmouth town Manager
David Mears – Seaton Town Clerk
- Apologies:** Councillors:
Ray Bloxham
Ben Ingham
- John Jeffery

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.45pm.

***18 Public question time**

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

***19 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview/Scrutiny – Economy Committee held on 21 January 2010, were confirmed and signed as a true record.

***20 Matters Arising**

Results of Devon wide Rural Business Survey (Minute *16 of 21 January 2010 refers)

Members discussed issues surrounding the Business Survey results, which indicated that employers had found skills shortages amongst their staff. The skills agenda for the District's economy needed attention and this was an area of the economy that the service was poorly positioned to deal with, work was being done by the Business Champion and the Economic Development Manager to map the skills required in the District and for the coming year this was where attention would be focussed. It was recognised that the Exeter and Heart of Devon Employment Skills board would have an increasing role to play in the District. There was considered a disconnection between business and skills development, which it was considered needed to be overcome for the good of business in East Devon.

*20 **Matters Arising** (Cont)

Results of Devon wide Rural Business Survey (Minute *16 of 21 January 2010 refers)

Karime Hassan, Corporate Director asked members of the Committee what further action they proposed to take with regard to the resolutions arising from the last meeting of the Committee. Councillor Malcolm Florey, Member Champion for Business, reported that he was beginning to look at Skills and Skills' mapping. A letter had been sent out to major business in the District inviting them to a meeting on 24 March with Simon Witts and Nigel Harrison, to discuss the skills' agenda and it was hoped this meeting would be a first step to provide an interface with training providers and help overcome skills' shortfalls.

Members considered that it was the role of Devon County Council to provide training for young people in the 16 – 19 age groups and requested that a representative of the County Council attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss this issue.

RESOLVED

that the Devon County Council Cabinet Member for Education be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee to discuss how the 16 – 19 skills agenda would be taken forward in East Devon.

(Councillor Jill Elson declared a personal interest as a Governor of Exmouth Community College. Councillor Ann Liverton declared a personal interest as a Governor of Bickton College)

*21 **Additional Meeting of the Committee**

The Chairman reported that an additional meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday 25 March 2010 at 6.30pm to discuss Employment Land in the A3052 corridor, Tim Western from King Sturge would be invited to speak at this meeting. In addition, a representative of the Federation of Small Business could be invited to speak to the Committee.

*22 **Economy and Development Service Plan 2010 – 2013**

Consideration was given to the Economy and Development Service plan for 2010 – 2013. Karime Hassan, Corporate Director, drew particular attention to the section on key issues to be faced in the next three years. This included the funding required for the New Growth Point Delivery team, which amounted to £300,000 per year including salaries, accommodation and operating expenses; this funding was not confirmed at present. In addition, attention was drawn to the need for locally managed workspace accommodation in Axminster, Exmouth, Honiton and Seaton.

During discussions, the following points and questions were noted:

- That it was hoped that work would start at Cranbrook in June 2010;
- Concerns over the funding for the New Growth Point Delivery team, particularly in view of the considerable amount of grant funding the team had achieved for the District Council for the New Growth project in recent years;
- Could the private sector provide managed workspace in the District?
- The importance of green issues and concerns that they did not seem to have made any progress in the Service Plan;
- The need to look at where the District Council could make the most impact for the economy of East Devon;
- Recognition of the significance of the CHP and the delivery of the first zero carbon volume housing development in the country;

*22 **Economy and Development Service Plan 2010 – 2013 (Cont)**

- The District Council should be able to invest to save, with funding for the New Growth Point Delivery Team being a good example of this.

RESOLVED

1. that the District Council's Carbon Strategy be discussed at a meeting of the Committee in the new Council year;
2. that funding for the New Growth Point Delivery team should be secured as a matter of priority for the benefit of the District Council as a whole.

*23 **Town Management arrangements in Exmouth and Seaton**

Consideration was given to the report of the Economic Development Manager on Town Management Arrangements in Exmouth and Seaton. The Chairman welcomed Tony Collins, Exmouth Town Manager and David Mears, Seaton Town Clerk to the meeting.

Members noted that the Exmouth Town Management Partnership had been a focus for successful co-operation between business, local authorities and the wider community in Exmouth since its inception in 2001/02. Through discussion with Seaton Town Council, it was hoped similar arrangements could be agreed for Seaton to promote both improvements to the town's shopping and visitor appeal and to complement the wider regeneration objectives for the town.

Tony Collins, Exmouth Town Manager reported that he had been appointed in mid 2007 given 'a blank piece of paper' as there had not been a Town Manager for the previous 18 months prior to his appointment. His first job had been to build a relationship with the 800 small businesses in Exmouth. Initially he had focussed on quick win projects and this had then led on to other work promoting the town more effectively. It was reported that a G8 group of businesspersons had been established to try to direct the future development of the town.

Members noted that there was currently a project, which was a private/public partnership, which was trying to attract high profile retailers to the town. There was a display advertising Exmouth arranged for this year's Devon County Show, which was 80% funded by local businesses.

During discussions, the following additional points and questions were noted:

- Do you see any danger of being considered as the manager of the Chamber of Trade? How much vision do you provide for Exmouth and its businesses? The job was to work closely with the business community, but to not direct the Chamber of Trade, but influence and advise them;
- The lack of financial commitment from the business community has been disappointing. Will this improve? It was still a struggle to get a financial commitment from the business community. A business levy would provide funding but the number of small businesses in the town would make this impractical;
- There were a number of businesses in Exmouth that were not financially able to contribute to the post of Town Manager. This post has been very valuable in bringing together and managing a number of different groups in Exmouth;
- A lot of energy and enthusiasm was being focussed on Exmouth through the successful post of Town Manager. How were the members of the G8 group identified? They were the people with the most money and land in the town. Those most able to influence its future direction.

*23 **Town Management arrangements in Exmouth and Seaton** (Cont)

David Mears, Seaton Town Clerk, reported on the need for a Town Manager in Seaton. Businesses in the town were struggling with many shops having already closed. He had been working closely with Nigel Harrison, Economic Development Manager to get the correct management structure established for the proposed post of Seaton Town Manager. He confirmed that it would take a long time for the person appointed to become established in the town, particular in view of the peculiar difficulties of working in Seaton. The Town Council had confirmed the importance it attached to the post of Town Manager by committing funding within its budget to the post.

Councillor Stephanie Jones, Member Champion for Seaton, reported that Seaton had a dying town centre and needed the appointment of an experienced Town Centre Manager to revive it. She confirmed that businesses were closing on a weekly basis. An important job for a Town Manager was to work closely with business and community groups to help revitalise the town centre and restore a positive attitude. It would be particularly important to have a post holder in place during the regeneration works in Seaton, when there was likely to be considerable disruption in the town.

Karime Hassan, Corporate Director, reported that the District Council funding of £45,000 for the post was dependent on money being released by Tesco through Section 106 agreements.

During discussions the following additional points and questions were noted:

- Was the post of Seaton Town Manager challenging enough for a full time employee or would it be better to employ a part time person initially or to share the post with other towns?
- That the Town Manager’s role was as a facilitator between the public and private sector;
- Could Seaton buy in some of the expertise of the Exmouth Town Manager? There was huge value in Exmouth and Seaton working together, which would bring the Seaton Town Manager up to speed much more quickly.

RESOLVED

1. that the proposals to facilitate closer co-operation between retailers, the local authorities and other town centre stakeholders in Seaton, through the appointment of a Town Manager be supported;
2. that the governance arrangements for active town management be devised to reflect those currently in place in Exmouth and thereby secure the engagement of private, public and community stakeholders.

(Councillor Iain Chubb declared a personal interest in this item as the owner of three shops in Seaton)

Chairman Date.....