

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 11 June 2009

Present: Councillors:
Iain Chubb (Chairman)
Trevor Cope (Vice Chairman)

Malcolm Florey
Graham Godbeer
Ben Ingham

John Jeffery
Bob Peachey
Tim Wood

Officers:
Karime Hassan – Corporate Director
Nigel Harrison – Economic Development Officer

Also Present Councillors:
Paul Diviani
Christine Drew
Jill Elson
Steve Hall
Peter Halse

Andrew Moulding
Helen Parr
Tony Reed
Pauline Stott
Graham Troman

Apologies: None given.

The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.15pm.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

***1 Public question time**

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

***2 Economy Overview and Scrutiny Remit**

The Committee was timetabled to meet five times per year, and the broad remit covered:

- Recession recovery
- Town services
- High street future
- Skills and training
- School provision for leavers and achievers
- Further education provision
- Property based decisions
- Local government association issues

Members of the Committee discussed the work involved within the broad remit, and the commitment needed to help facilitate actions to achieve the remit. A new approach was needed, with Members acting as both enablers and facilitators, to assist the local economy.

Members debated the following themes:

Town Managers

- Consider asking existing Town Managers to a future meeting, to discuss their role, successes achieved, and barriers to be overcome. The example of the positive work in Brixington was given;
- Consider a joint approach to Town Management so that some towns could share a Town Manager and costs.

Business growth and development

Members gave some local examples of how work had been done during the last recession in bringing businesses together and how important it was to get people back into work. They discussed:

- The impact of empty shop premises on each town;
- Accessing existing data and research;
- Talking with Chambers of Commerce where set up in local areas, to establish their concerns, at a time and place convenient for them or at invitation to Committee meetings; to also include other groups that cover agriculture and other industries in the area;
- Signposting where local businesses can get help;
- Consider scrutinising the agency responsible for inward development, such as the Heart of Devon or Devon County Council;
- Review small business unit demand;
- Planning issues that may arise;
- Adequate IT and communications infrastructure to support business

Clarity on the Council's role in education

Work including citizenship involvement with both primary and secondary schools could be enhanced; and work experience reviewed in the light of less opportunities for trainees/apprentices and general interest in careers in local government. Members agreed that this was a valid issue but could be considered later in the work programme.

Local Government Association

- Attendance at LGA Annual Conference to be considered;
- Councillor Christine Drew reminded Members that she was the Council's representative on the Local Government Association General Assembly and therefore would be happy to take back any issues the Committee wished to raise with the LGA.

***3 Work Programme 2009/10**

Members agreed that focus should be on priority areas within the remit, the aim being to work on a few issues to reach results, rather than look at many issues but not reach satisfactory conclusions.

Positive links with the relevant Portfolio Holder were also key, as was the link with the Member Champion for Business, who was also a member of the Committee. The service plan for Economic Development would become a regular item to ensure close monitoring.

Future agendas should contain between two and three items to allow work to progress and to allow in-depth debate.

*3 **Work Programme 2009/10 (continued)**

Consultation with the Council's commercial tenants would be completed and reported back to the Committee at its next meeting, to give some indication of the impact of the recession on small businesses. Work would also be done to map out a structured means of communicating with the local Chambers of Commerce and other related groups for the next meeting, including managing their expectations.

The agreed priorities for the work programme were:

- Business growth and development
- Business infrastructure and support services
- Recession impact on Market Towns including reviewing Town Manager role
- Skills and training
- Information Technology development and network for businesses

Chairman Date.....