

ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2014

PRESENT:- Councillors Junab Ali, Mark Dempsey, Oliver Donachie, Mary Friend, Mary Martin (Chair), Kevin Parry, Nicky Sewell and Steve Wakefield

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Skills

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rod Bluh, Wayne Crabbe (Vice-Chair) .

14. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. There were no declarations.

15. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2014, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

16. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

17. Higher Education and Skills

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Economy and Skills which outlined the progress to date on the implementation of the Higher Education Strategy for Swindon agreed by Cabinet in December 2012.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Skills, Mike Welsh, Chair of the HE Strategy Group and Alun Thomas, FSL contractor – HE Strategy Development Manager to the meeting.

Members were informed that since April 2013, Forward Swindon Limited had taken the responsibility to implement the Cabinet recommendation to establish a business orientated higher education partnership, ensuring that local businesses played a central role, identifying a location and funding for a higher education centre in Swindon, project manage a parallel long term plan to establish an independent higher education institution by 2026 and consider the feasibility of digital based provision as an alternative to a campus base.

The Head of Economy and Skills spoke in detail about the work of the partnership, especially in relation to the remit established by the Cabinet and detailed above. In particular he highlighted the following issues:

- a higher education partnership was in place and that it had been steering the

implementation plan since 2013

- The membership of the partnership
- The benefit of the cap on student numbers being lifted
- The amount of space required for a higher education campus and potential location
- Meetings with current and possible future higher education provider partners, including Buckinghamshire New University
- The recent and successful Unifest event held at the Steam Museum – video of the event was presented
- The recognition of the need for enhanced higher education provision within the area by the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership
- The report produced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England on 'Higher Education Cold Spots' and that recent data had confirmed that Swindon was one of the 'cold spots'
- The next steps in establishing a higher education centre as a reality in Swindon

Following the presentation of the report the Cabinet member, Head of Economy and Skills, Chair of the HE Strategy Group and the HE Strategy Development Manager responded to members' specific questions and observations on the following:

- The recent meetings with Buckinghamshire New University and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the University
- The number of potential students at the proposed higher education centre
- How a centre would be financed
- The role of the National Careers Advisor and schools in offering careers advice to students
- Student choice and schools providing different courses within clusters
- The aspirations of students where participation rates in higher education are low
- Any available research with the Higher Education Funding Council for England highlighting issues in the demographic profile of Swindon students participating in higher education
- The economic impact of a higher education centre in Swindon
- The Post Graduate opportunities in and around Swindon
- Achieving the right skills set for employment opportunities within Swindon
- The possible locations for a higher education centre within Swindon and the regeneration opportunities available
- Council initiatives to raise the numbers of students participating in higher education particularly in those areas where participation was low

Resolved:

1. That the progress being made in implementing the Higher Education Strategy for Swindon be noted.
2. That Cabinet member, Head of Economy and Skills, Chair of the HE Strategy Group and the HE Strategy Development Manager be thanked for a very interesting and valuable presentation of the report.

18. Work Programme 2014/15

The Committee received the report of the Scrutiny Officer setting out details of the Committee's work programme.

The Chair informed members that a Task Group to review Strategic Property, detailed in the Committee's work programme had not yet been established and asked members if they preferred to receive an officer report to the next meeting in the place of a Task Group Report. The members unanimously supported the Chairs suggestion.

Resolved:

1. That the work programme be noted
2. That the Head of Property and Assets prepare a report on Strategic Property for the next meeting of the Committee on 25 February 2015