

ECONOMY AND REGENERATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2015

PRESENT:- Councillors Oliver Donachie (Chair), Wayne Crabbe (Vice-Chair), Emma Bushell, Wayne Crabbe (Vice-Chair), Oliver Donachie (Chair), Mary Friend, Cathy Martyn, Des Moffatt, Kevin Parry, James Robbins, Joe Tray and Chris Watts

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Richard Hurley.

44. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. Councillor Perkins declared a pecuniary interest in relation agenda item 6 – Devolution in Local Government, during the discussion on business rates as he owned a business in Swindon.

45. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd September 2015, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

46. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

47. Local Plan

The Committee received an update report from David Dewart, Planning Manager on the Swindon Borough Local Plan Review and the Town Centre Masterplan.

The Planning Manager explained that the Swindon Borough Local Plan was adopted by the Council on 26th March 2015 and contained policies relating to Swindon Town Centre. He reported that, following a recommendation by the Local Plan Inspector work, had started on reviewing the Policies, in particular Policy SC1, which was a summary of policies contained within the Swindon Central Area Action Plan (CAAP),. Work had already commenced on the recommendation with a Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Employment Land Review being commissioned to assess the amounts of employment land and housing required to 2036. Assessment reports were expected to be ready in May 2016.

The Committee were informed that Forward Swindon had published the Town Centre Masterplan in March 2013, which amplifies the CAAP. A Delivery Plan is being prepared which will identify worked up and costed schemes for delivery in the next five years. It was expected that the schemes would unlock wider regeneration of the Town Centre.

The Planning Manager and Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills responded to a number of comments and questions from the Committee, as follows:

- The conversion of offices to residential dwellings in the central area
- Timescales for the delivery of schemes detailed in the Town Centre Masterplan
- The influence and implications of the Housing and Planning Bill on Swindon and Neighbourhood Plans
- The type of planning permission to be granted for schemes detailed in the Town Centre Masterplan

The Committee considered a proposal that officers hold a workshop style event to discuss in more detail the potential Policy implications for the Town Centre. It was suggested that the event should be held in early summer 2016 as the evidence base would be available and the Housing and Planning Bill was likely to have gained Royal Assent.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Committee supports a workshop style event to discuss in more detail the potential Policy implications for the Town Centre.
3. That the Chair and Committee Officer consider further the scheduling of the workshop and confirm details in due course.

48. Devolution in Local Government

The Committee received a report from Paddy Bradley, Head of Economy, Skills and Property Development summarising the broad range of proposals made to the government as part of its request for devolution bids.

The Head of Economy, Skills and Property Development explained that the report would allow the Committee to gauge an understanding of the requests made by other areas and the potential impact on local government of the devolution of powers, responsibilities and resources.

The report was limited to a description of the bids from across the country and provided a brief insight into some of the most targeted themes, which also captured some of those contained in the bid submitted by Swindon Borough Council (SBC). The report outlined some of the key benefits and possible associated risks to SBC.

The Head of Economy, Skills and Property Development and Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills responded to a number of comments and questions from the Committee, as follows:

- The deadline for expressions of interest and process for response from the government
- The key benefits of devolution
- An explanation of the roles and powers of a 'Metro' mayor and a directly elected executive mayor
- The amount of authority delegated to the directly elected executive mayor

compared to that of the 'Metro' mayor

- An explanation of the role of a Combined Authority and the retention of equal voting rights regardless of their size
- Concern about the effect of devolution on the number of Councillors and their duties
- Increase in public sector housing provision
- Concern about the level of services that could be provided in relation to the percentage of Business Rates collected
- The current and future working relationship between Wiltshire Council and SBC
- The effect on SBC due to a potential increase in housing development within Wiltshire on the SBC/Wiltshire Council boundary
- The obligation to work with a Local Authority on a Council's boundary
- The electrification of railway lines, cross border implication and working in partnership with local authorities in Wales
- The SBC service areas that could benefit from devolution with Wiltshire Council
- Devolution and the role of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
- Concern that the LEP was an unelected body and the need for checks and balances to be in place
- Concern at the potential of significant risk to SBC of devolution and the need to increase the level of scrutiny in this area

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Head of Economy, Skills and Property Development provides the Committee with a matrix detailing the options with/without mayors and with/without combined authorities.
3. That the Chair and Committee Officer schedule an additional meeting of the Committee to consider updates on the latest information in relation to the devolution bids received by the government when it is available.

(Note – Councillor Perkins declared a pecuniary interest in relation to the discussion on business rates as he owned a business in Swindon).