

GROWING THE ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2016

PRESENT:- Councillors Cathy Martyn (Chair), Wayne Crabbe, Malcolm Davies, Mark Dempsey, Carol Shelley, Gary Sumner and Steve Weisinger

Councillor Garry Perkins (Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Emma Bushell and Des Moffatt.

17. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

18. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 21st September 2016, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

19. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

20. Reference from Resources and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Democratic Services about a reference from the Resources and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members noted that the Resources and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 26th September 2016 had set up a Joint Task Group to consider changes to Business rates collection and new legislation, and had asked if members from this Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be interested in attending.

Resolved – That Members of the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the invite from the Resources and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and express their interest in attending the Joint Task Group meetings.

21. Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership

The Committee received a report of the Director Swindon Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) which provided an update on the work of the Local Enterprise

partnership (LEP), its achievements, priorities and challenges and how it is resourced.

The report covered the following areas of interest:

- How the SWLEP was established.
- The governance of the SWLEP.
- The achievements of the SWLEP.
- The challenges faced by the SWLEP.
- Resourcing the SWLEP.

The Director and his support team responded to the following questions and issues raised by the Committee:

- The value of the Great Stall Bridge transport scheme in comparison to other transport schemes.
- The success of SWLEP in securing central government funding during 2014/15 to support a range of capital projects across Swindon and Wiltshire in comparison with other LEP's.
- The composition of the SWLEP compared to its geographical area and potential areas of conflict for SWLEP Board members.
- The Town Centre Masterplan and whether it needed to be updated in order to aid the SWLEP with future funding bids.
- The possibility of linking Swindon to the Cambridge/Oxford innovation corridor.
- The bid for higher education and when notification of the outcome would be received.
- How the SWLEP engages with businesses and how that informs the Economic Strategy.
- The delivery timescales of the Swindon Rapid Transit and the Swindon Bus Exchange schemes.
- The role of the SWLEP Joint Task Group.

The Chair thanked the Director of SWLEP and his support team for their responses to the questions and issues raised by members.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

22. Draft Economic Strategy

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director of Economy, Regeneration and Skills about the progress to date in respect of Swindon's Economic Strategy, along with the production of a revised Economic Strategy over the longer timeframe of 2016-2036.

The Corporate Director referred to the four aims of the Economic Strategy and explained that the following fifth aim had been added 'To make Swindon a more inclusive place, with reduced worklessness and improving health and well-being outcomes'.

The Corporate Director and his support team responded to the following questions and issues raised by the Committee:

- The opportunities presented in the Autumn Statement and the Industrial Strategy.
- The challenge of delivering the priorities for Swindon's economy and the detail needed to populate an action plan.
- Redevelopments in town centre areas and how this impacts the development of businesses, in particular the middle of the town centre.
- The retail offer available in the middle of the town centre and timescales for redevelopment.
- The level of business rates in the town centre.
- The growth of the economy to keep pace with the growth of the housing market.
- The need for an Inward Investment Officer.
- The Economic Strategy delivery plan and how it underpins the Strategy.
- How projects would be funded.
- How the Strategy will manage the tension between short term gain for lower skilled jobs and the long term gain of higher skilled jobs.
- The location for emerging low carbon businesses.
- The design of homes to incorporate car charging points.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Director and his support team for their responses to questions and issues raised by members.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

23. Business Rates: A Sustainable Approach

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Economy, Regeneration and Skills about the relationship between business rates and economic growth.

The report highlighted the different departmental perspectives on business rates growth through economic growth, and how this linked to decisions taken within planning. The Corporate Director and his supporting officer team responded in detail to the following questions and issues raised by members:

- The need for new employment land when there are existing pockets of unused employment land readily available.
- The exclusion of office space from certain planning applications.
- The barriers to the delivery of projects at development sites.
- Access to commercial land at the Wichelstowe development.
- The Commercial Investment Fund, its allocation of investment into key assets, and potential returns generated.
- The variation in business rates for the town centre premises and those in retail parks.
- The support for national retail chains locating to district centres.
- The adoption of tighter timescales for approved planning applications commencing to avoid parcels of land being left undeveloped.

The Chair thanked the Director of Economy, Regeneration and Skills and his supporting officer team for their responses to questions and issues raised by members.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

24. Work Programme

The Committee received the report of the Director of Law and democratic Services setting out the agreed items for inclusion in the Committee's Work Programme 2016/17.

Members noted that the Committee was due to receive a report at its meeting in February 2017 about apprenticeships and higher education. It was suggested that the report should also include information about the 16-18 Education Review as this was relevant to the discussion. It was also suggested that the Cabinet member for Children's Services and Members of the Children's Health, Social Care and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee be invited to the meeting for this item.

Members also asked for detailed updates on Town Centre projects, in particular those for Aspen House, Bridge Street and Fleet Street, in the report being considered at its meeting in March 2017.

Resolved – (1) That the Committee's Work Programme 2016/17 be noted, subject to the following amendments:

- 1st February 2017 – Apprenticeships and Higher Education Report to include information about the 16-18 Education Review, with an invite to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, along with an invite to the Children's Health, Social Care and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 22nd March 2017 – Town Centre Projects update report to include detailed information about Aspen House, Bridge Street and Fleet Street projects.