

# Economic Strategy Consultation and Adoption

**Cabinet**

**Date: 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012**

---

Author: Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture  
Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment

Wards: All

Locality Affected: All

Parishes Affected: All

---

## **1. Purpose and Reasons**

- 1.1 The Draft Swindon Economic Strategy was produced as part of the One Swindon framework to outline the commitment of the Council and business to creating the conditions for good economic growth in Swindon and deliver the economic future of the town and its hinterland. It represents a shared commitment through agreed actions to the “Right skills and the right jobs, in the right places”.
- 1.2 The Economic Strategy also forms an important part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan, which is a spatial representation of economic growth aspirations for Swindon and forms the statutory planning framework.
- 1.3 The draft strategy was endorsed for the purposes of wider consultation by Cabinet on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2012. The consultation included the Strategy being made available online, presentations at numerous business events and networks outlined in more detail below, and a 3 week period where formal representations could be made in writing to the Council.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to report back on the comments received, advise on Officers responses to those comments and recommend changes where appropriate to the Strategy. These details are contained in Appendix 1.
- 1.5 Finally, the report asks that Cabinet confirm its endorsement of the newly revised strategy and recommend it be adopted by Full Council on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

## **2. Recommendations**

### Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the positive reception the Economic Strategy has had and the constructive comments received in response to the consultation.
- 2.2 Authorise the Head of Commissioning Economy and Economy, in consultation with Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture, to agree officer responses to received comments.
- 2.3 Endorse the revised Strategy and recommend its adoption by Full Council on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

# Economic Strategy Consultation and Adoption

Cabinet

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012

---

## 3. Detail

### Background

- 3.1 Prior to the production of the draft Strategy, several events were held garnering support and input from business community with a view to informing the priorities and actions set out in the Strategy.
- 3.2 These Forums, and the business representatives on the Steering Group set up to guide the process, established that further, broader consultation would aid in a wider cross section of business engagement and support to the strategy.
- 3.3 To that end the Council and forward Swindon have taken the opportunity to consult more widely on the draft Economic Strategy in advance of its proposed adoption at Full Council enabling the Strategy to be tested by the business community and other stakeholders.
- 3.4 Specifically, the Strategy was presented at a range of networks including the Swindon Development Delivery Panel, the Swindon Investment Group, the Swindon Business West, Influence (the Local Economic Partnership), the Swindon Chamber Business breakfast and the SWLEP's working sub-group for Finance and Business Services, during October and early November 2012.
- 3.5 The Strategy was also made available on the Council and Forward Swindon's websites offering an opportunity for the business community to feedback formally, through written consultation. This period was open from the 23<sup>rd</sup> October to the 14<sup>th</sup> November.
- 3.6 The presentations were well received, with various expressions of support for the process and the strategy received and minuted. These minutes, where available, can be found at Appendix 2 of this report.

## 4. Formal Written Comments

- 4.1 With regards the written comments received, there was a broad range of respondents largely representing the private sector. Some were made personally, others on behalf of a network or organisation.
- 4.2 The comments were positive in the main, with many recognising the Strategy as a positive signal of intent for the boroughs economic future and further, expressing keen support for the Strategy moving forward. Many comments included offers to work with the Council and Forward Swindon in order to jointly achieve our aims.
- 4.3 On the subject of achieving our aims and specifically around performance management and the ability to measure progress/outputs it was clear that respondents were keen for the governance arrangements around the Action Plan

# Economic Strategy Consultation and Adoption

Cabinet

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012

---

and those individuals responsible for workstreams and deliverables to be made clear. While some thought the Action Plan should be more detailed with a quantifiable target for each of the 'impacts on the economy' to help prioritise efforts others promoted a more devolved approach whereby simple high level measurables were contained in the Action plan with 'sub targets' if required as discrete projects moved forward.

- 4.4 Further, in answer to a request for individuals to be names in the Economic Strategy, it was felt that a nominated delivery agency i.e. Forward Swindon, Swindon Borough Council or private sector was sufficient for this level of strategy. The governance arrangements put in place to progress actions and workstreams will clearly nominate a responsible individual to ensure accountability for progress.
- 4.5 There was some doubt as to how realistic expectations around the Low Carbon Economy were and concern that they reflect an aspiration unconnected to the economic realities that Swindon is contending with. In response, it was advised that the Council has been working with major energy users in Swindon over the past 18 months and key messages emerging are that issues around energy cost, security and CO<sub>2</sub> reduction are increasingly important competitiveness factors.
- 4.6 In response to this, the Council adopted a Swindon Sustainable Energy Framework which was prepared in close co-operation with key businesses and stakeholders in Swindon including Forward Swindon, BMW Group, Honda UK, Honda Trading, Kilbride, Network Rail and the Great Western Hospital. Whilst the Framework recognises that energy and CO<sub>2</sub> reduction targets are key drivers for business and sets out a supportive and joined up approach to this, it also highlights a whole new area of business opportunity around the low carbon economy, an example being the expertise on hydrogen transport being developed in Swindon. An Energy Partnership has been set up to steer this and leverage local expertise already in Swindon.
- 4.7 The issue identified most often involved the need for effective and accessible Higher Education provision. One described our lack of a university as the main contributor to the bad image of Swindon, a deterrent to many people moving into Swindon, and a drag on the future economic growth of Swindon. There was support for the principle of provision of local HE, especially if tailored to our economic needs / opportunities and in conjunction with Swindon College / New College. In response it was made clear that the Higher Education Strategy is a priority for the Council.
- 4.8 A report is also being considered at the December Cabinet meeting regarding a Higher Education Strategy for Swindon. This report recognises how crucial access to higher education is for skills and economic capacity. The Strategy promotes a short, medium and long term action plan to firstly set up a business

# Economic Strategy Consultation and Adoption

Cabinet

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012

---

oriented Swindon higher education partnership, secondly to identify a location and means of funding for a higher education centre in the Borough at which the existing degree awarding providers and any new providers may operate with high quality business oriented courses; and to project manage a parallel long-term plan to establish an independent higher education institution by 2026, subject to government policy framework. As part of this planning, the feasibility of digital based provision as an alternative to a campus based provision will be assessed.

- 4.9 It isn't felt that further detail on the contents of the Higher Education Strategy are necessary within the high level Economic Strategy and that a set of very clear actions to be pursued by the Council and partners are already incorporated in the Action Plan reflecting the primacy the Strategy gives to opportunities for young people.
- 4.10 There were mentions of the importance of a single message about Swindon's priorities and investment where necessary to facilitate economic progress.
- 4.11 In common with the Town Centre Masterplan, two comments were received pertaining to the Canal through central Swindon. The delivery of the canal is not currently felt to be a realistic objective in the time frame that this strategy covers. The Council will continue to engage with the Canal Trust to examine the potential for some, or all, of the canal to be delivered as part of the town centre regeneration in line with the Town Centre masterplan.

## Amendments Made

- 4.12 It was felt that the Strategy could usefully make reference to the contribution that a strong economy with high employment and reduced dependency can make to the health and wellbeing in Swindon. This has been incorporated at paragraph 1.5 of the Strategy.
- 4.13 In response to a call for more prominence to be given to start up's we have further underlined the importance of start up support with adding wording at 2.14 of the Strategy.
- 4.14 It is recognised that the Strategy has not majored on transport given the breadth of the actions associated with Transport Strategy in general. Wording to further underline the strategic importance of transport has been added at 2.32 to say that Across the borough, sustained efforts to improve its transport network have encouraged more people to use public transport, providing better access to employment areas and leisure facilities, and helping in the push to reduce carbon emissions from car travel.

# Economic Strategy Consultation and Adoption

Cabinet

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012

---

## Adoption

- 4.15 Following the amendments made above it is requested that Cabinet endorse the final Economic Strategy, included as amended and in its final form at Appendix 3, and recommend it to Full Council for adoption.

## **5. Alternative Options**

- 5.1 The Council could not adopt an Economic Strategy and attempt to establishing the conditions for economic growth without a detailed overarching framework with which to coordinate efforts. It is difficult to see this approach being as successful.

## **6. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management**

### Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1 There are no immediate financial or procurement implications to this report although one of the recommendations is that the Council uses its considerable spending power and asset base to promote economic growth in Swindon. This has the potential to change how we use our resources and procure services and contracts in the future.

### Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 6.2 Legal and Human Rights implications have been taken into account in the drafting of this report.

### All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 6.3 The Economic Strategy will require all staff to consider the wider implications of their activities with regard to how they impact on local economic performance. Sustainability issues are central to future economic performance as the strategy sets out a role for a low carbon sector within Swindon. Future economic performance will directly impact upon health, rural issues and crime and disorder within Swindon.

### Links to One Swindon, Strategic Objectives, Plans and Policies

- 6.4 The One Swindon theme: 'We can all benefit from a growing economy and a better town centre' is our central priority but successful implementation of the Strategy will make a major contribution to all areas. The Economic Strategy is also a core component of the Corporate Strategy and should act as a driver for future Council activities, asset management and strategic planning.

# Economic Strategy Consultation and Adoption

Cabinet

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012

---

## Diversity Impact Assessment

- 6.5 A Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed and does not identify any adverse impacts of adopting this strategy. A copy is available from the report author.

## Risk Management

- 6.6 The main risk that the Economic Strategy faces is if it is seen as one of many strategies that the Council is responsible for rather than a principal strategy driving its work both internally and with external partners and stakeholders. This could lead to the allocation of scarce resources not being maximised in terms of the economic activity it generates and confidence being lost in the private sector as to whether Swindon is a place to do business in.

## **7. Consultees**

- 7.1 The Board Director Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

## **8. Background Papers**

- 8.1 None

## **9. Appendices**

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – Consultation comments and responses  
9.2 Appendix 2 – Meeting minutes  
9.3 Appendix 3 – An Economic Strategy for Swindon

## **10. Key Decision/Decision in Forward Plan**

- 10.1 This is not a Key Decision as the Council will adopt the final Strategy and is included in the Cabinet Forward Plan/ Work Programme for October 2012.