

# **ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2013**

PRESENT:- Councillors Mark Dempsey, Junab Ali, Roderick Bluh, Wayne Crabbe, Oliver Donachie, Toby Elliott, Emma Faramarzi (Chair), Mary Friend, Fay Howard, Maureen Penny, Julian Price, Steve Wakefield and David Wood.

Also in attendance: Councillor Garry Perkins.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mark Edwards.

## **7. Declarations of Interest**

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

## **8. Minutes**

Resolved: - That the minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2013, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## **9. Public Question Time**

No public questions were received during the meeting.

## **10. Inward Investment**

The Committee considered the report of Forward Swindon which contained updates on economic development and regeneration issues in Swindon since April 2013.

Members noted that Forward Swindon were in the second year of a three year campaign to raise the profile of Swindon as a business location. Sophisticated approaches to target priority sectors had been identified in the Economic Strategy, the first two being retail and manufacturing.

Members were informed that the performance indicators detailed in the report were up to date to the end of August 2013. The performance indicators had previously been agreed between the Board of Forward Swindon and Swindon Borough Council.

In particular Julia Falcon and Phil Young (Forward Swindon) highlighted:

- The use of the Forward Swindon Website in shaping the current inward investment strategy and information contained on it.
- The targeting of specific sectors and the design of material and information to facilitate this approach.
- Promotional documents designed over the previous 18 months and the use of digital technology within integrated marketing campaigns.
- The positive response to date from the Swindon UK Website and the positive

increase in click through rates on the website.

- The promotion of Swindon's Geographical location and its pioneering work in areas such as hydrogen technology.
- Attendance at the NEC show with Swindon partners who act as advocates for Swindon and the public relations benefits arising from this.
- Recognition that Swindon's three year investment was modest compared with some competitors and the need to maximise its effectiveness and to be innovative in promoting the campaign.
- The need to respond quickly to expressions of interest and to tailor any response (ie from meetings with Forward Swindon to arranging for companies to meet other such organisations in Swindon) and to differentiate Swindon from other towns.
- A breakdown of the yield of investments to enquiries received.
- The current target of 35 good quality enquires received and progress to date which was on track to meet this target.
- A recognition that not all enquires would lead to immediate investment and that often enquires would be received well in advance of any intent to move to Swindon because of issues such as lease expiry.
- The current investment target compared to previous years targets and reasons for the increase, partly due to a quality campaign and partly due to an improving financial situation.

The Committee asked questions arising from the presentation and considered the following issues:

- How Forward Swindon determined what was a firm commitment from an enquiry through contacts, feedback from questions, establishing timelines for potential investment (ie against the company's current lease) and by following enquiries through to a logical conclusion and providing support (ie finding out what skill sets a company might need filled) and fostering relationships.
- Additional information on the inward investment figures set out in the report.
- A flavour of the type of companies and job creation arising to date as well as on-going work to safeguard exiting jobs within the town.
- How inward investment not arising directly from Forward Swindon could be tracked. The use of business rates, job data through Job Centre Plus and relationships with commercial agents might be a source of such data in a basic format.
- The reasons why businesses might choose to leave Swindon or why incoming business chose Swindon over other locations and how this could be quantified.
- Whether Forward Swindon was being pro-active enough in seeking new investment or whether it was relying too heavily on its promotional campaign and website. The on-going work in awareness setting and targeting companies in key locations and in building intelligence was noted.
- Further information regarding the public sector investment data set out in the report.
- Foreign investment and the use of the main conduit of UKTI for this as Forward Swindon didn't attend foreign events. Work with the UKTI was explained together with the information on skills, and strengths offered by Swindon to that body and the potential follow-up for any enquiries generated.

Also the potential role of civic exchanges and foreign delegations in securing new investment.

- The design of the campaign and service provided to maximise the £100,000 budget available for this work the majority of which was done in-house.
- The recent positive publicity in the national press and from within Government circles and the need for officers, members, Forward Swindon and local businesses to put Swindon forward in a positive light to build on the work of Forward Swindon.
- The role of town centre improvements in attracting new businesses to the town.
- The potential to increase inward investment by embedding supply chains in the town.
- The importance of cross party support in the process of attracting new business and investment into the town.
- The importance of infrastructure to support any incoming business, including the availability of land, car parking and skilled employees.
- The redevelopment of areas such as the Cheney Manor Industrial Estate.

Resolved – (1) That the report on Inward Investment be noted.

(2) That the representatives of Forward Swindon be thanked for their attendance and be invited back to a future meeting to update Members on progress on inward investment.

## **11. Youth Unemployment**

The Committee considered (a) a report of the Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment which set out details of how the Youth Unemployment review would be taken forward and (b) received a presentation which outlined the current state of affairs in relation to Youth Unemployment in Swindon and highlighted the priorities identified and actions being taken by the Council and others.

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment and representatives of Job Centre Plus, Swindon College and Outset Swindon on work to help reduce Youth Unemployment including:

- The current situation in Swindon.
- The Council's Corporate Strategy regarding youth unemployment.
- Work over the previous four years to raising participation and reducing NEET numbers in Swindon.
- Equipping young people with relevant skills to enhance their employment opportunities.
- Changes to legislation and how this will affect Swindon's strategy moving forward.
- Current figures for youth unemployment and NEET in Swindon.
- Priorities and Challenges facing providers in tackling youth unemployment.
- The focus on 16-17year olds within current strategies.
- The use of apprenticeships and other options for help young unemployed people actively seeking work.
- The mismatch of skills and experience often required for young people trying to enter work.
- The role of work experience in helping to find employment.

- That the majority of employers looked for the right person to fill a vacancy rather than short term incentives.
- The current benefit regime and how this affected the youth job market.
- The need to identify the right skills for individuals to enhance their job opportunities.
- Vocational training for 19-24 year olds to increase skill sets and work experience.
- The transition of young people leaving school and how help could be maximised at this point to enhance their future opportunities.
- How to ensure that young people could best present themselves at job interviews and other meetings with potential employers.
- The use of non-vocational courses to build confidence in young people.
- Young people on the fringes of the job market and how they could be encouraged back into the mainstream to increase their opportunities.
- How the system could fully engage the longer term unemployed youth.
- Potential benefits of a university in Swindon and opportunities that this might afford young people.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

(2) That the representatives of Job Centre Plus, Swindon College and Outset Swindon be thanked for their participation in the discussion..

## **12. Economic Performance Data**

The Committee considered (a) report of the Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment which highlighted a set of economic performance data for Swindon using existing public data sets and other sources, with a focus on skills and employment and growth and regeneration.

Resolved - That the report on the economic performance data be noted.

## **13. Work Programme 2013-14**

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

Resolved – (1) That the Work Programme set out in the report be noted.

(2) That a report be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee on Youth Unemployment and that it include details on (a) segmented data on youth unemployment, (b) problems with rural youth unemployment, and (c) a breakdown of youth unemployment rates across Swindon.

(3) That, further to (2) above, officers approach representatives of Swindon's unemployed to attend the next Committee meeting to give Members a first-hand account of their experiences and problems that they face.

(4) That the future of the Mechanics Advisory Group be discussed at the next meeting of the Committee.

(5) That Councillor Emma Faramarzi replace Councillor Peter Heaton-Jones as a Member serving on the GWR 175 task Group and the Scrutiny Officer approach other Members appointed to it during the previous Municipal Year to confirm their continued service.

(6) That Members of the Business rates task Group and the Self-Build Task Group be requested to arrange a schedule of meetings and advise the Scrutiny Officer of the dates arranged.

(7) That all Members of the Committee be invited to meet Forward Swindon in small groups and that these visits be co-ordinated through the Scrutiny Officer.

(8) That the Scrutiny Officer update this Committee on LEP scrutiny following his attendance at the Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Bath LEP.

(9) That Members advise the Scrutiny Officer of potential companies to approach regarding visits to large and small employers in the town and that such suggestions also include companies with the supply chain of large employers with the Borough.