

ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2013

PRESENT:- Councillors Junab Ali, Roderick Bluh, Toby Elliott, Emma Faramarzi (Chair), Mary Friend, Julian Price, Steve Wakefield, Fay Howard, Maureen Penny, David Wood, Michael Bray and Vera Tomlinson

Also in attendance: Councillor Garry Perkins

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mark Dempsey, Wayne Crabbe and Mark Edwards.

14. Membership

Councillors Mick Bray and Vera Tomlinson replaced Councillors Wayne Crabbe and Mark Edwards respectively for this meeting only.

15. Declarations of Interest

The Chairman reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

Councillor Julian Price declared an interest in relation to agenda item 5 – Youth Unemployment as he recruited and trained youth apprentices, outside of Swindon.

16. Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2013, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

17. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

18. Youth Unemployment

The Committee (a) heard from 4 young people about their experiences at school, the training undertaken and qualifications they had achieved and their attempts to find employment and (b) received a presentation from the Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment on Youth Unemployment and NEETs.

- (a) The Chairman welcomed the following young people to the meeting who were being supported by Jill Annal representing Job Centre Plus and Jane Pearce representing Outset, Swindon:

- Tomasz Stanislawski – Outset Swindon
- Nick Pullen – Outset Swindon
- Jiezel Richards – working with Job Centre Plus
- James Vogeles-West – working with Job Centre Plus

Each young person explained the journey they had taken from education, to training and their search for employment. The following comments and issues were raised during the discussions:

- Concern that young people lose business start-up finance once they join a government work programme.
- It was noted that Job Centre Plus help young people with vocational training and offered one to one support
- There appeared to be a lack of clarity about how young people were able to progress from claiming Job Seekers Allowance to starting their own business
- There was a 20-25% success rate of young people progressing to start their own business and Outset would offer help and advice on a long term basis
- Gaining experience in the work place was an essential requirement in finding employment
- Job Centre Plus offered work experience to young people and was seen as a very important element for young people to be successful in finding employment. It was noted that 60% of those gaining experience in one of the Job Centre teams left before the end of the work experience to start work full time.
- Opportunities for young people to gain work experience with employers was difficult as many employers were wary of accepting young people into this role as previously many had left after only a short time
- Members noted that work experience was voluntary, however the young person would receive a reference from an employer and be able to add the work experience to their CV
- The careers advice given to young people at school and college was critical

(b) The Committee received the presentation from the Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment which contained statistical information relating to youth unemployment and young people not in education, employment or training in Swindon. The main issues raised during the presentation included:

- The current NEET situation in Swindon.
- The percentage of youth unemployment for 18-24 year olds
- The percentage of JSA claimants for 18-24 year olds
- Apprenticeship starts for 16-18 and 19-24 year olds between 2010 and 2013
- Academic age 18 NEETs compared to academic age 18 group by ward
- Academic age 18 NEET attainment compared to academic age 18 group
- Academic age 18 NEETs with vulnerabilities compared to academic age 18 group
- Academic age 18 by NEET duration
- Academic age 18 by previous destination
- 18-24 year old JSA claimants and duration by ward

Members, in considering the presentation made the following comments and raised a number of issues:

- Concern that the number of JSA claimants for 18-24 year olds in Swindon was above the national average
- It was more difficult for young people to find employment as Swindon was hit very badly by the recession
- Disappointed that the growth in Apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds in 2011/12 did not continue into 2012/13 and was a reflection of the national picture, however there was a sustained increase for 19-24 year olds
- There was a need to reduce the inequalities between academic age 18 NEETs with vulnerabilities compared to the academic age 18 group as a whole
- It was sometimes difficult to match employment with the training received by young people. There was an expectation that a difference would be made by the end of 2014 following partnership through the Skills and Employment Board

The Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment explained that the information contained in the presentation would be considered by the Employment and Apprenticeship Group. A Plan would be prepared which was expected to be available by the end of January 2014 for consideration by the Committee in February 2014.

Resolved:

1. That the presentation and comments made be noted.
2. That the representatives of Job Centre Plus, Outset Swindon and the Young People be thanked for their participation in the discussion
3. That future presentations include the figures relating to young people as well as the percentage of young people
4. That the Plan from the Employment and Apprenticeship Group be considered by the Committee at its meeting on 26 February 2014

19. Quarterly Economic Report

The Committee considered the 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.

Members were informed that the Centre for Cities compared performance of a number of cities, detailed in Appendix 1 of the report. The performance was considered in the context of two phases; 2008-09 and 2009-2012 and referred to as a “downturn of two halves”. Some cities felt the down turn early in 2008-09 and were now beginning to recover. Others were affected later by the downturn and had yet to feel the full effect of the financial recession.

It was noted that Swindon’s performance before the economic downturn was relatively strong. The town was hit very hard in the first part of the recession, but had staged a strong recovery since 2010. Swindon’s varying fortunes were

amongst the most marked of all UK cities. Of the 63 cities, Swindon was the sixth worst affected city in the 2008-09 period of the downturn. From 2009-12, it had risen 45 places up the rankings to be the 12th best performing economy. Swindon had made the third largest improvement in performance of all cities between 2009 and 2012.

Members, in commenting on the report highlighted the following issues:

- The majority of employees made redundant from Honda had since found employment
- The Council supported large business during difficult times, however there was concern that small businesses should receive similar support as they were still very important
- Encouraged that the number of businesses in Swindon were now higher than before the recession started in 2008
- Swindon had a flexible economy which was attractive to large employers
- Concern about the level of qualifications required to be successful in finding employment and the effect on young people
- The need for employers to offer apprenticeships to young people
- It was a challenge to provide the appropriate style of home to meet current demand

Resolved:

1. That the report on the economic performance data be noted.
2. That the Committee receive reports every six months, with the next report due in April 2014.

20. Mechanics Advisory Group Update

The Committee were informed that a meeting of the Mechanics Advisory Group was being set up for December 2013.

Resolved:

That the update be noted.

21. 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 the Board Director – Service Delivery, Bernie Brannan be asked to attend the Committee in February 2014 to report further on the review of Transport
- (3) That the Committee consider the Economic Performance Data report every six months, with the next report due in April 2014.
- (4) That the Chair of the Committee, Councillor Emma Faramarzi be asked to confirm with Councillor Steve Wakefield the role and focus of the GWR 175 task Group.
- (5) That the Scrutiny Officer be asked to contact major employers in Swindon

with a request that they attend the next meeting of the Committee on 26 February 2014 to comment on their companies approach to apprenticeships.

- (6) That the Committee receive updates from its Task Groups at the next meeting on 26 February 2014
- (7) That the Scrutiny Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, Councillor Emma Faramarzi be asked to update the current Work Programme and circulate the update to Committee Members for comment.