

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMY AND GROWTH) held in Civic Suite 0.1B, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 3rd November 2016.

PRESENT: Councillor D B Dew – Chairman.

Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, E R Butler, R Fuller, I D Gardener, B Hyland, D J Mead, T D Sanderson and D R Underwood.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors L George, K D Wainwright and D Watt.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors G J Bull, R Harrison and R B Howe.

32. MINUTES

The Minutes for the meeting of the Panel held on 6th October 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

34. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and note the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st November 2016 and 28th February 2017.

35. EDGE - SHARPER SKILLS FOR ENTERPRISE

The Panel received a presentation from the Economic Development Manager on EDGE – Sharper Skills For Enterprise. It was explained to Members that Huntingdonshire Regional College (HRC) had merged with Cambridge Regional College on 1st November 2016 and as such the Principal (who had been expected to present at the meeting) and the Vice Principal of HRC have left their posts with immediate effect.

Members were informed that EDGE is a partnership initiative between the private and public sector led by the Alconbury Enterprise Campus Skills Group. The partnership has been designed to facilitate pathways for local people to the employment opportunities at Alconbury and to promote industry-led training and development to support the future economic growth of Huntingdonshire.

An estimated 8,000 new jobs will be created at the Alconbury Enterprise Zone and businesses have stated how they feel that there

is a mismatch with what skills and qualifications schools and training agencies are providing and what they require and want.

The Panel were informed that EDGE aims to address the core skills gaps and improves employer engagement in the development of skills. Before the establishment of EDGE, different organisations were working on the skills gap individually however EDGE has given organisations an opportunity to coordinate their efforts on developing the right skills.

Members heard that EDGE assists job seekers as well as business. The partnership focuses on moving people who are disengaged or cut off from the job market into work. EDGE provides job seekers with an opportunity to improve and practice their job finding skills.

The partnership assists businesses with their recruitment and helps them to understand that they are key in addressing the skills gap and developing the workforce. EDGE has helped 56 people into work, 12 into learning, 10 into apprenticeships and 3 into self-employment.

Following a question on how does EDGE coordinate between apprenticeship offers and work experience, the Panel were informed that EDGE encourage companies to go into schools and inform students of what they can offer. There is also an EDGE Job Fair at Wood Green Animal Centre at which local companies exhibit career options within their organisation and children from all Huntingdonshire's schools attend.

In response to a question on what is the cost of the initiative and how long is it likely to last, the Panel were informed that it costs the Council nothing beyond the resources are contributed by the partners. For example the County Council contribute an employee to assist with Curriculum Vitae writing however the employee was previously providing the service so no additional cost has been incurred. Members heard how the main benefit of EDGE is that it does not rely on a short term funding pot as is the case with many job and skills initiatives. EDGE is governed by a formal Memorandum of Understanding which runs for three years before it is reviewed.

A Member asked does EDGE assist the whole of Huntingdonshire or just Alconbury Enterprise Zone and in response the Panel was told that EDGE has grown around the funding given for the enterprise zone however it works for the benefit of Huntingdonshire. As the workload increases then the focus will be assisting the enterprise zone however not to the exclusion of the rest of the District.

In response to a question relating to the funding of Groundwork projects by the Council, Members were informed that the budget for inclusion projects of £10k had been removed through the Zero Based Budgeting process however it was noted that Groundwork is a national charity organisation with which other parts of the Council still have some engagement.

Following a question regarding EDGE working with pupils who have a disability, the Panel was informed that at the last steering group meeting, partners agreed that they would work more closely with charities in order to provide opportunities for pupils with disabilities.

A Member asked about the materials schools work with and in response was told that composite companies can only work with their material for a limited time and once it has passed its shelf life they would be willing to donate it to schools.

36. IMET CENTRE

The Panel received a presentation on iMet from the Economic Development Manager. It was explained that the iMet is designed to help address the low productivity rate within the country. There is a focus on small businesses as 60% of private jobs sit in the small business sector.

Members were informed that the most commonly quoted obstacle to small business growth is the ability to recruit and retain staff with appropriate skills. The Sainsbury Panel in April 2016 also identified this as an issue and recommended proposals for improvements to assist with the training and development of the future workforce. In addition, as barriers to setting up a business have been removed, business leaders are needed as there are not enough people with the skills to take forward and develop businesses.

Traditionally the funding of training has followed the student and training providers have been putting on what students demand. The problem with this is that what students demand and what providers have put on has not matched business need. The iMet business model is that employers are driving the demand however iMet is not to replace the traditional educational model but is to run alongside it.

Members were reminded that the project is not run by the Council however the Council has an interest as the project aims to assist with the economic development of the District through providing training for the future workforce. A video was then shown to the Panel demonstrating what the new iMet training facility might look like.

Members are intrigued by the fact employers are encouraged to come forward and engage with the delivery of courses, however are concerned that there isn't enough guidance to help, as employers will need to be quite specific with their requirements. In response, the Panel were told that there is some guidance to assist them. In addition companies have tried doing in house training however as that takes up production space employers have opted to use the iMet training centre.

In response to a question regarding has there always been a mismatch between the needs of businesses and what training the education system provides, Members were informed that there has always been a mismatch however the pace of change has dramatically increased and both businesses and training providers need to collaborate closely on addressing the issues that affect them.

37. URGENT ITEM - KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR DELIVERING GROWTH FOR INCLUSION IN A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH THE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP

The Chairman announced that he proposed to admit the urgent item in accordance with Section 100B (3) and (4) of the Local Government Act 1972. With the aid of a report by the Head of Development (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Key Requirements for delivering growth for inclusion in a Memorandum of Understanding with the Local Enterprise Partnership was presented to the Panel.

Members were reminded that Neil Darwin, the Chief Executive of the Greater Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) attended a Panel meeting in June 2016 and offered the Council a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Since then officers have worked on a list of key priorities which was presented to the Panel so that they could highlight any infrastructure projects which have not been included and highlight which projects are the most important.

Members agreed that the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Upgrade and the A1 M25 to Peterborough Strategic Study are both highly important for the economic growth of the District.

Following a question regarding the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study, Members were informed that it has not been explained to Highways England what an expressway is or how it is being funded. The current budget is £500m however it is expected that the funding required will be 2 or 3 times as much.

The Panel highlighted that the existing A141 Junction Improvements are important to the growth of the District, particularly as there are a major developments expected to take place near to the A141. A Member stated that as the County Council have funding issues then perhaps the Council could work with the LEP to ensure it is a priority.

A Member highlighted in regards to the new train station at Alconbury Weald, land is also required for an access road from the A1 and a car park near to or on the site.

38. DEVOLUTION

The Panel received a presentation from the Executive Leader of the Council on the latest developments on Devolution. The Panel were reminded that Devolution involves the passing over to a Combined Authority, under the control of an elected Mayor a number of infrastructure budgets worth £1.2bn. There will be a Cabinet to oversee the work of the Mayor and that will comprise of the Leaders of all the Councils within the Combined Authority as well as a representative from the LEP.

Members were told that of the £1.2bn there will be £100m available for the building of affordable housing throughout Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and a further £70m for the building of affordable housing in Cambridge City.

Members were informed that Full Council will vote on 16th November 2016 to either accept or reject the Devolution deal. If all the authorities accept the deal then a Government Order will be brought forward in December 2016 to devolve powers to a Combined Authority in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

In order to prepare for the Combined Authority, Members were informed that a Shadow Cabinet has been formed with County Councillor S Count appointed at its leader. The Shadow Cabinet are responsible for delivering several work streams in order to deliver Devolution. Teams of people are working on how to account for the funding and how to distribute it. A separate investment board will be created to ensure that the funding is spent fairly.

It was confirmed that some of the infrastructure funds in the Devolution deal could be used to bring forward some infrastructure projects from the next ten to fifteen years into the next five years.

Following a question regarding the likelihood of Cambridgeshire County Council voting for the Devolution deal, the Panel was informed that the Executive Leader does not know the likelihood of the County Council voting for Devolution however the Leader of the County Council has stated he is confident that the County Council will vote for the deal.

In response to a question on the difficulty of building affordable housing across the Combined Authority, as all the different councils have their own policies, the Panel was informed that there will be an overarching plan with common standards to facilitate the building of affordable homes across the Combined Authority.

A Member asked if the Mayor and Cabinet will have enough expertise to manage the powers and the £1.2bn infrastructure budget, in response the Executive Leader stated that an independent panel of experts will be appointed to oversee and assess the work of the Mayor and Cabinet. The experts are not expected to be a significant cost upon the budget. In addition, the Mayor will need to have to right balance in terms of political network, management skills and commercial negotiating skills.

The Panel asked about the scrutiny arrangements for the Combined Authority and were informed that a scrutiny panel will be formed and headed by an independent Chairman, who will not be employed by the Combined Authority, to scrutinise the work of the Cabinet and the Mayor. Members were reminded that the Governance of the Combined Authority is currently being accessed.

Following a question in regards to the opportunities for local scrutiny panels to scrutinise the work of the Combined Authority, Members were informed that the scrutiny panels scrutinises the Leader of their respective authorities who in turn sits on the Cabinet of the Combined Authority.

Members were informed that the cost for Mayoral Election in May 2017 will be £300k and the office of Mayor will cost is £700k for the term of the Mayor. This represents 2% of the of the overall Combined Authority budget.

(At 8.30pm, during the consideration of the item, Councillor G J Bull left the meeting and did not return.)

39. REPORT ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the report on the Representation on External Organisations was presented to the Panel. Members noted that the St Ives Town Centre Management Team does meet regularly despite the Council's representative not providing any feedback.

(At 9.05pm, during the consideration of the item, Councillors R Harrison and R B Howe left the meeting and did not return.)

40. WORK PLAN STUDIES

The Panel received and noted a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which contained details of studies being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for Communities and Environment and Performance and Customers.

Members noted that the Hinchingsbrooke Hospital work stream on the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Environment) work programme has now concluded and is to be removed.

41. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROGRESS

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minutes Book), the Panel reviewed the progress of its activities since the last meeting.

The Panel was informed that the Cabinet have decided to proceed with the consultation on the increase of car park fees. After a short discussion over the timescale of the consultation, Members have sought clarification. The Cabinet have agreed the establishment of a working group to review the parking strategy of the Council. The Panel have appointed Councillors D B Dew, R Fuller, I D Gardener and T D Sanderson to the working group.

Members noted that the Housing Strategy will be presented to the Panel in January 2017. The Panel have decided to reconstitute the Housing Working Group with Councillors D B Dew, R Fuller and T D Sanderson appointed to the working group.

The Panel noted that the contract for BID Huntingdon is coming to an end and would like a representative from the BID to attend a future Panel meeting to explain what the benefit of the BID is and to answer Members' questions.

Members noted that the item 'Huntingdon West Masterplan' is to be removed from the work programme.