

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMY AND GROWTH) held in Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 2nd November 2017.

- PRESENT: Councillor D B Dew – Chairman.
- Councillors C E Bober, E R Butler, Mrs S Conboy, I D Gardener, R Harrison and D R Underwood.
- APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors B Hyland, D J Mead, T D Sanderson, Mrs J Tavener and K D Wainwright.
- IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Fuller, T Hayward and R B Howe.

28. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5th October 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

29. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were received.

30. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Panel received and noted 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 2017 to 28th February 2018.

31. COMBINED AUTHORITY PRESENTATION

The Executive Councillor for Devolution and Growth, Councillor R B Howe was in attendance to present to Members an update on the Combined Authority Progress. Also in attendance was Councillor T Hayward, one of the Council's representatives on the Combined Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

In his PowerPoint presentation, the Executive Councillor outlined what the Combined Authority have set out to do. Members were informed that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is seen as a target area for growth however there are challenges to growth such as connectivity and transport. The Executive Councillor added that there needs to be greater connectivity for people between their homes and their workplaces. In addition, there is a target to build 100,000 homes, which has since been increased by 20-25% by the Government.

The Combined Authority has also considered a low carbon,

knowledge-based economy. In order to do this the Combined Authority aim to build a digital infrastructure in the Market Towns to allow businesses to grow. In addition, the Combined Authority recognises that there is a skills shortage, particularly in Cambridgeshire where unemployment is low. Also another issue is the lack of tertiary education in St Neots.

A Member commented that they thought the biggest obstacle to business growth is the lack of tertiary education. As this means that there is therefore a lack of skilled workers.

The final commitment is that the Combined Authority has been tasked with looking at how public service is delivered within Cambridgeshire. The Executive Councillor stated that the Combined Authority had been talking to large scale employers regarding the lack of skilled workers however, in response to a question, the Executive Councillor confirmed that he had, in his role of Deputy Mayor of the Combined Authority, visited smaller and medium sized businesses regarding the lack of skilled workers.

A Member stated that they like the aspiration the Combined Authority has in regards to transport infrastructure however, they have concerns that it will lead to more dormitory towns. In addition, current transport provision is lacking competition and this is affecting rural services. The Executive Councillor was asked how is the Combined Authority going to increase quality of rural public transport. In response, the Executive Councillor agrees that there is a danger that dormitory towns are being created. For example, St Neots are exporting 25-28% of their population every day. The aim of the Combined Authority should be able to develop facilities in order to provide businesses a place to start and grow. In regards to bus services the Executive Councillor stated that there are no easy answers and that companies pull out of rural franchises as they lose money. It was confirmed that the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough bus services have been amalgamated, however the Executive Councillor warned that there may not be the finances to do anything about the poor, or non-existent, rural bus services.

The Executive Councillor outlined the Combined Authority's 100 day plan and the key achievements. The Combined Authority have developed a plan to build 100,000 new homes however, due to a Government requirement, that requirement has increased. It was noted that quite a number of feasibility studies had been carried out, following which the Combined Authority can establish which projects are the most viable and value for money.

The Executive Councillor stated that the Combined Authority has looked at the gross value added (GVA) per work within the area and are thinking of solutions to rebalance the GVA. A Member stated that they would like to see the 'Cambridge effect' exported to the rest of the region. In response, the Executive Councillor stated that it is the aim of the Combined Authority to grow along a series of corridors towards the Market Towns.

Following a question regarding the satisfaction of the Combined Authority with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the Executive Councillor stated that the LEP have currently had their funding frozen

by the Department for Communities and Local Government, in March 2017, as a result of allegations around governance issues. This means that the LEP have not been able to deliver any economic growth as a result. The Executive Councillor stated that once the LEP have had their funding unfrozen then they will be key in delivering education and skills to the area.

The Combined Authority has started to develop a St Neots Masterplan. This has been seen as key to reverse the decline of footfall within St Neots. The Combined Authority are going to pump priming money for initiatives to increase footfall. It was noted that St Neots has a significant manufacturing population however there is no knowledge intensive business services (KIBS) economy to support it.

Concern was expressed that, although 24 hectares of land has been designated for office and employment at Winteringham Park, the development could become like another similar development where the employment land used for housing. In addition, there is also a requirement for infrastructure in order to encourage businesses to develop the employment land. In response the Executive Councillor stated that St Neots has to be unconstrained in order to unlock its growth potential.

Following a question regarding the interaction of the Combined Authority with different layers of local government, the Panel was informed that interaction happens often between the different layers, particularly at officer level. As a result the Mayor has taken control of transport and infrastructure projects as the Combined Authority are able to deliver more quickly than the County Council as they are constrained budget wise and practically.

Concern was raised that although the Combined Authority wants to develop houses and infrastructure, those decisions are determined at local level and therefore the influence of the Combined Authority is minimal. The Executive Councillor accepted that decisions are made locally and that there needs to be a way to encourage more rural development. A Member added that it is difficult to develop a big strategy when locally Councils are constrained by planning rules.

The Executive Councillor stated that Huntingdonshire has only just missed out on funding for a new bridge over the River Ouse. He added that a feasibility study has been carried on a Hunts Strategic River Crossing. A Member was concerned that they did not know what the river crossing was as it had been referred to as an Ouse Crossing, a Hunts Strategic River Crossing and a Huntingdon River Crossing. The Member wanted clear communication and consultation to ensure residents know what it will be.

The Panel was informed of the Combined Authority forward plan. A Member commented on the transport system and asked if it could be integrated. In response the Executive Councillor stated that there is a good opportunity for the Combined Authority to build upon transport.

A Member admires the "blue sky" aspiration but was concerned that there is a gulf between the Combined Authority and the public and that they were worried that the Combined Authority are not effectively communicating their plans. The Executive Councillor stated that he

had given bimonthly updates to Council for 18 months and that District Councillors had the opportunity to disseminate the information to their residents. The Combined Authority will explain to people the forward plan but will be measured on results.

Further concern was expressed that the Combined Authority has a very big agenda and that they are spreading themselves too thinly. The Member stated that they would rather the Combined Authority pick out two or three projects and deliver them. In response, the Executive Councillor stated that the Combined Authority has a small officer group and that it runs itself as a commissioning agency. In addition, many of the projects are long term projects and that the feasibility studies will lead to the prioritisation of the projects.

In the opinion of a Member, the interaction between the Combined Authority and Highways England appears to be little as the authority seem to be carrying out feasibility studies that Highways England have already completed. In response, the Panel was informed that the Combined Authority are not working in isolation.

The Panel received a brief presentation from Councillor T Hayward, the Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel at the Combined Authority. Councillor Hayward stated that the Panel reviews the plans of the Combined Authority Board and make sure that the Board are realistic. The Panel was assured that they are not just Overview and Scrutiny but have an opportunity to develop policy. Members were informed that the Panel receive papers five days before meeting which in turn is two days before the Board meeting. In Councillor Hayward's opinion this does not give sufficient time to consider the items and decide whether a call in is required.

The Panel was informed that all the Combined Authority Portfolio Holders have an Overview and Scrutiny Panel Member shadowing them. In addition, the Chairman or Vice Chairman or representative can attend Board meetings. At the beginning, Overview and Scrutiny were concerned with the depth of the discussion before decisions are made but not so much now. There is concern that the Members of the Board are Leaders of their respective Councils and that could lead to too much of a load on one person. Members thought it would be better to have representatives that can concentrate on their role.

The Panel Members were concerned whether the 100 day plan will be met but have been reassured that it has been met however Councillor Hayward stated that he is still not sure. There is also the four year plan and that scrutiny are involved in the development of that. Following a question, Councillor Hayward stated that he and his colleagues are trying to have sufficient input into the process.

Overview and Scrutiny expressed concern regarding the amount of money that is spent on feasibility studies. Further concern was expressed that each Member fights for their area too much rather than focuses on an overall strategic programme. In addition, there is a feeling of Overview and Scrutiny Members that too much of a focus is on the north east of the area.

In response to a question regarding feedback, Cllr Hayward gives an update to each parish council he attends.

The Panel are assured that both Councillors Howe and Hayward are representing Huntingdonshire effectively. The Panel,

RESOLVED

to receive an update on the Combined Authority every six months.

(At 7.26pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor E R Butler entered the meeting.)

(At 8.06pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillor R Fuller left the meeting and did not return.)

32. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROGRESS

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Panel reviewed all the Panels' work programmes since the last meeting.

(At 8.45pm, during the consideration of this item, Councillors T Hayward and R B Howe left the meeting and did not return.)

Chairman