

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 January 2022 at 6.00pm held at Walsall Council House, Lichfield Street, Walsall, WS1 1TW.

Committee Members

Present:

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor M. Follows (Vice-Chair)
Councillor B. Allen
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor L. Jeavons
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor E. Lee
Councillor G. Singh Sohal
Councillor J. Whitehouse
Councillor R. Worrall

Portfolio Holders:

Councillor M. Bird	Leader of the Council
Councillor A. Andrew	Deputy Leader and Regeneration
Councillor G. Perry	Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities
Councillor C. Towe	Education and Skills
Councillor O. Butler	Clean and Green

Officers Present:

Simon Neilson	Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Communities
Philippa Venables	Director of Regeneration and Economy
Alan Bowley	Head of Clean & Green & Leisure
Craig Goodall	Principal Democratic Services Officer
Sian Lloyd	Democratic Services Officer

Invited Attendees:

Professor R. Gatrad
Ms J. Carless

Other Members in attendance:

Councillor S. Samra	Member of Scrutiny Overview Committee
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31/21 Apologies

None.

32/21 Substitution

There were no substitutions.

33/21 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whips.

34/21 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to consider in private session.

35/21 Minutes of the previous meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2021, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

36/21 Town Deal

The Deputy Leader (Regeneration) presented the Committee with details relating to the Town Deal which was announced in February 2019 and was moving towards delivery. It was noted that the aim of the fund was to develop local infrastructure and skills which would support growth of the local economy, increasing the town's opportunities and offer. A combined total of £42.6m for Bloxwich and Walsall had been made available by Government subject to agreeing the Head of Terms and the submission of Project Confirmation Tables for each project. He highlighted this as being particularly positive for the town to secure regeneration in the wake of Covid19.

The Director of Regeneration and Economy explained that the Town Deal Board was responsible for producing the Town Investment Plans and putting forward suitable projects. She advised that the Council acted as Accountable Body through the Programme Management service area and had also been successful in securing the support for particular projects under the scheme.

Following comments from Members of the Committee the Deputy Leader (Regeneration) highlighted various projects that had been identified including those proposed by Walsall College, works on towpath surfaces on the canal and the town centre performing arts venue. It was acknowledged that culture was an important lever for regeneration and named projects needed to have a focus on the economy, supporting jobs and education. The Director of Regeneration and Economy also added that Arts Council England had named Walsall as a priority and the West Midlands Combined Authority had designated Walsall a culture zone.

Walsall's heritage and potential were also commented upon and Members of the Committee and the Deputy Leader (Regeneration) emphasised the importance of Members talking positively about the town and a unique selling point being promoted. He also agreed with Members of the Committee that more residential use in the town centre needed to be encouraged. A short discussion took place on the price of car parking which could be a deterrent to visitors. It was noted that some prime car park sites were owned and managed in the private sector.

A Member asked a number of questions concerning the Town Deal Board regarding the membership and its meetings. The Director of Regeneration and Economy clarified that the details of membership and meetings of the Board were available on the Town Deal page of the council website.

A Member explained that it would be important to record the outcomes achieved from the forthcoming investment and ensure that they had a lasting effect. He recalled the former New Deal scheme for Blakenall which he felt had not created the long term change it aspired to.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The report and progress so far be noted;**
- 2. A progress report on delivery be presented to the Committee next municipal year;**
- 3. Details on the Town Deal Board be circulated to Members.**

37/21 Climate Change

Professor Gatrad gave a presentation to the Committee on climate change which he emphasised was a children's right issue. He provided details on temperature increases, highlighting that it was expected that global temperatures would have risen by 3 or 4 degrees by the end of the century and this would affect billions of people, particularly children and babies due to their different physiological systems and longer exposure as they age.

The Committee were advised of the 9 boundaries of planetary health and that a number of these had already exceeded safe levels which was of great concern. Professor Gatrad highlighted that the planet requires some greenhouse gases in order to remain warm but that these had now reached levels which were too high. He also highlighted the impact of air pollution on people, stating that higher rates of illnesses such as asthma, diabetes and dementia were observed as a result of air pollution.

Various personal measures which could be taken to reduce the impact on the climate were discussed including stopping cars idling outside schools, decreasing flights and switching to a largely vegetarian diet. Professor Gatrad advised the planting of trees would help to offset carbon dioxide.

Following a question from a Member of the Committee Professor Gatrad explained the importance of the trunk of trees in helping reduce soil erosion and support biodiversity and the importance of leaves in absorbing carbon dioxide.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The presentation be noted.**
- 2. A copy of the slides be distributed to Committee Members.**

38/21 Climate Emergency Action Plan

The Head of Clean and Green and Leisure presented the Committee with an update on the council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, which was approved by Cabinet on 21 October 2020. A further Cabinet report including a one year update was submitted to Cabinet on 20 October 2021. The Committee was reminded that the Council declared a climate change emergency on 16 September 2019 and committed to becoming a net zero carbon authority by 2050. It was noted that there was a comprehensive action plan and progress had been made.

Details of the council's tree planting strategy were discussed and it was highlighted that there was not enough land in council ownership to provide the tree canopy it aspired to deliver so it would be necessary to work with private landowners and research various funding sources. The Portfolio Holder for Clean and Green advised that whilst the trees planted thus far had been whips this was merely the start of the long-term planting strategy and some mature trees were also going to be planted.

Following a question from a Member of the Committee the Portfolio Holder for Clean and Green clarified that the Tiny Forests projects that had taken place within the borough had been embargoed by Severn Trent and this was the reason they had not been communicated to residents. The Portfolio Holders for Clean and Green and Education and Skills both agreed that they would look into the possibility of inviting local children to take part in any tree planting schemes that the council was responsible for.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The Committee note the progress made in delivering the measures identified in the climate emergency action plan.**
- 2. Details of recycling rates by ward be forwarded to Committee Members.**

39/21 Areas of focus – 2021/22

The Chair gave an overview of the work programme for 2021/22 and asked Members for their suggestions regarding items to be scheduled for the next meeting.

The following items were identified for the next meeting of the Committee:

- Phoenix 10
- Willenhall Masterplan
- Bonfires

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The Areas of Focus and Forward Plans be noted;**
- 2. That further information be provided to Members on the following items from the West Midlands Combined Authority Forward Plan:**
 - a. Ultra rapid charging spine;**

b. Mobility Hubs

40/21 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 3 March 2022.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.40pm.

Signed:

Date: