

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 January 2019 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members Present:

Councillor I. Shires (Chair)
Councillor A. Hicken (Vice-Chair)
Councillor B. Allen
Councillor B. Chattha
Councillor S. Coughlan
Councillor S. Craddock
Councillor L. Jeavons
Councillor C. Jones
Councillor W. Rasab
Councillor G. Singh Sohal

Portfolio Holders:

Councillor M. Bird	Leader of the Council
Councillor A. Andrew	Deputy Leader of the Council and Regeneration
Councillor C. Towe	Education and Skills

Officers Present:

Mark Lavender	Head of Programme Management
Kevin Clements	Environmental Resources Manager
Matthew Powis	Democratic Services Officer

Other Attendees Present:

Dr Chris Handy	Deputy Chair of Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
Sarah Middleton	Chief Executive of Black Country Consortium
Rosemary Coyne	SHAP Coordinator

47/18 Apologies.

An apology was received from Councillor Harrison.

48/18 Substitution.

There were no substitutions.

49/18 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip.

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

50/18 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended).

There were no items to consider in private session.

51/18 Minutes of the Previous Meeting.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2018, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

52/18 Areas of focus – 2018/19.

The Committee considered its areas of focus and the forward plans of Walsall Council and the Black Country Joint Executive Committee.

The Committee received a copy of West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board Forward Plan for consideration. The Chair highlighted that WMCA Forward Plans would be considered at every meeting of the Committee in addition to Black Country Joint Executive Committee (BCJC) and the Council's Executive Forward Plan.

Resolved:

That, areas of focus 2018/19 and forward plans be noted.

53/18 Presentation from Chair of Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

The Committee received a presentation from Dr Chris Handy at the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) which provided an overview of the future growth deal, status of the Borough economy, developments of the regeneration corridor and the Garden City Concept.

Dr Handy informed the Committee of the following:-

- The proportion of working age population with no qualifications had decreased at a faster rate than other areas of England;
- Population of Walsall stood at 281,293, which represented a 0.9% increase compared to 0.6% nationally;
- Job creation in Walsall had increased to over 111,000 representing a 5.7% increase compared to 1.1% increase nationally. However, it was noted that 24,120 extra jobs were required to reach national targets;
- Local resident wages had increased and stood at £25,187 in 2018 representing a 4.6% growth increase compared to 2.7% nationally;
- Gross Value Added (GVA) had increased per head representing a 4.1% increase compared to 2.9% nationally;
- Over 758 new build homes were built in 2018 and more than 4,305 new homes were required by 2026 in order to meet national target;
- 617 business births were required per annum to meet national levels;

- Employment rate between July 2017 and June 2018 stood at 69.2% which was below national average;
- Number of apprenticeships had decreased in Walsall and represented a shortfall of 2,269 posts compared to national averages;
- Walsall had received over £771m in total investment as part of a wider Black Country investment of 1.88bn;
- Walsall Town Centre had been identified as a strategic centre with regeneration corridors located in Brownhills, Birchills Leamore, Bentley and Darlaston North, Pleck and Willenhall South;
- The Garden City Concept focused around the following 10 objectives:-
 1. Using under –used land assets;
 2. Making the most of the Black Country assets;
 3. Integrating planning and food-growing into streets and spaces;
 4. Well connected by all modes of transport;
 5. Easy access to facilities and services;
 6. A distinctive and clear identity;
 7. Enterprising and supporting new business;
 8. Engaging residents to manage their own community;
 9. Harnessing technological innovation;
 10. Promoting healthy lifestyles.
- The Committee noted that Innovation Way in Beechdale had been a successful regeneration project;
- Walsall Town Centre had potential development opportunities around Walsall Train Station and Walsall Waterfront.

A question and answer session took place and following on, the principal points from the ensuing discussion:-

- The Chair sought clarification regarding the decline in apprenticeship positions in the Borough. In response, Dr Handy stated that Brexit was challenging for businesses when recruiting additional apprenticeships. In addition, smaller businesses historically resisted taking on trainees compared to experienced job positions. Sarah Middleton commented that work was ongoing to reduce bureaucracy around recruitment of apprenticeships and make hiring practices smoother;
- A Member sought clarification on the reason for low business births in the Borough. Dr Handy responded that business births in the Black Country had been historically low and further work was required to encourage business start-ups. Sarah Middleton commented that the Black Country Consortium had carried out birth mapping to identify businesses at an early stage to support and help grow businesses;
- Business survival figures in the Black Country were comparative to other areas of the country. The Committee requested that this data be provided to Members of the Committee in writing;
- The Chair requested that housebuilding figures be broken down into how many were classed for private sector use, social housing and general affordable accommodation. Sarah Middleton advised that this data would be circulated to Members of the Committee in writing;
- Comparative data on job sectors vs pay would be circulated in writing to Members of the Committee;

- During a discussion about strategic companies across the Borough. A Member requested that information on the types of businesses and their names be circulated to the Committee in writing. Sarah Middleton highlighted a snapshot of data which outlined that 127 businesses were identified in the retail sector and 128 businesses in advanced manufacturing;
- There had been some work on actions plans for each sector in the Borough which worked with the local industrial strategy and focused on identifying business needs within each sector. The Chair sought clarification on whether actions plans had changed the role of the Town Centre. Dr Handy confirmed that online shopping habits had changed the retail environment across the country. He envisioned Town Centres in future be used as multi-functional centres of commerce that mix live, work and play developments, which were comparable to the Garden City concept;
- A Member sought clarification on which sectors were growing the fastest. Dr Handy confirmed that engineering, automotive and aeronautical sectors were growing consistently compared to other traditional sectors. In response, Sarah Middleton confirmed that within the LEP, Health and Social Care sector and artificial intelligence were growth areas that would play an important role in the development and economical push of the Black Country;
- Walsall College was working with LEP and business to identify and support skills for young people to enter engineering in Walsall. The Committee noted that further work was required to support sectors which were struggling to fill job vacancies due to skills shortages;
- A Member sought clarification on whether business growth had been limited to availability of land in the Borough. Dr Handy outlined the role of the land remediation fund at the WMCA to assist in the development and availability of sites across the Black Country. He highlighted that output of development into land for mixed residential and business use was required. Sarah Middleton highlighted that availability of larger premises were in high demand across the country;
- The Vice – Chair sought clarification on whether there had been any improvement on skill redeployment to other sectors, given the decline with the retail sector. Dr Handy confirmed that low skills workers statistically had easier skill transfer sets compared to high skilled professionals and that the LEP was working with sectors to fill skills gaps;
- Transport hubs located closely to employment sectors were becoming increasingly important as a need for reducing vehicular traffic and air pollution;
- The Committee made reference to Freyburg, Germany and Detroit, USA on examples of town and city planning.

The Committee thanked the Dr Handy for his attendance.

Resolved that:

- 1. The presentation be noted;**
- 2. Business survival figures in the Black Country be circulated to Members of the Committee in writing;**
- 3. Housebuilding figures and data be circulated to Members of the Committee in writing;**

4. **Comparative data on job sectors vs pay be circulated in writing to Members of the Committee;**
5. **Strategic companies data figures be circulated in writing to Members of the Committee.**

54/18 **Presentation from Chief Executive of Black Country Consortium.**

The Committee received a presentation from Sarah Middleton, Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium. She outlined the role and future governance arrangements of the Black Country LEP with regard to the Black Country Assurance Framework. Following guidance received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government in November 2016, the framework aimed at providing appropriate transparency, value for money and compliance with funding with LEPs across the country.

Sarah Middleton informed the Committee of the following:-

- The Assurance Framework provided a positive refresh for LEPs across the country to improve transparency and enhance collaborative working;
- Government guidance was published following governance inconsistencies at Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough LEP;
- The Assurance Framework system had been made of the following:-
 - o Self-regulation which included peer review work, culture of transparency, best practice (LEP Network), Accountable Body Oversight and engagement with MCA, CA and LA Scrutiny Committees;
 - o Monitoring and evaluation;
 - o National Local Growth Assurance Framework;
 - o Regular reporting to ensure transparency;
 - o Deep dives;
 - o Annual Performance Reviews;
 - o Compliance Checks.
- LEP had actively engaged in the Board recruitment process and the organisation aimed at achieving a one third female representation by 2020 and 50% female representation by 2023;
- Annual Performance Reviews allow the LEP to review and comment on the governance, delivery and strategy of the LEP to ensure compliance of the assurance framework;
- The LEP had sought to formalise and enshrine forward plan and scrutiny arrangements with Black Country authorities;
- Final Government guidance was expected on the assurance framework within the coming months. However, it was expected to include the introduction of a new Ofsted type grading system for LEPs across the country;
- The Government had raised concerns at the geography of LEPs across the country not fitting with the layout of established Combined Authorities. Furthermore, the Government had expressed concerns at LEP geography overlapping with other LEP areas.

The Chair and a Member sought clarification from Sarah Middleton on how the LEP engage with the business communities and encourage underrepresented groups to step forward into leadership roles. In response, Sarah confirmed that the LEP had actively engaged with the business community to encourage nomination to leadership roles on the Board.

The Committee thanked Sarah Middleton for her attendance and praised the work carried out by the Black Country LEP.

Resolved:

That, the presentation be noted.

55/18 **Presentation from Sustainable Housing Action Partnership (SHAP)**

The Committee received a presentation from Rosemary Coyne from Sustainable Housing Action Partnership (SHAP). It was reported that SHAP was a networking organisation which acted as a centre of excellence for sustainable housing to influence improvement to policy and practice in order to address issues within housing construction.

The Committee were informed of the following priorities for SHAP:-

- Supporting Local Authorities in discussions with housing developers to achieve the very best outcomes available in terms of housing fit for the future from the finance invested;
- Ensuring the creation of a sustainable housing stock and that housing were comfortable and healthy to live in and affordable to run;
- Demonstrating that sustainable housing construction, retrofit and maintenance offers local economic development opportunities for individuals and businesses;
- Understanding the risks and opportunities around new approaches to infrastructure investment was needed for the industry to move forward.
- Encouraging adoption of new technologies, resource management, data management, partnership working;
- Pressuring the industry to support sustainable communities through delivery of a sustainable housing stock that contributes to the health and wellbeing of individuals;
- Tackling fuel poverty by ensuring fit for purpose housing and promoting the use of data and digital connectivity to provide targeted support;
- Tackling health and vulnerability issues by working towards data sets that can be interrogated to allow targeted support and investing in 'smart homes';
- Ensuring that rural issues were addressed equally with those of concentrated urban areas.

The Vice-Chair sought clarification on whether SHAP could establish a registered trademark of approval for homes which certify and meet a certain sustainability standard.

Rosemary Coyne responded that a trademark requirement was required for the sector with necessary accreditation protocols and benefits to encourage the wider industry. However, SHAP would not offer a trademark scheme.

Following a lengthy discussion on home insulation efficiency. A Member highlighted that Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) required for all homes in England needed to be updated to ensure that consumers had robust information about energy efficiency options and identifying solutions to reduce fuel poverty.

Members noted cladding options on a selection of homes in Nottingham which aimed at reducing fuel poverty whilst improving home appearance in a deprived area of the city.

The Chair requested that SHAP presentation be circulated to Members of the Committee.

Resolved:

That, the presentation be noted and be circulated to Members of the Committee.

56/18 Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project

The Committee considered a report on Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project.

The Environmental Resource Manager reported that UNESCO Global Geopark were defined as 'single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance'. In November 2015, the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) comprising of Dudley MBC, Sandwell MBC, Walsall MBC and Wolverhampton City Council submitted an application to UNESCO for Global Geopark status for the Black Country which included a number of sites within the Borough.

The Committee noted the following Geosites in the Borough:-

- Barr Beacon and Pinfold Lane Quarry Site of Importance for Nature Conservation;
- Brownhills and Walsall Wood Mining Heritage Monuments;
- Daw End Railway Cutting and Linley Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest;
- Hay Head Quarry Site of Importance for Nature Conservation;
- Moorcroft Wood Site of Importance for Nature Conservation;
- Park Lime Pits Site of Importance for Nature Conservation;
- Shire Oak Park Site of Importance for Nature Conservation;
- Walsall Arboretum Site of Importance for Nature Conservation;
- Walsall Geotrail, Museums and Galleries.

ABCA agreed to provide ongoing financial commitment to the coordination and administration of the project which included a minimum of £1,500 per Council per

year. In addition, a four –year commitment of £8,000 per Council per year was approved by ABCA to create a project officer to manage the project.

UNESCO deferred ABCA’s application in May 2017 for the management team to respond to seven recommendations.

A Member sought clarification on whether the financial contribution to the application was the best option for advertisement of the Black Country. The Environmental Resources Manager responded that the project was significant in boosting tourism and other benefits for the Black Country.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

57/18 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 19 February 2019.

Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 8.29p.m.

Signed:

Date: