

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

2 MAY 2018 - 2:30PM



PRESENT: Councillor C Boden, Councillor G G R Booth, Councillor S Clark, Councillor S Count, Councillor D Hodgson, Councillor M J Humphrey, Councillor Mrs K F Mayor, Councillor C C Owen, Councillor A Pugh

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Buckton, Councillor Mrs Laws, Councillor Mason, Councillor Oliver and Councillor Seaton.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Count, Councillor Humphrey and Councillor Pugh

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Gary Garford (Corporate Director), Anna Goodall (Head of Legal and Governance), Phil Hughes (Head of Leisure Services), Izzi Hurst (Member Services and Governance), Carol Pilson (Corporate Director) and Justin Wingfield (Head of Business and Economy)

OSC34/17 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

Anna Goodall requested a nomination for Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel. It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Mayor, seconded by Councillor Owen and resolved that Councillor Boden be elected as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

OSC35/17 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Mayor, seconded by Councillor Owen and resolved that Councillor Humphrey be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

OSC36/17 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting 19 February 2018 were confirmed and signed, subject to the following comments;

- Councillor Boden stated that the declaration of interest made by Councillor Mason in Minute OSC30/17, should read 'Conservative Club' not 'Group'.

OSC37/17 PROGRESS IN DELIVERING THE ECONOMY BUSINESS PLAN OBJECTIVES 2017-2018

Councillor Boden thanked officers for their comprehensive report and highlighted to Members an update that had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Councillor Boden informed officers that the Committee would discuss individual sections of the report and make comments on these.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows;

- Councillor Boden highlighted two Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) on pages 14-15 of the Agenda Pack, that were underperforming. He added that whilst the Business Ambassador network is currently below target, the initiative is in its infancy and hopes this will improve next year. Gary Garford thanked Members for considering this and confirmed that even though the initiative is in its infancy, plans are in place to improve performance with this KPI next year.
- Councillor Boden highlighted that by measuring inward investment enquiries, this could be seen as a reactive approach as oppose to actively approaching local businesses. He added that the report notes that enquiries are dependent on external organisations approaching the Council and therefore it is suggested that the Council cannot influence this figure. Gary Garford explained that the purpose of the figure initially was to capture the level of interest in investments in Fenland and added that it varies annually based on external influences and the different markets at that time. He confirmed that the team hope to take a more proactive approach in the future and will be identifying business needs in the Fenland area and pursuing different avenues to solve this. He explained that this is a very difficult item to measure as it is subjective and difficult to control and suggested that next year, this measure could be recorded differently and the target reconsidered.
- Councillor Booth stated that as the KPI only deals with enquiries on investments and not investments that have proceeded, the level of success is not being measured correctly. He asked that in future, the number of businesses locating to Fenland is captured also. Gary Garford said the team are now measuring investments and business expansions in the area however explained that initial enquiries can take a period of years to develop into local business opportunities. He added that whilst these are seen as slow burners, they do have a big impact on the local economy.
- Councillor Mason explained that a survey is currently being carried out on local businesses in Fenland; seeking their views on how the Council can support them. He hopes the results will assist the Council in helping other businesses too.
- Councillor Booth said that whilst it is difficult to measure the number of businesses coming to the area, quantifiable figures will assist Members in seeing progress. Gary Garford confirmed that outcomes will be measured in the future to show the number of jobs created and apprenticeships awarded.
- Councillor Owen reiterated that Members need to know the benefit to local people from investments, in order to measure its success. Gary Garford thanked Councillor Owen for his point and highlighted that local businesses produce a supply chain that affects a wider range of people. For example, one factory may employ twenty-thirty people but its supply chain has a far wider reach locally to other businesses which are enhanced by its existence. He added that the increase of investment to businesses also benefits the Council in relation to the increase in payment of Business Rates.
- Councillor Boden stated that whilst he appreciates the difficulty in obtaining the figures, it would be useful to measure the effectiveness of the Economic Development team by calculating how many jobs have been created or saved in Fenland, as a result of their work. Gary Garford agreed and highlighted to Members the level of inward investments and grants being awarded in the District, with funds being spent on the Wisbech Access Study and Rail Study/Works in Whittlesey and March. He explained that whilst these do not create instant jobs, they will facilitate better transport links and over time could bring other businesses to the area. Gary Garford explained that economic development ratings are subjective and difficult to explain which results in difficulty measuring their effectiveness.
- Councillor Booth asked if the GRANTfinder software discussed on page 18/19 of the Agenda Pack is the same type of software the Council had used previously and eradicated. Gary Garford confirmed the Council had a grant-aid package a number of years ago and at that time, it did not provide many benefits. He added that grants are now more openly available to other teams in the Council and therefore they are trialling the new software for a

year to see its worth. He explained that the GRANTfinder system is very effective in alerting the Council of funds and grants available in the District and is currently proving invaluable to officers.

- Councillor Booth suggested the report could be clearer in showing which bids for funding have been successful and what stage they are at. Justin Wingfield confirmed that the grants listed in the report are an example to Members of the grants available but agreed to improve reporting processes to show this in a clearer manner.
- Councillor Hodgson said he was very pleased with certain figures in the report and asked if other local Sports Clubs had been approached in regards to the grants available on page 20 of the Agenda Pack. Phil Hughes clarified that it is the responsibility of the individual Sports Clubs to apply for funding and therefore if specific Sports Clubs have not been mentioned in the report, they may not have approached the Council for advice on this.
- Councillor Boden said that whilst there are two KPI's underperforming, positives can be found such as the work being carried out in relation to the GRANTfinder software, the expansion of Business networking events taking place and the start of the Business Ambassador's network; which all should improve economic development in the area over time.
- Councillor Booth asked if the Council concentrates enough on the larger picture of economic development or focuses on smaller projects within this. Gary Garford explained it was a balance to concentrate on both the larger objectives and smaller projects but confirmed that no enquiry, however small, is turned away. He said that the team are doing all they can to assist both businesses and regeneration in the area. He added that economic development has three strands; investment, supporting existing businesses and direct intervention such as the Council's own Business Centres. The Council concentrates and priorities all of these areas of economic development.
- Councillor Booth asked how much resource is taken up within the team by holding Business Networking events and Forums and asked if these could be facilitated without using the Economic Development team's resources. Councillor Mason explained that as the new Portfolio Holder for Growth, he is engaging with local businesses through visits and Business Forums and hopes by taking a more proactive approach, this will have a positive effect on development in the District. He reiterated that quantifying the success of this will be difficult but is confident a proactive approach will benefit local businesses over time. Gary Garford said the Whittlesey Business Forum is a very good example of positive engagement with local businesses. He said that less than 10% of businesses are members of the Chambers of Commerce and therefore the Council continue to act as a portal to local businesses and are now making contact with accountants and agents in an attempt to engage business owners. He added that recent Business Seminars had been well attended and had assisted attendees in building their own network of local services and businesses. As a result of this, he hopes that local businesses will now have the confidence to approach the Council when help is needed.
- Councillor Boden asked if Fenland District Council's own business premises contribute towards Economic Development and asked if the Council's management of these premises assist in economic development too. Gary Garford said that in his opinion these premises do improve economic development by providing services to smaller local businesses with attractive rental terms whilst bringing in revenue to the Council. He explained that due to attractive terms, the premises act as incubator units to small businesses which eventually allows them to expand to larger premises therefore helping economic growth. He added that the Mini-Factory Units are ideal for people who require a small workspace away from home and also attracts people relocating their business to Fenland which offers lower rents compared to other areas, such as Cambridge.
- Councillor Booth suggested future KPI's should highlight the number of businesses that have successfully moved and expanded from the Council's premises and asked what was being done to improve the occupancy rate at South Fens Business Centre in Chatteris. Gary Garford said occupancy rates across the Business Centres do fluctuate and the Council is targeting the marketing of South Fens Business Centre to improve this figure.

- Councillor Mrs Mayor asked if figures are available to show the number of businesses that have stayed in Fenland once they have left the Council's business premises and what support is offered to assist with this. Gary Garford explained that whilst Fenland does lack larger commercial units, the Council has a database of potential premises for businesses looking to expand and tries to facilitate these companies remaining in Fenland.
- Councillor Boden said that it would be helpful for officers to provide figures to show the effect and success of these incubator units on economic development.
- Councillor Boden asked what plans were in place to deal with the lack of larger commercial premises in Fenland and whether the Council could facilitate this in some way, perhaps through the Local Plan. He suggested Councillor Mrs Laws could consider as Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Planning. Councillor Mrs Laws thanked Councillor Boden for highlighting this and agreed that it is of importance and can be looked into further.
- Councillor Booth asked if the KPI measuring tenant's satisfaction, is necessary to report as this is more of an operational value. Gary Garford explained that this measurement is a Management Performance Indicator (MPI) and shows Members what Management collect in regards to performance data.
- Councillor Boden said the KPI relating to tenant's satisfaction highlights the flexible leases and support the Council offer local businesses. Gary Garford agreed and said the attractive terms appeal to the target market and encourage small businesses to lease these premises.
- Councillor Boden asked whether the Council's activities in respect of Marine Services, are appropriate in promoting economic development in Fenland. Gary Garford said Marine Services benefit the service area by offering employment to local people and the shipping aspect also benefits local companies as commodities coming into Wisbech Port provide a supply chain for other Fenland businesses. He explained that even though it is difficult to influence shipping, the leisure side of Marine Services is an asset to Wisbech and Fenland and provides income from tourism in the area. He said an example of this is the use of local companies to repair boats in Wisbech Yacht Harbour which further improves the supply chain.
- Councillor Booth asked if more focus could be put on agriculture in Fenland as oppose to Marine Services. Gary Garford explained that as the Council owns and operates the Port; it is an asset and therefore reported on.
- Councillor Boden asked for the relevance in reporting the tonnage to Ports and how this improves the economy. Gary Garford explained that Marine Services falls under the remit of Economic Development so is therefore reported on and the service brings income to the Council. Councillor Mason said it is difficult to measure the success of Marine Services as its revenue is intangible such as tourism, business links and supply chains however without one, Fenland would miss out.
- Councillor Booth asked if figures could be provided showing the success of other sectors in the area, such as agriculture and retail. Gary Garford said this data is not readily available as they are not service areas the Council deliver.
- Councillor Boden stated that figures relating to Planning Applications shown on page 48-49 were substantially above target which is positive.
- Councillor Owen asked if Planning Shared Services had affected the application decision making process, as planning officers are less likely to be familiar with the local area and historical applications. Councillor Mrs Laws said that whilst it is not feasible for planning officers to visit every potential site, they do try and ensure that one officer is responsible for an application throughout the entire process from application to discharge of conditions. She added that the planning team is currently stable and will be having a new senior planning officer joining the team soon. Carol Pilson clarified that only two officers from Fenland District Council are shared with Peterborough City Council and the Council see the importance in having our own planning officers on site, making decisions on applications in Fenland. She reiterated that whilst officers cannot be familiar with every site in Fenland, a lot of work is spent researching the history of sites to ensure professional recommendations and decisions are made on every application.
- Councillor Booth asked if any officers from Peterborough City Council assess applications in

Fenland and vice versa. Carol Pilson confirmed that generally applications are assessed individually however there are times where both Fenland District Council and Peterborough City Council utilise each other's skills and expertise in relation to niche applications.

- Councillor Boden said there were no negatives in relation to the KPI's relating to Planning and economic development. He explained that the appropriateness of the Local Plan and how that interacts with the needs of local businesses is very relevant and important to economic development in Fenland.
- Councillor Booth suggested that the Council needs to consider increasing the number of affordable homes in the area as without these, there will be a negative impact on economic development.
- Councillor Hodgson updated Members on his involvement with the Wisbech Access Strategy and informed Members that a Press Release should be circulated soon updating them on the progress. He raised concerns in regards to a potential road development discussed in the report. Carol Pilson reminded Councillor Hodgson to refrain from discussing potential matters that may relate to an Interest he may hold without declaring it to the meeting. Councillor Boden suggested Councillor Hodgson discuss his concerns to officers outside of the meeting.
- Councillor Boden stated that infrastructure improvements are key to economic development and even though these targets are difficult to set, it would be useful to report the stages of achieving each objective. He asked officers to consider the best way to report the progress of objectives on major infrastructure improvements.
- Councillor Booth asked if it was possible to create a KPI that measured congestion times in relation to improvements to highways. Gary Garford said this would not be possible as this information falls under the remit of Highway Services and the Transport Authority and although the Council does benefit from a Transport Manager who has great success in lobbying schemes and gaining funding across the District, the Council can only report what it is accountable.
- Councillor Boden thanked Gary Garford and said Members need to be mindful when considering secondary measures as oppose to the primary measures the Council is solely responsible for. Gary Garford confirmed that the Council have a good working relationship with Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority and both listen to any concerns the Council have.
- Councillor Boden reiterated that to measure the success of economic development, KPI's should only relate to the work carried out by Fenland District Council.
- Councillor Booth suggested that putting in place an overriding strategy would assist the Council in achieving their objectives.
- Councillor Mason thanked the Chairman for the points raised during this item, his attention to detail and support today.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the progress made by the Council in delivering the corporate objectives in the Business Plan and Councillor Boden made the following comment;

'The Committee recognises recent, useful and innovative initiatives undertaken by Fenland District Council to promote economic development and to deliver the Council's Economy Business Plan Objectives. Examples of such beneficial initiatives include positive business engagement through the Business Ambassadors Network, subscribing to the GRANTfinder system and the business networking events now held monthly at, alternately, the South Fens Business Centre and the Boathouse Business Centre.

The Committee is concerned that we are failing adequately to measure the current effectiveness of Fenland District Council's Economy Priority. KPI's need to be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are up-to-date and that they provide a good overall measure of the value added by the work of the teams involved with the Economy Priority. While recognising the difficulty in precisely

quantifying the number of jobs generated or saved by the work of the Economic Development team, the Committee believes that current KPI's fail to give any useful quantifiable measure as to the success, or otherwise, of the work of Fenland District Council in improving employment numbers in the District, which the Committee believes should be seen as one of the Council's key Economic Development Objectives. Having in 'the Number of journeys made by bus and rail users' a performance measure which cannot be fully reported because figures have not been available for several years, suggests that it may have been some time since performance indicators for Economic Development have been systematically reviewed for their relevance and usefulness.

The Committee recommends that those performance measures which relate to the work of the teams involved in the Economy Priority, should be reviewed to ensure that they are useful and up-to-date. The Committee further recommends that one or more performance indicators which more transparently show the number of jobs created or saved in Fenland as a direct result of the work of the Economic Development team would be very helpful.

The Committee would welcome the opportunity later this calendar year, to review improvements made or proposed in the measurements of performance of the Economic Development team.'

(Councillor Owen declared that he was Chairman of Estover Playing Field CIC)

(Councillor Mrs Mayor declared that she is a Member of the Whittlesey Business Forum)

OSC38/17 UPDATE FROM CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEETING

Councillor Boden updated Members on the recent Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Meeting which took place on 26 March 2018 and was attended by Councillor Boden and Councillor Hodgson.

The agenda items considered at the meeting were;

- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Strategic Spatial Framework
- Transport Delivery 2018/19
- Digital Connectivity Infrastructure
- University of Peterborough - Interim Accommodation options
- Cambridge City Devolution Housing Programme
- Affordable Housing Programme
- East Cambridgeshire Strategic Community Land Trust Programme- Provision of Loan Facility

*** FOR ADOPTION BY THE COUNCIL ***

OSC39/17 ITEM WHICH THE CHAIRMAN HAS UNDER ITEM 5 DEEMED URGENT.

None

OSC40/17 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Members considered the Confidential - Economic Development Update report.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses from officers.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the proposal and provided comments and feedback to help inform the proposed Cabinet and Council reports.

4:30 PM

Chairman