



Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Colliton Park,
Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1XJ on Wednesday, 20 March 2019

Present:

Ray Bryan (Chairman)
Cherry Brooks, Jon Andrews, Jean Dunseith and Jon Orrell

Members Attending

Daryl Turner, County Councillor for Marshwood Vale

Officers Attending: Mike Harries (Chief Executive), Kate Tunks (Transport Planning Team Leader), Matthew Piles (Service Director of Environment, Infrastructure and Economy), David Northover (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and David Walsh (Economy & Enterprise Team Leader Economy).

Apologies for Absence

30 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andy Canning, Spencer Flower, Peter Hall, Margaret Phipps and David Shortell.

Code of Conduct

31 No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made by members.

Minutes

32 The minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2018 were confirmed and signed.

Public Participation

33 There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

There were no public statements received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(2).

Enabling Economic Growth Strategy - Progress

34 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment, Infrastructure and the Economy on the County Council's Enabling Economic Growth Strategy. Members received a presentation on issues which could contribute to the economic vision of the new Dorset Council.

The report set out what progress was being made with delivering the County Council's Enabling Economic Growth Strategy, focusing on priority actions. The Committee were being asked to consider what the report entailed in order that this could lead to recommendations being made for the economic vision of the new Dorset Council.

How the strategy was being delivered; what investment was being made; the way in which this was being done and what this entailed was all contained in the report for the committee consideration. A presentation at the meeting complemented this and gave members a clearer understanding of what this entailed.

What was integral to the success of economic growth and how it could be progressed was set out in the report.

The Dorset economy was not reliant upon any one sector, and its resilience was enhanced by the presence of sound sectors in terms of high productivity. As such resources had been focussed on sectors with potential to grow and increase productivity (advanced engineering and manufacturing, and agritech/aquaculture) and improving aspects of sectors which are important to the local economy (construction, visitor economy).

The policy, investment and activity referred to by officers provided a context and foundations for the new Dorset Council to develop ambitious and sustainable proposals for economic growth.

With the aid of a visual presentation, opportunities and challenges facing Dorset were outlined and the part productivity; skills and education; housing; infrastructure and the role that the environment played in all this was explained. The principle of an Economic Growth Strategy and the benefit this would bring was explained and members recognised that ownership of this should be embraced by them to ensure that the Committee was successful.

The part that the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership played in influencing economic growth was drawn to the Committee's attention and the success in achieving the Dorset Innovation Park at Winfrith Newburgh was noted, as well as the importance of the Western Dorset Growth Corridor and what benefits this brought. The importance of digital infrastructure and its availability in order to access opportunities was seen to be essential in economic growth being successful and every effort was being made to facilitate the provision of Superfast Broadband throughout the County, which was demonstrated by the County Council's continued commitment towards this. It was acknowledged that universal provision of Superfast Broadband was critical to the future economic prosperity of Dorset.

Officers explained that in enabling economic growth, consideration should be given to the part employment; housing; skills; infrastructure and the environment played and the relationship between these. Whilst sophisticated technological business played a critical part in how economic growth might be achieved, there was a need to recognise the importance of what part other more traditional sectors played in this across the rural county, with the likes of tourism, agriculture, fishing, mineral extraction and quarrying, and oil exploration and production all playing their significant part in benefitting the economy. The viability of these would ensure that rural development was maintained and that there was investment made to benefit the rural sector alongside other sectors of the economy.

The Committee were keen to see that commercial investment fulfilled its potential and how Dorset Council was able to facilitate economic growth for the private sector was instrumental in this. There was an acknowledgment that businesses needed to be encouraged to locate to Dorset for prosperity to be achieved. Given the various means by which Dorset Council could play its part in facilitating economic growth across the County, there were significant opportunities for Dorset to achieve its aim of stimulating a more prosperous economy.

The Committee were pleased to see the progress being made and hoped that this would be maintained by Dorset Council, particularly in the integrated working relationship that would arise in a Unitary authority.

Resolved

That progress with delivering the County Council's Enabling Economic Growth Strategy 2018-2020 be supported in that this might be maintained and enhanced by Dorset Council.

Reason for decision

Economic growth was vital to the achievement of the County Council's four corporate priorities, especially 'Prosperous', and was likely to be a priority for the new Dorset Council.

Growth through Digital Infrastructure - Progress

35 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment, Infrastructure and the Economy providing a retrospective view of the achievements of the Superfast Dorset Programme and summarising the next steps that would be needed to be taken by the new Dorset Council and its partners to ensure that a fully future-proofed and accessible digital infrastructure - both fixed and mobile - was available to meet the significant future data demands on modern digital smart places. A visual presentation was made to Committee in complementing this.

Members were informed that significant progress had been made in improving digital connectivity and accessibility through the Superfast Dorset programme, with policy and technology having evolved considerably over the recent period. The full fibre agenda, market analysis and stimulation, emergent 5G opportunities and challenges and smart place applications would all need the active engagement of the new Dorset Council in order that ambitions for digital place can be realised.

Of particular importance to the Committee was to know how improvements might continue to be delivered, with a specific view to identifying solutions to meet the needs of those currently having limited, little or no reception and to understand what was being done to achieve this.

The Committee was being asked to assess the progress being made and how improvements could continue to be made for accessibility to broadband. It was considered that the benefits to Dorset from this could well lead to the generation of significant economic and social prosperity. The Committee recognised that delivering the Superfast Broadband initiative was integral to the delivery of services in a more direct, flexible and accessible way.

Members recognised how important connectivity was considered to be for the prosperity of Dorset and having the means to access it was considered to be essential. Giving all residents the same opportunity to access it was an obligation the Council was determined to fulfil and all was being done to achieve this. Officers explained the technologies associated with this and how these were being applied, the process for deliverability and what practicalities there were. Innovations in technologies to improve how broadband could be delivered were constantly evolving, with wireless and satellite technologies playing a significant part.

The Superfast Dorset project aimed to deliver the most appropriate Superfast broadband solution practicable, maximising benefits in a cost-effective manner across the business and domestic community where it was not deemed to be otherwise commercially viable. The Strategy provided a basis for the successful delivery of superfast broadband. In particular, it was hoped that the continued work by Dorset Council would help to play a significant part in transforming the strategy into the delivery of outcomes.

The relationship between BT, BDUK, Superfast Dorset and the County Council and the part each played was outlined; along with the technologies involved; the areas of coverage and speeds associated with this. How the Council played its part in facilitating accessibility and delivery was drawn to the Committee's attention. The current Superfast Dorset contract had now reached 97% of the premises in Dorset, including Bournemouth and Poole. Reaching the final 3% and identifying solutions for their connectivity remained a considerable challenge. Officers reaffirmed what investment the County Council along with other public bodies, in partnership with BT,

were making in fulfilling their commitment to rolling out broadband via the Superfast Dorset Programme.

The Committee acknowledged the progress being made and the processes involved in delivering it. However, it recognised that economic, commercial and technological barriers remained. Nonetheless, the Committee fully understood the socio-economic benefits that connectivity brought and hoped that Dorset Council would prioritise this too. They asked that this be taken into consideration:-

- Development of Digital Dorset vision
- Encouragement of Digital skills
- Resources and volunteers in the community to facilitate digital understanding

Resolved

That the Dorset Council be asked to ensure that every effort is made to maintain and, where practicable, enhance the Superfast Dorset programme, its implementation and its Strategy so that continued success was achieved.

Reason for decision

To ensure the continued success of the Superfast Dorset programme so that a fully future-proofed and accessible digital infrastructure - both fixed and mobile - was available to meet the significant future data demands being made on modern digital smart places.

Dorset Transport Infrastructure - Progress

36 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment, Infrastructure and the Economy on progress being made with the Dorset Transport Infrastructure and how this was being achieved. The report updated on strategic transport issues and workstreams for Dorset. Of particular importance was the progression of the Sub-Regional Transport agenda and the Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) Bid in South East Dorset.

Members noted that as part of the Government's Industrial Strategy and the National Productivity Investment Fund, the national focus was now on sustainable access and delivery of growth. The aim being to increase productivity through improved connections between urban centres and suburbs. The means to do this would be by investment in infrastructure to improve public and sustainable transport connectivity. In order to gain access to this, Dorset must be able to evidence investment needs to take the opportunities available. A Local Transport Plan Review was required to update Dorset's transport strategy to take into account recent Government and LEP policies.

The report was supplemented by a presentation which showed what achievements had been realised, what had been successful and what more need to be done.

Members recognised the need that there would be greater emphasis if where possible the two new unitary authorities collaborated in any approach they were to make to government.

In discussion members considered what was of importance that should be brought to the attention of the Dorset Council, this being:-

- support priorities for the east west corridor and A37 corridor
- support work with partners and the LEP

- ask for support from the LEP for transport model funding
- means of communicating rather than having to travel, by improved digital connectivity.

Resolved

1. That the Bournemouth, Dorset & Poole Local Transport Plan (LTP) should be reviewed by Dorset Council with our partners to inform the new Local Plans.
2. That progress continue to be made by Dorset Council to evidence, work with partners and submit funding bids for transport infrastructure to support housing delivery, jobs and economic growth.

Reasons for decisions

1. To ensure the integration of transport planning and planning to deliver the outcome of sustainable development for Dorset.
2. Transport infrastructure priorities have been agreed and included in the LTP 2011 but Dorset does not receive enough LTP grant funding to deliver each scheme. Other funding opportunities must be sought to deliver Dorset's growth potential.

Highway Maintenance - Progress

37 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment, Infrastructure and the Economy on Additional Highways Maintenance Funding designed to ensure that condition of the highway network was as good as it could be and provided for a satisfactory standard being met.

The management of the highway assets was based on need with sites most in need of repair being prioritised. The aim was to achieve a point at which the highway asset could be maintained in a condition that provided optimum serviceability for minimum investment. Whilst value for money in highway maintenance was critical, the scope for greater efficiencies was always sought. Wherever possible, opportunities to carry out preventative treatments were being implemented to prevent road condition deteriorating identify maintenance needs. Whilst some £12.462m was received for maintenance from Government annually, as documented to the Policy Development Panel, those funds were insufficient to cover all of Dorset's maintenance needs across the whole highway network.

On that basis a bid was being made to Dorset Council for the necessary additional funding to ensure that the standard of the highway network was maintained and enhanced where practicable.

Officers explained what was done with surfacing, patching, drainage and ditching improvement works and how this was being achieved. Where practicable, a proactive approach was being taken to invest in the network, by way of interventions rather than having to react to issues when they arose and were reported.

Assessments made of what maintenance was required was continually being done. The reasons for what work was necessary, when this was being done and what benefits it brought was communicated in a number of ways, with social media being used to engage with public.

The Committee were pleased to see what progress was being made and the way that this was being done – in taking a proactive approach where practicable – recognising that it was essential that the standards of the network were maintained. How highway in conservation areas would be maintained was of importance to the Committee and that where practicable, the benefits of any additional funding might be seen.

They were keen that Town and Parish Council's continued to play their important part in identifying issues at an early stage and doing what they might to assist the Highway

Authority. In investing to save, benefits would be realised in the longer term and not require such a demand on resources. On that basis they agreed

Resolved

That the additional schemes being constructed by the additional corporate funding and the proposals for the additional Department for Transport funding be noted.

Recommended

That having considered the recommendations made by the Policy Development Panel (PDP) in 2018, the Cabinet be requested to recommend that Dorset Council be asked to actively, and formally, consider reinstating essential highway maintenance activities in the future, requiring additional annual revenue funding equating to £3,733.960.

Reason for Recommendation

The recommendations made by the PDP are considered essential to address the backlog of issues associated with essential highway maintenance.

Outcomes Focused Monitoring Report: March 2019

38 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment, Infrastructure and the Economy on the Outcomes Focused Monitoring Report as at March 2019 and were pleased to see what progress was being made, with the report's infographics improving their understanding of this.

Noted

Questions from County Councillors

39 No questions from County Councillors were received.

Meeting Duration: 10.00 am - 12.30 pm