



Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Colliton Park,
Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1XJ on Wednesday, 15 June 2016

Present:

Daryl Turner (Chairman)
Hilary Cox (Vice-Chairman)
Hilary Cox, Richard Biggs, Mike Byatt, Andy Canning, Ronald Coatsworth, Mervyn Jeffery and
Margaret Phipps.

Members Attending

Deborah Croney (Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills), Peter Finney (Deputy Leader of the County Council and Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Highways), Robert Gould (Leader of the Council), Trevor Jones (Chairman of Audit and Governance Committee), Rebecca Knox (Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Children's Safeguarding) and David Walsh (Chairman of People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee).

Pauline Batstone, County Councillor for Blackmore Vale attended for minute 4.

Officers Attending: Mike Harries (Director for Environment and the Economy), Matthew Piles (Head of Economy), Mark Taylor (Group Manger- Governance and Assurance), Peter Moore (Head of Environment), Andy Smith (Group Finance Manager) and David Northover (Senior Democratic Services Manager).

For certain items, as appropriate

David Walsh (Economy and Enterprise Team Leader), Ken Buchan (Environmental Advice Team Leader) and Penny Syddall (Communications Team Leader (Superfast)).

Public Speakers

Ray Scragg, Arne Parish Council, petitioner - minute 4
Mark Vye, local resident, petitioner – minute 4

(Notes: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on **Wednesday, 12 October 2016.**)

Chairman's Introductions

1 The Chairman took the opportunity to open proceedings at the inaugural meeting of the Committee and provided some context around what its purpose was, how it was to operate and how its objectives might be achieved.

Apologies for Absence

2 Apologies for absence were received from Mike Lovell and John Wilson and from Colin Jamieson, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Growth.

Code of Conduct

3 There were no declarations by members of disclosable pecuniary interest under the Code of Conduct.

Public Participation

4 Public Speaking

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

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

Petitions

There were two petitions submitted to the meeting in accordance with the County Council's Petition Scheme.

Procedure for Petitions - Petition entitled "Superfast broadband for Ridge"

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Economy on the receipt of a petition containing 222 signatures asking for the provision of superfast broadband for the village of Ridge near Arne, Wareham. The report set out a series of options available to the Committee on how they might wish to respond to the petition.

Officers took the opportunity to confirm that the Superfast Dorset Programme aimed to deliver the most appropriate Superfast Broadband solution for communities, maximising benefits in a cost effective manner across the business and domestic community. Furthermore it was confirmed that the County Council was committed to pursuing all technical and funding solutions possible and every effort was being made to maximise what might be achieved. Officers reaffirmed what investment the County Council, in partnership with BT, were making in fulfilling their commitment to rolling out broadband. They took the opportunity to explain in detail the practicalities of delivering the project, technicalities that were being faced by BT in achieving this, the processes involved in how the Programme was to be implemented and arrangements for delivering the service. The basis on which the Programme was modelled was explained and what criteria it took into consideration. Officers fully understood the socio-economic benefits that connectivity brought and would do all that they could to enable this to be achieved. There was an acknowledgement that there was a need for influence to be brought to bear on BT to ensure that they were doing all that they could to achieve the maximum coverage possible.

The Committee then heard from the petitioner, Councillor Ray Scragg, who considered that the petition demonstrated the importance of superfast broadband to the settlement and that the success of businesses within the community depended on it. He expressed concern that little information had been made available on what the implementation plan for Ridge was or when connectivity might be achieved. The provision of broadband was critical in being able to maintain the vibrant community which currently existed and would go some way to fostering increased economic growth. He was concerned that without the necessary connectivity, such vitality could not be sustained and the petition amply demonstrated the overwhelming business and educational needs of the village. He considered that connectivity was vital in maintaining an active and thriving community and its continued absence would be detrimental to this.

Officers understood the petitioner's frustration by the lack of information available and agreed that every effort would be made to provide the necessary information as soon as practicable.

The Committee then took the opportunity to discuss the merits of the petition and agreed that, in principle, every effort should be made to facilitate the provision of Superfast Broadband throughout the County. They acknowledged that this was being demonstrated by the County Council's continued commitment towards this and acknowledged that universal provision of Superfast Broadband was critical to the future economic and social prosperity of Dorset. As such, they considered that engagement in the search for solutions should be sought and that a meeting should be held between the petitioner and officers to determine the means by which this might be achieved. Additionally members asked for a better understanding of how BT/Superfast Dorset determined the viability of where services should be delivered

and the mechanism for how this was done. Officers agreed to share what they could with the Committee to enable this better understanding and welcomed the opportunity to meet with the petitioner to discuss what solutions there might be. There was also a need to establish the level of take up as this was a critical factor in determining how successful any rollout would be.

Resolved

That the petition be noted and the petitioner informed that a meeting would be arranged between officers and the petitioner to discuss how best to proceed with the request for Superfast Broadband at Ridge and what options were available in the delivery of this.

Reason for Decision

In order to comply with the County Council's published scheme for responding to petitions and so as to enable local people to connect with local elected decision makers.

Procedure for Petitions - Petition for Superfast Broadband for Pulham and surrounding Areas

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Economy on the receipt of a petition containing 96 signatures asking for the provision of superfast broadband for the village of Pulham and the surrounding areas. The report set out a series of options available to the Committee on how they might wish to respond to the petition.

Officers took the opportunity to confirm that the Superfast Dorset Programme aimed to deliver the most appropriate Superfast Broadband solution for communities, maximising benefits in a cost effective manner across the business and domestic community. Furthermore, the County Council was committed to pursuing all technical and funding solutions possible and every effort was being made to maximise what might be achieved. Officers reaffirmed what investment the County Council, in partnership with BT, were making in fulfilling their commitment to rolling out broadband. They took the opportunity to explain in detail the practicalities of delivering the project, technicalities that were being faced by BT in achieving this, the processes involved in how the Programme was to be implemented and arrangements for delivering the service. The basis on which the Programme was modelled was explained and what criteria it took into consideration. Officers fully understood the socio-economic benefits that connectivity brought and would do all that they could to enable this to be achieved. There was a need to ensure that BT was doing all that it could to achieve the maximum coverage possible.

The Committee then heard from the petitioner, Mark Vye, who considered that the petition demonstrated the importance of Superfast Broadband to Pulham and that the success of businesses within the community depended on it. He circulated a series of diagrams and paperwork to the Committee so that they might have a better understanding of the issues which needed addressing. He too expressed concern that little information had been forthcoming from BT on what their plans were for implementation. He explained that the petition had the support of the local MP for North Dorset, Simon Hoare, and local County Councillor for Blackmore Vale, Pauline Batstone. He understood that the technologies used in and around Pulham did not necessarily meet the practical needs of the village and questioned the reasoning for this and how commercial viability was determined. He also considered that the indication that Pulham would be part of the coverage was misleading given that this had played a part in attracting enterprise to the village on the basis that their business needs would be met, only to find that this was not the case. He appreciated that OpenReach was actively investigating how they might meet the needs of the petitioners.

He considered that connectivity to Superfast Broadband was critical in benefitting those wishing to access the internet for business, educational and social purposes

and so as to ensure that the village maintained its vitality. He felt that connectivity was vital in maintaining an active and thriving community and its continued absence would be detrimental to this.

Pauline Batstone, County Councillor for Blackmore Vale, was supportive of the petition in that improved connectivity would benefit the rural agricultural community of Pulham, home based businesses, local manufacturing businesses and other commercial activities, as well as meeting educational and social needs. She asked that alternative means of providing broadband to Pulham be investigated.

Officers explained that the map which Mr Vye referred to was known to be only indicative of where connectivity was proposed, with the precise detail of where connectivity was achievable being subject to variation, depending on the practicalities of its delivery. However they acknowledged that, at face value, the map created an impression of where coverage was proposed.

Officers then informed the Committee that progress was being made in what might be achievable in the vicinity and it was anticipated that Pulham would benefit from this. Furthermore alternative means of providing broadband were still being considered, including the part 4G/5G communications might play in this. Officers also reaffirmed their commitment to provide as much clarity as they were able to members and the public alike on when, where and how broadband was to be delivered and by what means.

The Committee then took the opportunity to discuss the merits of the petition and agreed that, in principle, every effort should be made to facilitate the provision of Superfast Broadband throughout the County. They acknowledged that this was being demonstrated by the County Council's continued commitment towards this and considered that universal provision of Superfast Broadband was critical to the future economic and social prosperity of Dorset.

The Committee were pleased to learn that progress might well soon be made in what was able to be delivered to the village and considered that a meeting should be held between the petitioner and officers to determine how progress might be made and what opportunities there were for the village to gain access to Superfast Broadband as soon as practicable.

Resolved

That the petition be noted and the petitioner informed that a meeting be arranged between officers and the petitioner to discuss how best to proceed with the request for Superfast Broadband in Pulham and the surrounding areas and what options were available in the delivery of this.

Reason for Decision

In order to comply with the County Council's published scheme for responding to petitions and so as to enable local people to connect with local elected decision makers.

Terms of Reference

- 5 The Committee noted its Terms of Reference and how these should be applied in order that the Committee achieved all that it was designed to do. With the aid of a visual presentation members were provided with an understanding of what overview and scrutiny entailed, the way in which this could be undertaken, what matters could be scrutinised and the way in which this might be done.

The Committee's purpose was seen to be to improve outcomes to people's lives; hold the Executive to account; have the ability to challenge topics which had a clear link with the Corporate Plan outcomes; and meet the Corporate Plan aim of enabling economic growth in being prosperous. How the Overview and Scrutiny Management

Board played its part in the process was explained, together with how scoping reviews could lead to effective and constructive scrutiny - in doing less, but more fully. In doing this there was a need to develop a constructive relationship with the Executive and for the Committee to get actively involved in the process.

Officers provided members with an understanding of how topics for scrutiny could be selected and the reasoning for this, in having an understanding of how outcomes could be improved for residents and the means by which this might be achieved. The relationship the Committee would have with partners in achieving this was critical. To do so effectively, there would be a need for members to receive a proportionate level of information and have the ability to focus on specific lines of enquiry in order to achieve their objective.

The Committee were advised on the suggested methodology to be used to prioritise topics and what criteria this needed to be assessed against.

The Committee were enthusiastic about the part they were being asked to play and whilst they recognised their current limitations in directly influencing commercial business enterprise, they were still able to facilitate and enable the means for economic growth for Dorset's businesses. As an organisation, there was a need to understand the importance of this; in doing all it could to ensure that Dorset was prosperous and in being economically competitive as an organisation in its own right.

Noted

Corporate Plan

- 6 The Committee noted the aims of the Corporate Plan and how the outcomes of the Committee were designed to meet those aims.

The Director for Environment and the Economy explained that as the nature of Committees was changing, there was a need for all that they did to be relevant to the aims of the Plan. With the natural environment of Dorset being valued at an estimated £1.5 - 4 billion per annum, there was a need for this to play a significant role in how economic growth could be developed. The way in which the County Council ran itself, in being one of the county's largest employers with a significant spend, meant that it was therefore a significant contributor in its own right to the economy. Members recognised that their role was not to manage the economy of Dorset, but to play their part in facilitating where and how they could have positive influence. How revenue streams for the Council might be generated as part of this process could also be an area of focus for the Committee.

Noted

The Committee, in Context - Dorset's Economy is Prosperous

- 7 With the aid of a visual presentation, the purpose and aims of the Committee were set in context by lead officers, namely the Group Manager – Governance and Assurance, the Director for Environment and the Economy and the Head of Economy. The way in which the Committee was designed to operate, what economic growth entailed and the issues for focus were drawn to the attention of the Committee. Officers explained:-

- what scrutiny entailed and how this function should be applied;
- provided an understanding of the purpose of the Committee and making sense of the part it played in meeting the aims of the Corporate Plan;
- the means by which this might be achieved;
- an explanation of the State of Dorset Economy, the role of the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership and the relationship these had with the Committee.

Opportunities and challenges facing Dorset were outlined and the part productivity; an ageing workforce; benefits claimants; 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 (Green) Enterprise Zone 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 the County 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 the County 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.

Noted

Outcomes Based Accountability - Context Setting

- 8 The Committee considered a report which provided background and context in relation to Outcomes Based Accountability which was a key methodology that the Authority had adopted to ensure it maintained a clear focus on priority outcomes for Dorset residents and communities.

Also included within the report was a sample scoping document and report which had been prepared, for illustrative purposes only, in order for members to see how a planning and scoping document could look in relation to helping support the future overview and scrutiny review work of the Committee. The scoping document had been trialled by Councillors Biggs and Canning for an area of spotlight scrutiny, relating to parking arrangements in Dorchester, and they reported that it had proven very helpful.

Noted

Work Programme

9 The Committee was provided with the opportunity to develop its Draft Work Programme and to participate in proceedings. So as to stimulate debate, the Chairman and Lead Officers had actively encourage members to reflect on the Committee's Terms of Reference with a view to prior consideration being given to items they considered could benefit from scrutiny in looking at their Work Programme. These were given due consideration at the meeting. As a prelude to this, Councillors Canning and Biggs had proposed the establishment of a Policy Development Panel on a new residents' parking strategy for the County Council.

The Committee had also been given the opportunity to have a better understanding of the responsibilities of the Committee, with hyperlinks providing detail about: Enabling Economic Growth Strategy; the State of Dorset Economy; the Cabinet Forward Plan; and Cabinet decisions taken in the previous 12 months.

The Committee acknowledged that the use of policy development panels, task and finish groups, working groups, spotlight scrutiny and inquiry days were all legitimate means by which scrutiny could be achieved, with whatever method used, being proportionate and relevant to that activity to secure an appropriate return on investment.

In being asked to propose topics, the Committee devised the following list, including methods for scrutiny and the members to take part:-

- Residents Parking Strategy – Working Group / Spotlight Scrutiny / PDP (Andy Canning / Richard Biggs)
- Bus Subsidies (T&F Group) (Hilary Cox / Andy Canning)
- Commercial Investment Aspirations / Opportunities incl. Investment (Mike Byatt / Hilary Cox)
- Digital Strategy incl. Broadband (Mike Byatt)
- Skills & Training (Mike Byatt)
- Demographic changes – Impact on Services & Infrastructure (Inquiry Day)
- Affordable Housing (Mike Byatt)
- Physical Infrastructure
- LEP / Growth Board – Presentation to set context and understand impact & outcomes
- Overview functions -
 - Renewable energy
 - carbon footprint

The Committee acknowledged that the prioritising of these items was to be determined and that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board would play its part in assessing them. The Committee also acknowledged that there was a need for a lead officer to be identified for each topic to provide a clear link and contact point to support and coordinate the required work with elected members. The Director for Economy and the Environment agreed to advise the Committee of the lead officers as soon as was practicable.

Resolved

That the suggested topics listed above be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board for information and assessment and for those, in conjunction with those members and officers involved in each of the topics actively taking action to progress matters as soon as practicable.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that proceedings to actively scrutinise topics were undertaken as soon as practicable.

Dorset County Council Action Plan for Management of Pollinators

- 10 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Environment and the Economy on the County Council's Action Plan for the Management of Pollinators. The Committee acknowledged the essential role pollinators played in providing pollination services for many commercial crops and wild plant species, and their significant value to the UK economy, estimated at over £400 million annually. Given Dorset's significant agricultural sector, the importance of pollinators to Dorset's economy and environment was acknowledged despite pollinators such as bees, hoverflies, butterflies and moths being in decline. Pressures such as habitat loss and degradation, pests and diseases, pesticide use and climate change individually, and in combination, were having negative impacts on populations and, as a result, reducing the pollinators effectiveness.

It was therefore proposed that the County Council should play its part in helping to reduce this decline and, where possible, enhance populations, by adopting an Action Plan for Pollinators, in line with similar plans adopted by other public bodies. This would specify the principles by which Dorset County Council would seek to deliver services and projects at an operational level in a way that maximised positive impacts and minimised negative impacts on pollinator species.

The Action Plan proposed a range of positive principles which could be applied to the management of County Council assets, projects and decision-making processes, as well as a prohibition on the use of neonicotinoid pesticides, which had been linked to the decline in pollinators, on County Council land where the power to enforce this existed.

The attention of the Committee was drawn to the principles of the Action Plan which was proposed to be adopted with immediate effect, or to be applied to future projects, asset management plans and decision-making processes as and when they were developed and/or reviewed.

The Committee acknowledged the importance of pollinators to Dorset's economy and environment and the benefits Dorset's agricultural sector brought to that economy, and accordingly endorsed the proposals, as set out in the Director's report.

Recommended

That the Cabinet be asked to adopt the proposed Action Plan for Pollinators, as set out in section 2 of the Director's report having taken into account the views of the Committee.

Reason for Recommendation

The adoption of the proposed Action Plan for Pollinators would help Dorset County Council meet its aim of a 'healthy environment' as set out in the Corporate Plan 2016 outcomes framework.

Questions from County Councillors

- 11 No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 20(2).

Meeting Duration: 10.00 am - 1.00 pm