

Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee

17 JUNE 2015

PRESENT: Councillor P Strachan (Chairman); Councillors A Southam (Vice-Chairman), B Adams, J Cartwright, A Christensen, P Cooper, M Hawkett, P Irwin, C Poll and W Whyte

APOLOGIES: Councillors B Foster

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meetings held on 17 March and 27 May 2015 be approved as a correct record.

2. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2015-18 AND ONWARDS

Members received a report outlining the purpose and function of the Committee and in particular the work programme and background information relating to the economy of the Vale.

The Committee was advised that setting the work programme was an important stage in the scrutiny process. The work programme would identify key topics for consideration during the life of the Committee. It was essential for Members to be directly involved in the formulation of the programme, ensuring that it reflected the time available. The following key principles needed to be considered when drawing up the programme:-

- Topics should add value to the work of the Authority
- Topics should involve partners, residents and businesses
- There should be sufficient flexibility to allow for topics to be considered as and when they arose
- Topics should reflect the views and concerns of the community
- The programme should reflect a realistic use of resources

There were many ways by which topics could be identified, including the outcome of public consultations, suggestions from Members and/or Corporate Board, the Cabinet forward plan and quarterly performance and finance digests. It was however again stressed that the programme should be manageable from the Committee's perspective and resourcing work by officers.

A number of "one off" items had been considered specifically or had been reported on during the past year, including the following:-

- Key employment sites
- East/West Rail
- Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Economic Performance
- Broadband provision
- The Aylesbury Vale Estates Business Plan
- Skills Update
- Support for business growth within the Vale

Issues currently being worked on included:-

- Inward investment
- Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan
- Business support
- Start up businesses
- European funded programmes

Copies of the Committee's Terms of Reference, the current work programme and the selection criteria were attached to the Committee report.

To provide some context to the economy of the Vale, the Committee received a presentation giving a brief overview of AVDC's economic development activity. This included high level economic indicators concerning the current and projected demographic position, employment statistics and information about the businesses within the Vale.

By broad industry group, health employed the most people in Aylesbury and Buckinghamshire, with 24,600 working in this sector, ahead of retail (22,400), education (21,300) and the professional scientific and defence sector (20,900).

There were 9,570 businesses in the Vale, the majority of which were small businesses. At 87% being less than 10 employees, Aylesbury Vale had been ranked 37 out of all 380 local authorities in the country. These figures could be broken down as follows:-

- 0-9 employees – 8,390 (87%)
- 10-49 employees – 185 (10.2%)
- 250+ employees – 30 (0.3%)

There had been 1,075 "business births" in the Vale during 2013, which had been the highest since comparable records had begun in 2004. A table detailing "business births and deaths" in 2013 in Buckinghamshire and the rest of the country was submitted.

Business intensity in Aylesbury Vale was strongest in construction, motorsport, wholesale, public administration and defence, education and arts/entertainment/recreation. The business growth focus had been to ensure the growth sectors had sufficient opportunity and minimal barriers to continue growth.

It was reported that the Economic Development Strategy 2011-2014, adopted in 2011 had set out the vision for the future and had identified the programme of economic development activity required to provide and sustain an attractive environment for the Vale's businesses and employees. The partnership action plan to deliver the strategy objectives had four key elements:-

- To build on the current strong entrepreneurial culture within the area, encouraging businesses to start up and grow within the Vale
- To create a unique positioning for the area as an attractive inward investment location to attract foreign direct investments, as well as UK businesses re-locating to the South-East
- To encourage new investors through proactive and focused interventions
- To ensure that the existing and future workforce remained highly skilled.

The Action Plan was due to be revised during the summer of 2015 to take account of the changing political and economic environment. It would incorporate the economic intelligence from the 2010 Buckinghamshire Local Economic Assessment and shared learning over the last four years from working with the Council's partners, namely the South-East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) and the Buckinghamshire

and Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership/Bucks Business First. The key areas that had been progressed from the Economic Development Strategy were summarised for the Committee and included:-

- The Business Grants/Loans Scheme
- The “Golden Welcome” Scheme
- Business Engagement
- The Aylesbury Enterprise and Innovation Centre
- Inward Investment and Marketing the Vale: Business Facing Campaign
- The Business Website: Invest Aylesbury Vale
- Enquiry handling and lead generation
- The Silverstone master plan
- CETAL – Telecare/Stoke Mandeville
- Property and other professional briefings
- University Centre Aylesbury Vale (UCAV)
- Next Generation Access Infrastructure
- Employment led growth assessment.

The programme of activity for the coming years would build upon the foundations already laid in terms of business support, targeted grant investment, proactive marketing of the investment opportunities within the Vale and effective partnership working. Specific strands included:-

- A refresh of the Economic Development Strategy 2011-2014 Action Plan relating to the promotion and maintenance of new business facing website, the refinement of the inward investment targeting and sector/cluster propositions, including further development of CETAL and the wider life sciences
- Consolidation of the relationship with the top 30 Aylesbury Vale businesses alongside the Council’s partners
- Bringing new businesses to the Vale, growing existing businesses and encouraging start-ups, increasing business rates retained, reducing unemployment and gaining increased spend locally by those in employment
- Building trusted relationships with Vale businesses in order to deliver value added (paid for) services from across the whole Council
- Developing closer working relationships with commercial agents and developers to unblock barriers to employment land
- Developing revised employment targets for the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan
- Moving forward the work with Local Enterprise Partnerships (BicksTVLEP & SEMLEP)
- Supporting the construction of East/West Rail
- Supporting the development of Waterside University Technical Centre, Aylesbury.

The next steps of the marketing and communications campaign included:-

- The extension of activities aimed at building the Aylesbury Vale brand and generating leads
- Reviewing and renewing the business support portal
- Reviewing the inward investment marketing of the District and highlighting its key assets as a business destination
- The production of further employment site fact sheets and business case studies
- Ongoing media relations work in the local and specialist media channels.

Members of the Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee discussed the topics that they wished to be added to the work programme for the Committee. It was requested that an overview of the funding available for the Council in regards to

economic development be provided. A detailed breakdown of the budget would be provided. Funds available included LABGI money, and additional funding was available through the local enterprise partnerships. It was stressed that there were at least three towns in the district, and it was important to promote economic development in areas other than Aylesbury Town. The District Council had more influence over development in Aylesbury Town than in Buckingham or Winslow, as the Council owned a larger proportion of land.

One particular area of interest was in regards to the Inward Investment Strategy. It had long been recognised that the major road network in the Vale was not sufficient to attract large businesses. Bucks Advantage were producing an infrastructure plan. Councillors were advised that the Tri-County Alliance between Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire aimed to attract additional funding for infrastructure from central government. Members asked that an item be added to the work programme, with a view for discussion at the September meeting, on the Buckinghamshire Infrastructure Plan. It was asked that representatives from Bucks Advantage and Buckinghamshire County Council be invited to attend the meeting.

Members were also concerned that school leavers may not be equipped with the skills required for a work place. The Committee had previously received a presentation from the training director at Arla, and it was suggested that a representative from another organisation, such as ATG or from the Federation of Small Businesses, be invited to attend a future meeting.

Additional topics that were of particular interest to the Committee were the provision of leisure facilities, and investment opportunities to encourage new businesses.

RESOLVED –

That the following topics be included on the Work Programme:

- Availability of funding for economic development
- Bucks Infrastructure Plan, with Bucks Advantage being invited to attend the meeting in September
- Skill development and education
- Leisure provision
- Investment opportunities to encourage new businesses.