

ECONOMY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 September, 2012

PRESENT: Councillors Cashman (for Councillor M Smith), Mrs Glover, Hawkett, Isham, Miss Lewis, Monger, Mordue, Mrs Phipps, Poll, Mrs Renshell, Richards, Strachan, Stuchbury, Tyndall and Vick (for Councillor Lambert). Councillor Edmonds attended also.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mrs Davies, Lambert and M Smith.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Richards be elected Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the Council year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Miss Lewis be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the Council year.

3. BUSINESS SUPPORT: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE THAMES VALLEY LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (BTVLEP) & BUCKS BUSINESS FIRST (BBF)

Alex Pratt, Chairman of BTVLEP, Philippa Batting, Managing Director of BBF, and Jim Sims, the Innovation, Sector and Funding Manager for BBF attended for this item.

Following meetings of the Economy Scrutiny Committee in January, 2012, it had been agreed that a series of specific themes should be explored further, providing an opportunity for Members to meet and discuss issues of mutual interest with external speakers.

This particular meeting (which coincided with being the first meeting of the newly formed Scrutiny Committee), represented a continuation of the theme 'What businesses want or need' and followed on from the meeting in Spring, attended by the Managing Director of the Aylesbury Enterprise and Innovation Centre. At that meeting Members had indicated that they wished to hear more about the level of business support available from the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (BTVLEP), Bucks Business First (BBF) and the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP).

By way of background, Members were advised that in June, 2010, the Government had invited areas to bid to form Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) following the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies and changes to the national business support infrastructure. In January, 2010, BTVLEP had been established,

and the Committee report gave the following examples of some of the successes that had been achieved:-

- Securing BD (UK) funding, in conjunction with Hertfordshire, to support the roll out of superfast broadband to those areas with limited or slow broadband speeds, largely of a rural nature.
- Securing and allocating £6.2m of Growing Places Funding (GPF) to unblock employment sites or overcome barriers to business growth. Allocations made had included £0.5m towards East West Rail, £1.7m to further support broadband rollout, £2m for Handy Cross, with the remaining £2m currently being decided upon, including a proposal from AVDC for public realm works related to the Waterside development
- Lobbying to secure East West Rail approval for Aylesbury Vale, formally approved in July 2012
- A skills and employability study undertaken by Warwick University to support for inward investment profile raising.

Bucks Business First (BBF) was a business driven economic development entity, which provided signposting and business support in areas ranging from skills and inward investment through to access for finance. Funding came from contributions from business membership and from Bucks County Council (BCC), incorporating BCC employees (formerly of Bucks County Council economic development team) and employees of the former Bucks Economic and Learning Partnership (BELP).

BBF had merged with Ngage Solutions in April 2012 to provide additional expertise and capacity.

BBF had already met with AVDC to discuss areas of activity which might be progressed jointly and work was progressing on developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between AVDC and BBF, which could, ultimately, lead to a Service Level Agreement (SLA) which would contain more detail about what type of support would be provided, and when and how it was to be provided. BBF effectively provided the secretariat for BTVLEP.

AVDC was currently working with BBF in discrete areas including:-

- EU funding support for the Stoke Mandeville NSIC Telehealth related activities and for other AVDC activity across the board.
- Inward investment lead generation.
- Business and marketing communications.
- Economic research support.

This was in addition to AVDC's own ED team activity, which included business engagement and support for the Aylesbury Enterprise and Innovation Centre. A copy of BBF's Business Plan for 2012/2013 had been circulated previously to all

Members of the Committee. The Chairman of BTVLEP, Alex Pratt, a successful businessman, with a company based in Aylesbury, elaborated upon the relationship between BTVLEP and BBF. Philippa Batting provided additional detail within the context of BBF's Business Plan.

Members were generally supportive of the direction of the work being carried. However, there were a number of issues concerning which Members expressed a view on or commented generally, including the following:-

- Members emphasised the importance of cross boundary working with neighbouring LEPs and were reassured to hear that BTVLEP would actively pursue any opportunities that might present themselves. BTVLEP was already working closely with Hertfordshire on the provision of super fast broadband across Buckinghamshire. The Chairmen of neighbouring LEPs met reasonably regularly. The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, who was present at the meeting, confirmed that he would ensure the continuation of partnership working for the benefit of the Vale economy.
- Members were interested to note BBF's commitment to support economic development against political opposition, although disappointment was expressed about the position taken in relation to the proposed energy from waste plant.
- Members were pleased to hear that a concerted effort was being made to minimise duplication of effort and were assured that this would continue. BTVLEP recognised fully the importance of ensuring that the resources available for the promotion of inward investment were properly targeted and geared towards the delivery of the stated outcomes.
- It was confirmed that the links between BBF's and AVDC's approach to economic development would be maintained. It was also confirmed that recent research work in relation to skills issues had yielded a significant amount of information in relation to the engineering/manufacturing business sectors, which would be shared with the Council.
- Members were of the view that a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with BBF would help to define more clearly the level of specific activity with AVDC and assist with the scheduling and prioritisation of initiatives.
- Members were pleased to note that BTVLEP recognised the importance of communication and all issues relating to connectivity of broadband, not simply the large and well publicised issue of high speed broadband. For example work was still necessary to deal with cell phone flat spots across the Vale.
- Reference was made to the need to work with Parish Councils and the Local Area Forums on the issue of connectivity.

- It was commented that the issue of housing numbers within the context of growth was a matter for the District Council. Insofar as BTVLEP and BBF were concerned, of paramount importance to them was the development of a jobs led sustainable economic development strategy, which sought to ensure that the Vale was viewed as a welcoming place for businesses.
- In response to questions about the development of the tourism economy, it was confirmed that this was still somewhat fragmented and that further work was necessary to reap the full benefits this particular commercial sector might offer. Work was taking place with AVDC's Leisure Team to address these issues. It was indicated that BTVLEP would be happy to examine any tourism issues in relation to Buckingham brought forward by AVDC's representative on the organisation, namely, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development.
- BTVLEP was aware of the activity taking place to develop the Silverstone business offer by the South East Midlands LEP (SEMLEP), and in the interests of minimising any duplication of effort, it was felt appropriate for SEMLEP to drive these particular activities. Members appreciated the importance of developing appropriate infrastructure to support the development brief for Silverstone. Notwithstanding these comments, however, it was indicated that BBF had undertaken some research in relation to the needs of the motor sport sector within the Vale.
- Members indicated that it would be helpful if a progress report on the activity/research taking place in relation to the provision of high speed broadband could be brought to a future meeting of this Committee.

Having thanked their guests for their informative presentation, Members then discussed the most appropriate way forward in the light of the information given at this meeting. In reaching the decisions referred to below, Members felt that it would be useful if a similar presentation could be given to a future Committee meeting by representatives of SEMLEP to help better understand how that LEP fitted into the economic development picture. This would be addressed as part of the consideration to be given to the Committee's work programme referred to in Minute 4.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Economic Development be advised of the following views expressed by this Committee in response to the presentation on the activities of BTVLEP and BBF:-
 - (a) This Committee recommends that in order to achieve best value and certainty from BTVLEP and BBF initiatives, it is essential to have a Service Level Agreement in place with BBF.

- (b) This Committee feels that in the spirit of partnership between AVDC, BTVLEP and BBF, the Service Level Agreement should be free of charge, although the Council recognises that sometimes contracts have to be paid for and that Cabinet should be asked not discount payment in either officer time or on a case by case basis.
- (c) That a report should be prepared for a future meeting of this Committee on AVDC's involvement in, and the activities of SEMLEP and BTVLEP, and how the Council can maximise its unique membership of both in all areas.
- (2) That SEMLEP should be invited to give a similar presentation to a future meeting of this Committee.
- (3) That a report be brought forward to this Committee on the progress/activity in relation to the provision of high speed broadband across the Vale.

5. ECONOMY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – WORK PROGRAMME

Following Council's request to invigorate AVDC's scrutiny activities, three new Scrutiny Committees had been formed that better represented the Council's Corporate Plan aspirations.

The new Committees had taken parts of the, now disbanded, Communities Scrutiny Committee work programme, and these had been amalgamated into new work programmes that reflected the terms of reference of each of the new Committees.

Members considered a draft work programme for this Committee and

RESOLVED –

That the work programme circulated at the meeting be approved, subject to the following revisions:-

- The inclusion of arrangements for a presentation by representatives of SEMLEP (referred to in the preceding Minute).
- The inclusion of a report on the provision of high speed broadband within the Vale (also referred to in the preceding Minute).
- The addition of an item on Silverstone (in connection with major employment sites) for the meeting scheduled for 17 December, 2012.
- The inclusion of a report from the Cabinet Member for Civic Amenities on the outcome of discussions with Bucks County Council on the activities of the enforcement officers who enforced the on-street parking contract managed by the County Council.