



Buckinghamshire Council

Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GROWTH, INFRASTRUCTURE & HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 6 APRIL 2023 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 11.06 AM

MEMBERS PRESENT

D Carroll (Chairman), T Hogg, A Baughan, N Brown, T Hunter-Watts, M Hussain, N Marshall, C Poll, S Rouse, D Town, S Wilson and N Thomas

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

M Tett, I Thompson, L Michelson and T Fowler

Agenda Item

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies had been received from Councillors Isobel Darby, Carl Etholen, Sue Chapple and Qaser Chaudhry.

Cllr Nathan Thomas was present as substitute for Cllr Isobel Darby.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Simon Rouse declared an interest in item 5, as an adviser to a UK-wide apprenticeship and adult skills provider.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 16th February 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE PLACE BASED GROWTH MODEL

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Martin Tett, Leader, Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Planning, Growth and Sustainability, and Lisa Michelson, Service Director, Economic Growth and Regeneration to the meeting.

The following points were highlighted from the report:

- Buckinghamshire Council inherited strong economic credentials from its predecessor Councils, from projects including The Exchange by Aylesbury Vale District Council and the Eden Centre by Wycombe District Council.
- Skills were highlighted as important to the economic development of the county.
- In future, the Council would be financially more dependent on local council tax and business rates rather than central government funding. A strong and prosperous local economy was therefore important for future Council funding.
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) were introduced by the coalition government - Capital funding was channelled through them into local areas. Buckinghamshire was fortunate to have a good relationship with its LEP, partly due to the coterminous boundaries of the LEP with the Council. This allowed the Council to align very well with the LEP, along with Bucks Business First (BBF).
- The New Buckinghamshire Place Based Growth Board would aim to bring together the strength of the voluntary sector, private business and other key stakeholders under the local Council.
- The Structure was laid out in the appendix. Beneath the top level board, there were 4 key strands. Place, Housing & Regeneration Board, Opportunity Bucks Board, Skills Board, and the Enterprise & Investment Board.
- During discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:
- The new structure could enable Buckinghamshire to achieve an improved devolution deal. The deal would compare to Tier 3 Combined Authorities, which require an elected mayor, and combine the LEP with the Local Authority to receive extra funding from the government. Buckinghamshire Council, by agreeing the new Place Based Growth Model would effectively achieve a Tier '2.5' deal. Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, had been lobbied for approval of this new arrangement. It was noted Buckinghamshire Council would not receive extra government funding from this.
- Success for the new arrangement would be assessed by key metrics to be confirmed by each work stream. Progress made in Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham would be assessed separately. Skills were highlighted as particularly important, and skill shows were being run around the county. Some of these were to be targeted at adults, not just school leavers.
- The Investment Fund Board would not have a large pot of money and would primarily focus on the Council's strategic aims. Transport projects would be examined carefully, but the board would not be replacing the function of Cabinet regarding very large sums of money.
- The Staffing arrangements of the new Place Based Growth Model would be examined to ensure the best outcome for the Council and LEP staff. There were various options, such as TUPE. These would be compared to ascertain the most appropriate way to staff the new model.
- It was reported Opportunity Bucks had conversations with Local Members to keep them informed, as well as attending Community Boards. With a relatively small pot of money, the investment board would aim to establish how these funds could be used and if it could work well. Geographical areas and sectors would be looked at individually by the Growth board to ensure appropriate actions are taken.
- Businesses would be aware of climate change priorities, and these would be highlighted where necessary.
- Town centre regeneration varied across the county (Aylesbury, High Wycombe & Chesham), and each town had their individual groups looking to serve their communities. Officers were consistently working to ensure a joined-up approach across these groups.
- The large housing growth over the next 20 years in Aylesbury was noted. The Council

would not have the funds to redevelop Aylesbury Town centre by itself, as such, business partners and other stakeholders would be brought on board to ensure their expertise is utilised. High Wycombe was also looking at a similar situation with the Eastern Quarter moving forward.

- High growth sectors, and the enterprise zones would be important for further economic development within the county. The expansion of the Bosch campus, along with Westcott, Silverstone and media companies in the south were important centres for the Board.
- The Leader expressed his disappointment with the lack of success on county deals. Buckinghamshire Council originated the concept of county deals with government, and it was discouraging that the Council was not in the first wave. The lack of capacity in the civil service to deliver these deals was noted.
- Help and advice was available from Bucks Business First, this was free to everybody who required it. Their expertise was widely used by businesses across the County and those businesses looking for advice were encouraged to get in touch with BBF.
- Public involvement and engagement would take place on larger schemes proposed by the Boards. The Leader emphasised that he was involved with lobbying government to build the business case for future investment. Due to the financial prudence shown by the Council and its strong outcomes, there was concern that Government takes the success of Buckinghamshire for granted. Further investment was necessary to ensure success for the county.
- It was important to ensure that democratic control is retained for the release of public funding while allowing the boards to have a strong steer on decision making.
- To allow for the creation of conglomerations, the boards would have discussions with private sector investors, as well as partners such as Bosch in the south to establish how to encourage growth and development in the area. Areas such as planning, investment and encouragement could be key to growth.
- The skills agenda was highlighted as being important for the board to address. Young people in the county often left to attend university elsewhere and then didn't return, at least not in the early stages of their career. Therefore apprentices, practical T levels, and other relevant skills should be encouraged to grow the talent pool that local businesses need.

6 THE LEGACY OF 'EVERYONE IN' AND HOMELESSNESS IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Members reviewed The Legacy of 'Everyone in' and Homelessness in Buckinghamshire review scope.

- Several Members expressed interest in joining the review group and would be contacted by the Scrutiny Officer.
- The first meeting for the review group would be with the Council's Housing team to set the scene of Everyone In and Homelessness in Buckinghamshire. From there, the review group would seek to meet with other partners, to be agreed by the review group.

7 WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme for the next municipal year would be drafted in due course. Members were asked to suggest items they wished to be considered for the future work programme to the Chairman and Scrutiny Officer.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting date was to be confirmed.