

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Monday, 4th November, 2013

**Present:-** Councillor David Stringer – in the Chair

Councillors Miss Baker, Cairns, Clarke, Jones, Loades, Matthews and Olszewski

Officers Cllr Terry Turner (Portfolio Holder)

Neale Clifton (Executive Director for Regeneration and Development)

Guy Benson (Head of Planning Services)

Martin Stevens (Democratic Services Officer)

Louise Stevenson (Scrutiny Officer)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence from Members of the Committee.

Cllr David Becket and Cllr Tracey Peers sent their apologies to the Committee in their capacity as Members of the HS2 Working Group.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

**4. PRELIMINARY DRAFT REPORT FROM THE HS2 WORKING GROUP**

The Chairman presented a report from the HS2 Working Group. He stated that the report, subject to the Committee's approval, would be considered by Council on the 27 November 2013. The Working Group had met with Mr Terry Stafford, Community Stakeholder Manager – HS2 and Siobhan Edmund, Stakeholder Advisor – HS2 in the previous week. A summary note had been compiled swiftly in readiness for the Scrutiny Committee, which had been circulated for Members consideration. He was very pleased that the Working Group had been given the opportunity of meeting with representatives from HS2.

Mr Stafford had stressed that no compensation package had been finalised and had tried to convey that the compensation was likely to be better than what had been previously stated. Mr Stafford had suggested two minor factual changes to the report regarding the number of train services in the area and the amount of time taken for a train to slow down into a station and then to regain optimum speed.

The meeting with the representatives of HS2 had not changed the views of the Working Group, which remained to oppose HS2 and to join with other local Councils in opposition.

A Member stated that he thought the report could be enhanced if references were to be included on where some of the evidence had been obtained. In response, the Chairman stated that, Mr Stafford had commented that the report was fair given the evidence that the Committee had considered. The aim of the group had been to compile a simple succinct readable report. He did however take on board that the report could contain some more references as to where some of the information had been obtained and agreed to include an appendix to the report.

A Member stated that an additional recommendation should be added to the report. He believed that there should be some reference to a spur in the North Staffordshire area. There were differing views over whether this additional recommendation should be contained within the report. A Member stated that if a spur was to be recommended then serious thought would have to be given to the location and its impact.

A Member stated that in the outlining villages in the Borough there was a real concern about compensation and damage to property. It was important to develop a compensation plan.

A Member expressed his support for a station at Etruria, on the grounds that it would open up regeneration land in the area.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the report and recommendations from the HS2 Working Group be endorsed and be presented to Council on the 27 November 2013.

## **5. PORTFOLIO HOLDER QUESTION TIME**

The Chairman invited the Portfolio Holder, Cllr Terry Turner, to give a statement on his current portfolio. The Committee were keen to learn about his objectives for the next six months and to see which areas could potentially benefit from Scrutiny.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the size of his Portfolio was significant and contained almost all of the major Council projects currently planned for the next 3-5 years. When he became Portfolio Holder he realised the importance of setting priorities from the outset. It was clear that the workload of the Directorate was already significant. He was very pleased with the outcome of Keele Golf Centre and the JCB / Blue Planet project. The Ryecroft development was a key priority and part of this work was the relocation of the main Council Offices. He was working with commercial advisors to get the most out of the plan and then they could begin marketing the site. A report would be coming forward for Council's consideration on the 27 November. With regard to the public realm, plans were in place, with works on the market stalls due to commence in the New Year. Work was taking place on branding and making best use of the market. The aim was to make the market the best in North Staffordshire. Work was taking place on the Newcastle Housing Advice Service to find a new provider within a ten percent saving. They had given contractors the flexibility of offering something different if it saved them money.

The Portfolio Holder stated that there were some problems which need to be resolved with the private rented sector, particularly on some estates where there was a concentration of properties of this tenure. This was not an easy task as some people had stopped reporting anti-social behaviour to the Police. Stoke-on-Trent City

Council had introduced a landlord licensing scheme. He had started exploring the possibility of the Council having their own landlord licensing scheme and was trying to encourage improved working between various agencies.

The Portfolio Holder stated that a significant piece of work was taking place on the Asset Management Strategy. Careful consideration was being given to what the Council should retain as an asset and what it should dispose of. The Council needed to generate capital receipts. The Asset Management Strategy was intended to be received by the Scrutiny Committee as part of its work programme. Selling land was not necessarily a quick process and often the Council would have to go through a consultation process.

The Portfolio Holder stated that a report on the process for preparing a new Local Plan would be received by Cabinet in December. There was clearly a decision to be made on whether the Council should join in collaboration with Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The Portfolio Holder advised that it was important to be mindful that all of the projects currently underway were taking place at a time when the Council were looking to make budget reductions. He suggested three areas for scrutiny in the future which included Ryecroft, Private Sector Landlord Initiatives and the two Town Centre Partnerships.

The Chair invited the Committee to ask questions on the Portfolio Holders statement. A Member asked if it would be possible to have a drawing of the vision of the Ryecroft development available at the Council meeting on the 27 November. In response the Portfolio Holder stated that a drawing would not be available but there would be an outline business case presented for moving out of Civic Offices. The principle objective was to ensure a robust business case and the rest would follow in time. In response to a question from a Member about the nature of the Ryecroft development, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that it was intended to be retail led with a major food outlet to provide anchorage to any scheme.

A Member asked whether the Council still had a private landlord accreditation scheme. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council did have the scheme but it relied on the private landlord registering. In reality it was the good landlords which registered with the scheme. A landlord licensing scheme would be compulsory where a fee would be payable and the income generated would be used to employ staff to administer the scheme. It was however a difficult scheme to setup because certain conditions had to be demonstrated. Evidence had to be available to justify the scheme in case of a legal challenge by a private landlord. When the Council had kept a log their data showed considerable more crime and anti-social behaviour than the Police data for the same area. He encouraged Members to keep a log of crime in their areas and suggested that this could potentially be co-ordinated through the LAP. A Member stated that one of the problems with Police data was that they appeared to have multiple definitions for Anti-Social behaviour. The Executive Director for Regeneration and Development stated that there was an obvious cost implication to the compilation of data and evidence to justify a landlord licensing scheme. He suggested that Scrutiny could potentially look at the item in the future.

A Member in reference to the Asset Management Strategy asked for a complete record of all assets owned by the Council to be brought to the Scrutiny Committee in the future including the expected capital that could be obtained and the future and potential use of the asset. In response the Executive Director for Regeneration and Development stated that certain information regarding the assets would have to be held in exempt session. It was important to note that some assets were seen as a liability and therefore were only valued at £1.00. This burden of assets was an area

which potentially the Scrutiny Committee could focus. The Portfolio Holder stated that the authority should continue to look at their assets on a consistent basis, keeping them under constant review. Cllr Loades proposed, that during the Scrutiny meeting when the Asset Management Strategy would be discussed, that the Committee should consider the establishment of a Task and Finish Group.

A Member stated that skills needed to be improved within the Borough, which was essential for economic development. He believed this to be a high priority and the Council should link in with the LEP. He understood that funds were available from the European Union, it was important that the Council did not lose out through bad timing. In response the Portfolio Holder stated that improving skills was part of the economic strategy and the Council was engaging with the LEP and Newcastle College. Equipping people with transferable business skills was important. He was pleased with the apprenticeship campaign the Council had helped run.

A Member encouraged the Portfolio Holder to resolve the Local Plan as soon as possible, as it was causing concern for rural residents.

The Chair stated that Portfolio Holder Question Time had been particularly useful because the Committee had been able to learn about areas for potential future Scrutiny and to learn about the early development of projects coming forward. He thanked the Portfolio Holder for his contribution.

## **6. NEWCASTLE AND KIDSGROVE TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIPS**

The Chairman stated that the Portfolio Holder, Cllr Terry Tuner, was the Council's representative on the Newcastle Town Centre Partnership Board. He invited the Portfolio Holder to update the Committee on the latest position of the Newcastle and Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnerships. He described the composition of the Newcastle Town Centre Partnership board as a great success. The Board comprised of a range of very capable people all of which were voluntary Members.

The amount of events held in the last twelve months represented an immediate success. The Dragon's Den event had been particularly well received. The long-term aim of the Newcastle Town Centre Partnership was to achieve self-sufficiency. Work was currently taking place on developing a medium-term financial strategy. A key task was to convince people in the Town that it was worth their while paying a levy to keep the Town Centre Partnership in place. The Partnership were encouraging students from Keele to come into the Town. The night time economy was another key issue where work was taking place. Another initiative making progress was the purple flag scheme. A Film Festival would be held shortly and this year the Christmas lights switch on event would be at a weekend linked to a series of activities.

The Portfolio Holder stated that he believed the Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership to be a positive idea. The main focus of the partnership at the present time was to stem the flow of business closures in the Kidsgrove area. The aim was to also make the Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership self sufficient. He believed the partnership was being successful. Whilst there were currently no figures and statistics, there would be in the future. The board of the Kidsgrove Partnership was smaller at five Members but was likely to increase over the coming months. The Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership was officially a CIC with its own Bank Account.

A Member stated that they believed there should be figures and statistics in place. It was important to have these to be able to accurately assess how well the

partnerships were performing. In response the Portfolio Holder stated that it was important to convince the businesses within both Towns that the Partnerships were worthwhile to ensure their future sustainability.

A Member stated that the partnerships should focus on providing activities for families in the early evening to attract them to the town. He stressed the importance of the Council working with the Town Centre Partnership to help promote them. The Portfolio Holder agreed that it was important to attract young families to the Towns. He also believed that marketing was important. He emphasised that the partnerships relied on volunteers who were only able to give some of their time.

In response to a question from a Member about rolling out the concept to other areas within the Borough, the Portfolio Holder responded that the Council had decided to focus on two areas. If these were to become a long-term success then consideration would be given to further partnerships in other areas in the future.

A Member asked the Portfolio Holder if he had any figures on business closures in Kildgrove since the partnership had formed. The Portfolio Holder said he would endeavour to obtain the data.

A Member asked what the Newcastle Town Centre Partnership was doing to encourage small shops in the Town. In response the Portfolio Holder stated that the Dragon's Den event had actually led to two new shops being taken up. There were other initiatives being undertaken. The Council were currently looking at how business rates were calculated as they were causing an issue for some small businesses. The Chairman asked what could be done to help businesses that were struggling in the Town. The Executive Director for Regeneration and Development stated that there were discussions about forming a business support framework but there was currently no funding. Another project was the concept of having a sponsor to give advice to businesses.

**7. WORK PLAN**

The Work Plan was considered. The Chairman referred to the items that had been raised during the Portfolio Holder Question Time and undertook to work with the Scrutiny Officer to schedule them appropriately.

**8. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business within the meaning of Section 100(B) 4 of the Local Government Act.

**COUNCILLOR DAVID STRINGER**  
**Chair**