

REPORT ON THE COMMENTS RECEIVED FOLLOWING CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2012-17

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Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To report comments received on the draft Economic Development Strategy 2012-17, following consultation on the draft, and to consider what changes Members wish to make in the light of these comments.

Recommendations

- (a) That the draft strategy be amended as set out in Appendix A to this report.**
- (b) That Cabinet given further consideration to any other improvements/modifications Members wish to see made to the draft.**
- (c) That the modified (final) version of the strategy be reported to next meeting for approval.**
- (d) That the final version of the strategy be accompanied by a first year action plan demonstrating in more detail timescales, lead bodies and resource implications.**
- (e) That the approved version of the strategy be re-formatted with plans and photographs added and printed for wider distribution.**

Reasons

To strengthen the strategy and to ensure that it better reflects stakeholders' views.

To give Members more time to review comments received and to suggest/agree improvements to the strategy.

1. Background

- 1.1 Cabinet approved a first draft of a new Economic Development Strategy for the Borough at its meeting on 19 October and agreed that this should form the basis of consultation with partners, LAPs, the local business community and other interested groups and stakeholders. The draft was also considered by the Economic Development and Enterprise Scrutiny (which will receive this report prior to Cabinet and so have another opportunity to pass comment before it is considered for approval/adoption).

Scrutiny Committee at its meeting last September made a number of comments the draft and these are included, along with other comments received, in this report (see Appendix A).

- 1.2 The consultation process began on 5 December and has allowed nine weeks for comment (closing on 3 February). This length of time is deliberately designed to encourage as much

opportunity as possible for stakeholders and other interested parties to contribute and have their say. This is intentional since

- the subject matter is important and affects everyone in the Borough;
- partners are well placed to suggest improvements to the strategy and will usually be more expert than the Borough Council in their particular field;
- it is possible that this strategy will also have the effect of influencing the priorities and plans of other organisations with which the Council works; and
- as discussed at the October meeting, the level of support given to the broad direction and content of the strategy will clearly have a strong bearing on its success.

2. Comments Received From the Consultation Process

- 2.1 Over 320 comments have been received and these are set out in Appendix A to this report. The appendix is in three parts – a summary of the response (for brevity, not verbatim), your officers' comments on that response and finally, your officers' recommendation as to how the draft strategy should be modified to reflect the response. The source of the responses is not identified (to avoid unintended bias). Nearly all responses have come via email and in some cases the source is not known.
- 2.2 It is proposed to report comments received to *this* meeting of Cabinet (and to the February meeting of the Economic Development & Enterprise Scrutiny Committee) giving Members adequate time to reflect on those comments and on the officers' recommendations on our response to them. Depending on Members' views, the Draft will then be modified into a final version for approval at the following meeting. Although this adds to the length of the process, the alternative of approving a modified version (on the assumption that Cabinet will accept all officers' recommendations) and considering consultees comments at the *same* meeting is impractical (and undesirable).
- 2.3 This approach will also give time for the preparation of a more detailed first year action plan to accompany the strategy which will set out actions with further information of timescales, lead bodies and resource implications.
- 2.4 It is not intended that the strategy, be distributed further in the form you see here. Once agreed and adopted it is intended to re-format the text in a manner which will make it more reader-friendly, add plans and photographs to give it greater personality (and greater specificity to the Borough) and be printed for wider distribution. It is hoped that this will help to answer some of the comments received about the documents length and complexity.

3. Comments Received From Scrutiny Committee

- 3.1 Cabinet will recall that the following comments were made by Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in September regarding the draft Strategy:
- That it would benefit from the inclusion of a timetable highlighting the aspirations and intent of the Council.
 - That it was vital to liaise with other Borough and District Councils to ensure harmony with their Strategies.
 - That the Council should consider how it provided advice to businesses and shops to help guide them through the current economic climate
 - That the importance of redevelopment to encourage people to visit Newcastle under Lyme and not just the main shopping centres be noted

- That consideration be given to the mix and use of executive housing as there were concerns that customers looking for executive housing could be dissuaded from buying if the property was in close proximity to affordable housing.
- That the importance of well paid jobs in the Borough be noted. The Committee cited the fact that many of the young Doctors trained at Keele University then left the Borough for higher salaries elsewhere.
- That consideration be given to the mix of home owners and those renting properties as it was thought that the balance was moving towards a larger percentage of renters which would have a knock on effect regarding where these people spent their money (home owners were expected to spend money on their properties whilst those who rented spent more of their money on luxury items).
- That it was vitally important to raise the skills level in the Borough.
- That the Strategy must remain as a living document and once agreed be revisited every 6 months if possible.

These comments are reproduced in Appendix 1, and commented on (with recommendations for changes, as required) along with all the other comments received.

4. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 The strategy has been prepared in response to the Council's priority of 'Creating a Borough of Opportunity'.

5. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 5.1 There is not a strict requirement on the Council to prepare an economic development strategy though clearly developing policies, committing resources and making investment against a rational set of agreed objectives is good business practice and an adopted strategy is a good place to start when it comes to encouraging partner organisations to share objectives and concrete plans.

6. **Equality Impact Assessment**

No differential impact had been identified.

7. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 7.1 There are staff resource implications arising from the preparation of the strategy and these are built into current work programmes. There will also be a modest financial cost to cover printing costs once the strategy has been agreed and approved (although promotion of the document on the Council's website should reduce demand for hard copies).

8. **Major Risks**

- 8.1 The principal risk of *not* preparing a strategy for the promotion of economic development is that staff resources are committed and financial investment made without reference to the things which the Council and its partners consider to be most important. This would most likely cause the Council's actions to be ineffective (or at best, not as effective as could be).
- 8.2 There is no obvious risk to preparing a strategy in itself, other than perhaps raising expectations from Members, staff and partners that everything in it will be achieved – but this simply reflects the inherent risk of setting objectives and targets. The strategy itself does not commit the Council to specific actions; these will be the subject of more detailed reports including (where relevant) the first year action plan.

9. **Key Decision Information**

9.1 This strategy will impact on two or more wards and has been included in the Forward Plan.

10. **Earlier Cabinet Resolutions**

10.1 'That the Draft Economic Development Strategy, subject to modifications suggested by Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee, be used as a basis for consulting with partner organisations, the local business community, LAPs and the Economic Development strand of the Newcastle Partnership and that comments received are reported back for Cabinet's consideration.

'A new Economic Development Strategy for the Borough', Cabinet 19 October 2011.

11. **List of Appendices**

Appendix A - Draft Economic Development Strategy 2012-17, Summary of Responses.