

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at SUNDERLAND COLLEGE, CITY CENTRE CAMPUS, PARK LANE SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY 12TH MARCH, 2019 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Turner in the Chair

Councillors Blackburn, Foster, Galbraith, E. Gibson, Jackson, D. MacKnight, Marshall and O'Brien

Members of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee in attendance:-

Councillors Francis, Hunt, F. Miller, Scullion and K. Wood

Also in attendance:-

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mr Iain Nixon, Executive Director for Commercial Activity, Sunderland College

Mr Mark Taylor, Principal Heritage Protection Officer, Planning and Property, Sunderland City Council

Ms Ellen Thinnesen, Chief Executive and Principal of Sunderland College

Mrs Christine Tilley, Governance Services Team Leader, Sunderland City Council

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Curran, M. Dixon and Taylor

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Variation in the Order of Business

The Chairman proposed and it was agreed that the order of business be changed so that the item on Apprenticeships Update was considered at this point on the agenda as Members of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee had been invited to attend the meeting for the presentation on this topic from Officers at the College.

Apprenticeships Update – Meeting with Sunderland College

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated), setting the background for a presentation from representatives from Sunderland College in relation to the operation of apprenticeships in the city.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Ms Ellen Thinnesen, Chief Executive and Principal of Sunderland College and Mr Iain Nixon, Executive Director for Commercial Activity, Sunderland College provided the Committee with a presentation on the college, its performance and ambitions, together with details of the apprenticeships provided at the organisation.

Ms Thinnesen highlighted that the college had won the Association of Colleges Beacon Award for Engagement with Employers in November 2017 and was a finalist for this year's Careers and Guidance Beacon Award from the Association.

Mr Nixon highlighted the importance for the college of understanding business challenges, the workforce and skills needs and how to align these industry needs with the college's areas of specialism in order to meet the requirements of industry. Mr Nixon advised that the college's areas of specialism were in the key sectors of digital, advanced manufacturing and finance and business services,

Mr Nixon commented that English and Maths were critical for students. He advised that there had been a decline in apprenticeship activity since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Reforms in 2017 with a negative impact on the smaller firms in particular. He advised however that the college was in the top 30 nationally and 3rd regionally. Almost 200 employers in the city had apprenticeships. There were 700 on average apprentices on programmes at any time and within the City of Sunderland, the college was the largest provider of apprenticeships.

Mr Nixon advised of a number of apprenticeship partners which included the following Gentoo, Liebherr, Persimmon Homes, City Hospitals Sunderland and Rokshaw Laboratories.

Ms Thinnesen briefed Members on the merger of the college with Hartlepool College, the plans to merge with Northumberland College and the Strategic Plan 2019-2023.

Councillor Scullion commented that he was pleased that the role of SMEs had been acknowledged and that the differences for small employers had been alluded to.

Councillor Scullion added that it had been his experience that 16-18 year olds were not work ready and therefore this was an expense for the employer. He felt that it was important to engage with schools to make young people work ready.

Ms Thinnesen advised that Sunderland College had a unique model of engagement with schools, having strong partnerships with 12-13 partner schools where the Head Teachers met with the college senior team and students were given opportunities to come in and try things. College staff also spend time in school giving careers advice and guidance and providing taster sessions as well as holding events.

Ms Thinnesen added that not all career routes required either/both English and Maths, however large volumes of students came to the college having not achieved these subjects at school and were a requirement of their education.

Councillor Francis enquired how the college kept track of the 21,000 students in terms of its pastoral role and how many went on to leave the North East.

Ms Thinnesen responded by saying that with 4 campuses it was clear that they had to know how to manage this and know who was accountable for various aspects of the business. There were teams underneath to support and they were structured in a way needed for a multi campus college. In terms of how many students left, she would forward the data. However she was able to say that a high proportion left Sunderland but stayed in the region. Some left for university in Durham, Northumbria or Newcastle or out of the region and it was the case that those who went out of Sunderland, did not often come back.

Councillor O'Brien asked what the impact would be on the college of Brexit, the fact that Nissan would not now be making the Infinity model car at its plant in Sunderland, whether apprenticeships would dwindle and whether the college had contingency plans.

Mr Nixon advised that the apprenticeships relating to the above equated to a small proportion of the college's overall income, albeit very important, however this would not be critical. The college was not reliant on any one sector. The slow-down was based upon uncertainty and not Brexit per se. He went on to say that there would be an impact but the college had tried to have a balanced portfolio. They wanted to support the larger employers but they also wanted to engage with SMEs, although this would not be undertaken at all costs and there were some areas where more work was needed to ensure attitudes were right.

In response to Members, Ms Thinnesen advised that the college delivered special needs and education up to the age of 24 at the Bede Campus where specialist services were provided. The college worked with various organisations to help the young people find placements. This provision was very important to the college and they continued to drive the SEND specialism.

In response to Councillor MacKnight, Mr Nixon advised that the college had a strong relationship with Nissan and acted as a feeder for their apprenticeships. The college had links with the apprenticeship courses Nissan provided but did not work on them with the apprentices. The college was looking at how it could support Nissan with workforce development outside of the automotive apprenticeship. Nissan did however support the college in a number of areas, for example by providing cars for the motor vehicle courses.

In response to Councillor Francis, Mr Nixon informed that the college still worked with sub-contractors to reach industry they would otherwise not be able to reach, however there was a robust quality monitoring process in place.

Ms Thinnesen added in relation to the above that the college did not sub-contract out of the area.

Mr Nixon explained that there were lots of nuances and complexities in relation to apprenticeship funding, however generally larger employers paid 90% and the Government paid 10% of the cost of the apprenticeship. Where an employer had spent all of its apprenticeship levy, the apprenticeship was organised as though it did not pay a levy and the employer only funded 10% whilst the Government funded 90%.

Councillor K. Wood commented that Maths and English were often a barrier for young people and enquired whether an outreach venue would be able to support this education and provide a stand-alone qualification.

Mr Nixon advised that there were 2 ways of dealing with the issue, what they did as a college and the outreach work where they designed a programme around individuals. Equally the college worked with a number of partners who had a strong focus on English and Maths who could reach individuals they could not and build confidence and support them to take the next steps.

Councillor Wood advised that she would forward some information to Mr Nixon which provided an incentive for employers to employ apprentices.

Mr Nixon commented that he was aware of some initiatives but not necessarily all and would always look at the information to see if it was relevant.

Councillor Jackson commented that it was encouraging to see the college were delivering Maths and English as young people often found this to be a barrier to their progression.

Ms Thinnesen commented that it was a challenge as the young people had done the subjects before, however it was rewarding when they achieved them.

The Chairman having thanked Ms Thinnesen and Mr Nixon for their presentation and for hosting the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, it was:-

1. RESOLVED that the contents of the report and presentation and the information brought out during the discussion be received and noted.

At this juncture the Members of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee left the meeting.

Minutes of the Last Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12th March 2019

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12th March, 2019 was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

2. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12th March, 2019 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Sunderland Heritage Action Zone Partnership Grant Scheme

The Executive Director of Economy and Place submitted a report (copy circulated), to update Members on a forthcoming Cabinet report, to request approval for the delivery of the Heritage Action Zone Partnership Grant Scheme and to delegate

authority to make all grant offers to third parties to help further the City Council and Historic England funded scheme.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr Mark Taylor, Principal Heritage Protection Officer, Planning and Property, Sunderland City Council provided the Committee with a presentation on Sunderland's Historic High Streets providing details of the location and context of the buildings included and plans for building repair, conservation and re-use under the Heritage Action Zone Partnership Grant Scheme.

Mr Taylor highlighted that a report was being submitted to the Cabinet for approval at its meeting on 27th March and referred Members to the Delivery Plan 2017-22.

Councillor Jackson commented that she was delighted to see Mackie's Corner and the Elephant Tea rooms included in the scheme particularly due to their proximity to the Vaux site development.

In response to Councillor Blackburn, Mr Taylor confirmed that property owners would need to fund 25% of the costs for all projects, that they had worked with those owners and that they were aware of what was needed.

In response to Councillor Marshall, Mr Taylor confirmed that the Council was looking to acquire properties in Norfolk Street and Sunnyside.

Full consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the contents of the report and presentation and the information brought out during the discussion be received and noted and the proposals be supported by the Scrutiny Committee.

Annual Work Programme 2018-19

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated), setting out the current work programme of the Committee for the 2018-19 Municipal year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

4. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme for 2018-2019 be noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report providing Members with an opportunity to consider the items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28 day period from 26th February, 2019 (copies circulated).

(For copy report and notice – see original minutes).

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer reminded Members to contact him if they required further information on any of the items included in the notice.

5. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

The Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) D. TURNER,
Chairman.