

At a meeting of the ECONOMIC PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY 5TH NOVEMBER, 2019 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor D. Turner in the Chair

Councillors Blackburn, Blackett, M. Dixon, Foster, Jackson, Marshall, Scullion and Thornton

Also in attendance:-

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council
Mr Paul Wood, Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council
Mr Richard Baker, Head of Strategy and Policy, North East Local Enterprise Partnership
Mr Vince Taylor, Assistant Director of Economic Policy

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

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Fagan Jenkins and Taylor.

Minutes of the Last Ordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 8th October 2019

A copy of the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 8th October, 2019 was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 8th October, 2019 (copy circulated), be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Industrial Strategy - Update

The Head of Strategy and Policy for North East Enterprise Partnership submitted a report (copy circulated) To inform the Committee on the Government's Industrial Strategy, the North East Local Industrial Strategy and their implications for the economy of the City.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Richard Baker, Head of Strategy and Policy, North East Local Enterprise Partnership presented the report and was on hand with Mr Vince Taylor, Assistant Director of Economic Policy to answer any of Members queries.

In response to an enquiry by Councillor Blackett if the objectives stated could be achieved, Mr Baker advised that some objectives were more conceptual than others. Working groups were looking at delivery plans and quite a lot of detail had gone into how some would look like. Some objectives weren't as far along but were ambitious plans.

In response to Councillor Blackburn's enquiry over the Economic Strategic Plan and if they had achieved their targets, Mr Baker advised that whilst he did not know the exact figures, they were way ahead of target and he would send the latest figures to Mr Diamond for circulation.

Councillor Blackburn queried how long it would take to close the productivity gap to a point where the North East were as good as the rest of England. Mr Baker advised that the aim was to reduce the gap by 50% by 2024 and the data could be sent on this. The North East was catching up to the Northern Powerhouse figures and performance scenarios but to catch up to the national averages was a different question.

Councillor Blackburn commented that investment in transport infrastructure would provide a great help to us in terms of productivity and that we had been ignored in this area for so long.

Councillor M. Dixon referred to the Software Centre and how it was unfortunately losing money due to being under occupied and queried if the new digital strategy launched could help in this regard.

Mr Baker commented that there was the opportunity of growing our digital centres, to create demand for the right kind of space and we needed to be as well connected as we could be to service international markets.

Mr Baker added that improved investment into schools over technical/digital skills if carried out correctly would create a whole demand for digital services and they also try to spot growth in emerging sectors such as the gaming industry.

Mr Taylor commented that if Manufacturing was to survive it had to digitise how it operated, if the software sector could be applied to this then that would generate a demand for such places as the Software Centre.

Councillor M. Dixon referred to a recent planning application in which a new business had been attracted to the Port of Sunderland, in his belief, due to the new Strategic Transport Corridor Road and enquired if they had any links with the Port.

Mr Baker informed that they had been working in relation to Brexit scenarios and had set up an infrastructure Brexit group in which they liaised with the Port on the

monitoring of the Port and consideration of free trade proposals and such like. Colleagues at the LEP were in regular contact with the Port.

Councillor M. Dixon advised of a video which suggested an approach of looking ahead rather than focusing on the past, something echoed by the Chamber of Commerce recently and commented that he believed we could be nostalgic but had to look to the future.

Mr Baker agreed that there was a need to look to the future but it was also important to remember our history.

Councillor Jackson enquired how we ensured equality within each region of the North East so that certain areas, especially Sunderland were not left behind in terms of investment and also enquired with regards to the Chamber of Commerce and how we try to raise the skill base in our area and suggested the amplification of the manufacturing/engineering career path to secondary school as successful routes to take.

Mr Baker advised that as part of the role of the Place agenda they wanted to create a programme looking at the performances within the region and it was clear within the evidence base different regions had different skills. Sunderland was mainly in manufacturing whereas Newcastle was more Service industry with the Airport and such like. The Place based strategy needed to work with each area on what they did best and needed to be outward looking and connected to sources of growth.

In relation to skills, this was a fundamental part to their programme on how to make sure young people were aware and could take advantage of the offer. They have worked hard, not just with the University's but also working with the Gatsby programme, where lots of secondary schools voices were being heard with over 100 schools in the programme.

The aim was to be a national demonstrator with the employability framework and the Government were still to determine what to do with their recommendation.

Councillor Jackson commented that this would be great and asked that this be monitored, and further information be provided in the future.

Councillor M. Dixon enquired as to other parts of the Country and their views of the North East and if this was outdated. Mr Baker agreed that they had to work very hard to change the story of the region yet people were astonished by the North East once they were here.

Mr Taylor commented that perceptions did change over time and it was improving. Companies once here were delighted but it was about how to attract them here in the first place.

Having fully considered the report, the Chairman thanked Mr Baker and Mr Taylor for their attendance.

2. RESOLVED that the Committee received and noted the report.

Annual Work Programme 2019-20

The Director of People, Communications and Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated), setting out the current work programme of the Committee for the 2019-20 Municipal year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Mr Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer presented the report for Members information.

3. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme for 2019-2020 be noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Director of People, Communications and 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 16th September, 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.

4. 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.