

ECONOMIC GROWTH, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

22 JANUARY 2019

PRESENT:

Councillors Cox (Chairman), Ball (Vice-Chair), Warfield (Vice-Chair), Mrs Baker, Mrs Boyle, Mrs Eagland, Mrs Lax, Marshall and Smith.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillor Pritchard attended the meeting).

42 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Drinkwater, Mrs Fisher and Mrs Stanhope MBE

43 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

44 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was requested that the information received from the Environment Agency be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be signed as a correct record.

45 WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme was considered and items for the March meeting were noted.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted and updated where required.

46 LOCAL PLAN AND RELATED SPATIAL POLICY MATTERS UPDATE

The Committee received a report updating Members on the consultations on the Local Plan Allocations Main Modifications, Local Plan Review: Preferred Options & Policy Directions document and draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The report also gave an update on Neighbourhood Plan progress.

Members asked for further information regarding how the consultations were completed and it was reported that the SCI outlined how engagement would be undertaken. It was reported there was a minimum requirement for engagement and the Planning Inspector examined whether this had been completed but in reality, far more than this minimum was always done. It was reported that the Development Plans team worked closely with the Communications Officers to consider how best to reach all groups whether it be residents, private companies and Parish Councils.

The Committee then discussed Neighbourhood Planning and it was asked if there was a schedule for reviewing them. It was reported that reviews would only be required if changes were needed however it could be wise to re appraise plans after five years because this is the timeframe recommended in national policy. Some Members felt that these plans, even with good intentions, had resulted in another level of bureaucracy.

RESOLVED: 1) That the progress associated with the Local Plan Allocations and Local Plan Review be noted;

2) That the progress associated with the Statement of Community Involvement be noted; and

3) That the recent progress in relation to neighbourhood plans be noted.

47 LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS REVIEW

The Committee received a report on the current Government review of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The review was looking at a number of issues including legal status of LEP's, governance arrangements and also geographical boundaries between LEP's. It was reported that presently Lichfield District Council was a member of two LEPs which were the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP (GBSLEP) and the Stoke and Staffordshire LEP (SSLEP). Members noted that being a member of two LEPs allowed access to two Growth Hubs that help support local businesses and the ability to access funding for projects from both.

It was reported that the Government in terms of geography was keen to see the removal of any overlaps which had implications for authorities like Lichfield. The Government's argument is that removal of overlaps would provide for more clarity and assist in the allocation of monies. The Committee was informed that the Government had left it to the LEPs to deal with this matter and agree a way forward. However GBSLEP wished to keep the status quo as it had developed strong working relationships with its authority partners and had support of businesses yet SSLEP wished to have a geography based on the county boundary.

Some Members were in agreement that membership should remain with GBLEP as it is based on a functional economic area and where businesses consider the boundaries of markets and customers to be. There was concern however from other Members that there were bigger projects underway in the GBSLEP area which would divert public funds and Lichfield may not be considered as a high priority. There was also concern that Lichfield could be considered as part of a wider Birmingham area.

It was asked what authority would make the final decision if no agreement could be reached and it was reported that the Government would have the ultimate say however this may be delayed due to other priorities namely Brexit.

It was noted that the Leader of the Council was working with the LGA and the other local authorities to express the view of keeping the current set up with LEPs. There was no need to change things and questions had been raised as to why the Government was so wedded to the idea of boundary changes.

The Committee asked what could be done to plan for whatever the Government decides. Members were advised that at the present time it is not clear as to whether the Government will force through decisions however if it did, the Council needed to be mindful of the good working relationships which had been formed with partners (and which could continue irrespective of LEP membership) and the potential for new relationships to be formed. The latter being particularly relevant in terms of accessing future funding pots.

It was agreed to keep the item on the work programme for the March meeting to receive an update and consider options if a decision of which LEP to be in is required or if the Council deems it not wishing to be in a LEP at all.

RESOLVED: 1) That the LEP Review and its progress be noted;

2) That the potential implications for Lichfield District of the decision to remove geographical overlaps between individual LEP's be noted; and

3) That an update be submitted to the Committee at it's March meeting.

48 BRS WORKING GROUP UPDATE

The Committee received an update from the Chairman of the BRS Working Group. It was reported that the pro bono advice was no longer being given and a Communications plan was now underway with a website and newsletter.

Thanks were given to Officers for their support in the process.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

(The Meeting closed at 7.15 pm)

CHAIRMAN