

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 JULY 2021

Minutes of the remote attendance meeting of the Environment and Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Tuesday, 6 July 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Rosetta Dolphin (Chair)

Councillors: Sean Bibby, David Evans, George Hardcastle, Patrick Heesom, Andy Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton, and Owen Thomas

APOLOGIES: Councillors Cindy Hinds, Richard Jones and Kevin Rush

ALSO PRESENT: The following attended for minute No.14

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Clive Carver, Geoff Collett, Rob Davies, Richard Lloyd, and Arnold Woolley

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Chris Bithell (Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection), Councillor Glyn Banks (Cabinet Member for Streetscene), Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy), Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation), Chief Officer (Social Services), and Principal Accountant, Streetscene & Transportation

For minute number 14

Alwen Williams (Portfolio Director), and Hedd Vaughan-Evans (Operations Manager), North Wales Economic Ambition Board

IN ATTENDANCE: Overview & Scrutiny Facilitators and Democratic Services Officer

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

12. MINUTES

(i) The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2021 were submitted.

Matters arising

Councillor Chris Bithell asked if a response had been received from the Welsh Government (WG) to the letter sent on behalf of the Committee to seek reinstatement of the Aggregates Levy Fund. The Facilitator advised that a reply had been received which she would forward to Councillor Bithell, and that Councillor Carolyn Thomas said she would progress this with the WG on behalf of the Committee.

The minutes were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas.

(ii) The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2021 were submitted.

Matters arising

Councillor George Hardcastle took the opportunity to thank the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) for his response to the concerns he had raised during the meeting regarding the costs incurred for dealing with stray dogs.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson also took the opportunity to thank the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) for his direct response and explanation to the concerns he had raised during the meeting on 8 June.

The minutes were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Andy Hughes and Paul Shotton.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

13. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme. She drew attention to a virtual tour of Parc Adfer which was scheduled for the meeting on 12 October, and asked Members to contact her with any suggestions for items they wished to include on the Forward Work Programme.

The Facilitator referred to the actions arising from previous meetings. She advised that some actions were still ongoing but were long term and an update on progress would be provided.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved;
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises; and
- (c) That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

14. NORTH WALES ECONOMIC AMBITION BOARD ANNUAL REPORT AND QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE

The Chief Executive introduced a report to present the Quarter 4 (January – March) Growth Deal report, updated Portfolio Risk Register, and the Portfolio Management Office Annual Report for 2020-21 for the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. He provided background information and reminded Members that the North Wales Growth Deal was a medium to long term set of interventions which linked to North Wales' strengths, citing in particular Green and Inclusive Economy and core progressive industries. He said it was a regional programme and gave a balance of West/Central East.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Economy & Environment) introduced Alwen Williams, Portfolio Director, and Hedd Vaughan-Evans, Operations Manager, and invited them to give a joint presentation to the Committee on the North Wales Growth Deal which covered the following main points:

- Growth Deal portfolio:
- the 5 Programmes:
 - Digital Programme
 - Land and Property Programme
 - Energy Programme
 - Innovation in High Value Manufacturing Programme
 - Agri-food and Tourism Programme
- North Wales Growth Deal 2020-21 Quarter 4 (January- March 2021) Performance Report
- North Wales Economic Ambition Board 2020-21 Annual Report

Councillor Paul Shotton referred to the easing of Covid restrictions and asked if any of the projects could be brought forward before 2023. He also asked for an update on the upskilling project. The Operations Manager advised that work on delivery was progressing as fast as possible, however, the projects were medium/long term complex capital projects which would take time to develop and construct. He advised that the first operational projects were likely to deliver benefits from 2023 onwards, however, the construction phases were expected to start end of 2021/beginning 2022. The Portfolio Director advised that all of the capital investment would require the right skills and people to service the investment and commented on work with the Regional Skills partnership, industries, colleges and schools, concerning the skills and employment opportunities required to keep value in local economy.

Councillor Andy Hughes asked what strategies were in place to promote the Growth Deal to the general public. The Portfolio Director explained that a website was being developed and was due to be launched in the next few months which would provide comprehensive information and contact details about all the projects. In addition to the website there would be a launch of a brand identity. She commented on the need to influence and inspire young people about the opportunities and high value jobs which would be created by the Growth Deal.

The Chief Executive explained that the Economic Ambition Board would be expanding its role in the future to have a greater impact beyond the Growth Deal. He commented that in terms of public awareness of the Growth Deal interest in specific projects would be high and said engagement with the business and academic sector had been significant and would filter through. He said North Wales was recognised as a coherent and ambitious region by both the UK government and WG and said there was a need to build up stakeholder interest and promote local projects when going live.

Councillor Owen Thomas referred to the Holyhead project and asked if investment was going to be made to the A55 and the electrification of the Holyhead to Chester rail service. He also asked if there was to be investment into electric vehicles and referred to production of engines on Toyota, Deeside Industrial Park. The Chief Executive explained there were separate programmes of work regarding the A55 and rail services. He said there was investment in improving land capacity and speed and investment by Transport for Wales in rolling stock but electrification was not on the agenda for UK and WG governments for the North Wales railway at the current time as it was about improving connectivity, the number of trains, and quality. The A55 was WG responsibility and multiple schemes were in operation to improve the flow and the Authority was pursuing WG funding for the easement of congestion which did not require a new route and replacement of the Dee Bridge.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) provided further detail regarding the Holyhead project. He said that work was at a critical stage, and as part of the Land and Property Programme the proposals for investment in the Holyhead project were being reviewed which may have an impact on other projects in that Programme.

Councillor Patrick Heesom asked that consideration be given to the potential for Mostyn port and referred to the concerns raised around the Holyhead project. The Chief Executive explained that although Mostyn was not in the Growth Deal – and was self-sufficient in funding its own expansion - and therefore not part of the funding list, the Authority would be its advocate for the region and Flintshire as it remained a significant port.

Councillor Glyn Banks thanked all involved for their work and spoke in support of the Growth Deal. He commented on the anticipated growth in the tourism industry and asked for further information on the Tourism Talent Network project. The Portfolio Director gave an overview of the project and explained that the Tourism Talent Network was a project designed to identify the need for skills in tourism and to raise the quality of customer and hospitality service. The Chief Officer (Planning, Economy & Environment) commented on the challenges of recruitment into the tourism industry during the last 12 months.

The Chief Executive advised that progress reports and themed reports of particular interest would be provided to future meetings of the Committee.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Patrick Heesom and seconded by Councillor Paul Shotton.

RESOLVED:

That the Quarter 4 Performance Report and the Portfolio Management Office Annual Report for 2020/21 be noted.

15. TOWN CENTRE MARKETS

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced a report to give an update on local markets within Flintshire. He provided background information and reported on the main considerations as detailed in the report. He commented on the challenge and evolving impact of the pandemic on street and indoor markets and local businesses during the last 12 months. He explained that the Council had supported market businesses during the pandemic and had promoted the importance of local business and local shopping to residents. The Chief Officer said he would welcome Members' views on further investment in local street markets.

The Chair referred to the questions she had received from street market traders in Holywell and said that they felt they were not being treated the same as market traders in Mold and cited an example.

Councillor Joe Johnson asked if market traders who were successful in other areas could be enticed to trade in Flintshire. The Chief Officer acknowledged the point and explained that some markets operated from a permanent site and were open to the public on more days and longer hours than the local markets, however, there was potential which could be looked into further.

Councillor Vicky Perfect commented that due to the pandemic many people now preferred to shop outside and locally and suggested that consideration be given to reintroducing a market in Flint.

Councillor Chris Bithell commented on the lack of parking provision for market traders in Mold and said there was a need for collaboration between the markets department and streetscene services to resolve current issues. The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) agreed to take the matter up with the relevant service areas.

Councillor George Hardcastle asked what fees were charged for trading in local markets. The Chief Officer agreed to circulate a copy of the Authority's current fees to the Committee prior to the next meeting.

Councillor Owen Thomas spoke in support of Mold market.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson asked that Buckley be included in the review of current markets in Flintshire with a view to establishing a market in the area to increase footfall in the town.

Councillor Bithell spoke of the need to introduce new businesses and encourage entrepreneurship into local market trading which if successful could create opportunities for permanent trade and employment in the local area.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Joe Johnson and seconded by Councillor Owen Thomas.

RESOLVED:

That the current status of the markets in Flintshire is reviewed and the work which the Council has undertaken to support them be noted.

16. UPDATE ON DEESIDE HYDROGEN HUB PROJECT

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) introduced a report to provide an update on the work carried out to date by Jacobs to develop a Strategic Business Case (SBC) for a new hydrogen hub at Deeside. She provided background information and advised that the low carbon energy programme presented an opportunity for North Wales to be established as a leading UK location for low carbon energy generation. She reported that the Growth Deal, which was for the whole North Wales region, had allocated £11.4million to the Deeside Hydrogen Hub project. Whilst the Hydrogen Hub project was Flintshire focussed it presented huge opportunities for the whole of North Wales. The Chief Officer reported on the key points as detailed in the report.

The Chief Officer referred to the subject of electric vehicles which had been raised in discussion during the meeting and said due to the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans in 2030 there was a push towards electric vehicles which would play an important part in the future of transport. She advised that following the strategy produced by the WG for electric and vehicle charging a transition plan was being developed and the Authority was working closely with the Welsh Government's energy teams on implementation.

Responding to Councillor Paul Shotton's comments in support of the benefits of the hydrogen project, the Chief Officer advised that the project manager had contacted a number of local industries/businesses to discuss how they could be involved going forward. She explained that the strategic business case was currently assessing demand for hydrogen across the region and said there was a need to develop infrastructure to give companies confidence to invest in vehicles. In response to the further comments by Councillor Shotton, the Chief Officer advised that only "green" hydrogen was being considered at the present time, however, there was the potential to use "blue" hydrogen first and then move into "green" and this was being considered.

Councillor Glyn Banks referred to the proposal to create a hydrogen hub in Deeside (referred to as a hydrogen bunkering facility) and asked if it could be built larger and underground. The Chief Officer explained that the size of the bunker would depend on the demand required which was unknown at the current time but would be identified as business cases progressed. The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) responded to the further question raised by

Councillor Banks regarding the use of “blue” and “green” hydrogen and explained the difference between them. He advised that the drive for the Deeside project was for “green” hydrogen as it did not produce the carbon by-product which had to be stored or moved elsewhere.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That the work carried out to date in partnership with the NWEAB to consider the options for a hydrogen energy hub in Deeside be supported.

17. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.37 am)

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Chair