

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

SPECIAL ECONOMY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Special Meeting of the **Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in **Committee Room 1A , County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 6 October 2023** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor B Moist (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors A Surtees (Vice-Chair), G Binney, R Crute, P Heaviside, G Hutchinson, C Lines, L Maddison, R Manchester, J Miller, R Ormerod, I Roberts, K Robson, M Stead and A Sterling

Co-opted Members:

Mrs R Morris and Mr E Simons

Also Present

Councillor E Adam

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Reed and K Shaw.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members or interested Parties.

5 Inclusive Economic Strategy Delivery Plan

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth and presentation which sought feedback on the draft

Inclusive Economic Strategy Delivery Plan and performance management framework to help shape the final Delivery Plan for consideration by Cabinet in November 2023 (for copy of report and presentation slides, see file of minutes).

The Head of Economic Development, Funding and Programmes Manager, Regeneration Policy Team Leader, Economic Development Manager and Vice-Chair of the County Durham Economic Partnership provided a detailed presentation focusing on the main elements of the Inclusive Economic Strategy Delivery Plan:-

- Development, Adoption and Implementation;
- IES Logic Chain;
- Delivery and Review;
- Thematic Working Groups;
- Development Timescales;
- Scrutiny Engagement;
- Delivery Framework: The 5 P's: People, Productivity, Places, Promotion and Planet;
- Delivery Plan Approach;
- Investment Plan;
- Performance Management Framework;
- Opportunities;
- Governance and Implementation;
- Next Steps.

The Head of Economic Development commenced the presentation by explaining the process for the development of the delivery plan highlighting that in relation to the IES this had been underpinned by evidence resulting from the economic review and the Big Econ-versation which included feedback from a number of stakeholder events. The IES had been adopted in December and following the adoption of this strategy the draft delivery plan had been developed together with a performance framework and the preparation of the investment plan. He continued that there was a need to recognise that DCC does not have control of all of the levers to deliver the plan and it required buy-in by other stakeholders/partners in the county. He commented on the need to ensure that the IES strategy was joined up with local, regional and national strategies and that there was a need for a long-term approach. He highlighted that there were actions within the plan to achieve the County Durham Vision.

In relation to the delivery plan, it was the County Durham Economic Partnership that would monitor and hold delivery plans to account. In addition, the plan was a live document that would be updated and would will be responsive to change, capturing the big items that DCC is to deliver over the next 2-3 years, including significant projects and new activities that fill a gap and leads to transformative action. The plan provided a long-term direction of travel that could be revised as necessary.

In relation to the development of the plan he highlighted the various stakeholders and partners who had been involved in the development of the delivery plan and the various thematic working groups. He confirmed that the thematic groups had met regularly between March and July to identify and assess current activities, assess any gaps in provision, identify solutions and transformative actions, develop a commitment with partners to implement the plans and identify activities that would have positive impacts on the 'Planet' including reducing energy use and carbon emissions with more than 40 external partners involved in this process. He highlighted that it was important to keep the momentum of partners to drive the plan forward.

He continued by highlighting Overview and Scrutiny's involvement in consideration and development of the strategy and in the development of the draft delivery plan with this meeting providing an opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny members to comment on the draft strategy before the delivery plan was considered by Cabinet in November 2023.

The Funding and Programmes Manager informed members as to how comments made, at the bespoke workshop held for members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July and focused on the initial draft delivery plan, had been taken forward in the draft delivery plan under the people and productivity and the places and promotion themes, resulting in identified related delivery plan activities within the plan. It was highlighted that in relation to the promotion theme a new Place brand was being developed for the county.

The Economic Development Manager then took members through a slide in relation to the People theme of the plan identifying actions/activities under key priorities of: increase in-work progression and upskilling; overcome barriers to employment with a view to aiding the progression of residents within the county; raise skills levels to meet our employment specialisms and needs of business. In relation to the needs of business this included building on existing programmes to be delivered at a community level and improved personal well-being and life chances, working with residents with poor mental health to engage them in the labour market and provide support to ensure that they stay in the labour market.

The Vice-Chair of the County Durham Economic Partnership Board continued in relation to the Productivity theme of the plan. She explained that the group had looked at how they could grow productivity, where are the opportunities and how do we capitalise on them, keeping the business we have and growing them. She highlighted the importance of the involvement of employers and employees as they had the knowledge on how best to run the business, what needs to be done and their ideas/thoughts need to be captured. She continued that the group had looked at the smaller businesses in the county, how they were supported as the county had three times more of this type of business than larger businesses and highlighted that money would need to be used differently to support this type of business.

The Head of Economic Development commented that in relation to the Place theme, the group responsible for developing this theme within the plan had included representatives from housing and community groups. He continued that there was a focus in the county on the Town and Villages Programme with a £25m spend. In addition, they were also looking at how they develop masterplans going forward.

In relation to the theme of Promotion, the Head of Economic Development identified various actions/activities under the key priorities in the plan of: develop a clear brand and place marketing about County Durham to engage and attract investors, business and visitors; enhance cultural and creative infrastructure; grow a year round visitor economy and attract more inward investment.

He then informed members that alongside the delivery plan an investment plan had been developed identifying funding gaps and where funding could come from either public or private funding and confirmed that the plan would be ready in March.

He then continued that a performance management framework had been developed around the IES under the themes of People, Productivity, Places, Promotion and Planet and confirmed that performance would be tracked.

The Regeneration Policy Team Leader then explained to members a slide showing a snapshot of County Durham's performance in relation to employment, unemployment and skills with regional and national comparisons and highlighted that long-term sickness was an issue in the county. He then explained a further slide providing a snapshot of inclusive growth at a parliamentary constituency level again looking at employment, unemployment and skills. The snapshot showed that East Durham was underperforming on all headline issues.

In relation to governance, he confirmed that the delivery plan would be going to Corporate Management Team on the 18 October 2023, the County Durham Economic Partnership Board on 26 October 2023 and to Cabinet on 15 November 2023. He continued that in relation to next steps, there would be delivery of actions, performance management updates, completion of the investment plan, live updates to the delivery plan and the establishment of a post to manage the delivery of the IES with a formal review and update of the delivery plan in 2025/26.

Councillor R Crute left the meeting at 9.55am.

Councillor R Ormerod was mindful of the wording in the document and felt that the document needed to reflect the importance of both higher and lower skilled jobs to ensure the right balance. The Head of Economic Development explained that the low-level jobs supported higher-level jobs and all skill levels were vital to the economy. He highlighted that the strategy focused on bridging the gaps in productivity to improve economic opportunities for all skill levels.

Responding to a query from Councillor A Sterling regarding the work undertaken by the Local LEP in relation to career support, the Economic Development Manager advised that the Gatsby benchmark was reflected in the plan and input from universities and colleges was an added element to reflect all age groups and ensure the system was robust.

Councillor C Lines was pleased to note the Delivery Plan was a live document and had the agility to respond to change which was extremely important. Going forward, he would be interested to see how well it worked and adapted to change. He highlighted the importance of 'Place Branding' and the amount of work that was required to gain support prior to launching the brand. He added that he would like to see how the brand had been developed and the plans for promotion. The Head of Economic Development advised that the Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism was the lead for 'Place Branding' and agreed that timing was important. Branding would have to be aligned, yet distinctive from the North East Devolution branding and capture what County Durham had to offer in terms of growth and inward investment. He added that the delivery process would be reviewed, and the live approach allows them to adapt and respond to change as and when it happened.

The Chair requested that Overview and Scrutiny Members have sight of the 'Place Branding' prior to the launch.

Councillor E Adam questioned the language used in terms of promoting the 'Durham Living Wage' to employers. He felt we should aim higher for residents in County Durham and suggested that the wording be changed to promote a Durham 'Decent Wage'. He referred to the Health and Wellbeing aspect and felt there was a need to ensure that the infrastructure was in place to support businesses and communities in terms of health care provision, GP surgeries and dentists. The Head of Economic Development confirmed the plan links in with other key strategies including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Housing Strategy which focused on individual actions. The Economic Strategy looks at how the economy can benefit from those key strategies and help to drive Health and Wellbeing within the economy. The Economic Development Manager added that the County Durham Plan included policies that provided funding to help support community growth and needs assessment development to link health opportunities with physical growth was shared with health partners and community organisations. Long term planning at community level would provide support to help reduce the challenges and pressures on health care services.

The Vice-Chair of the County Durham Economic Partnership Board agreed with the points raised in relation to the language used and referred to the assumption that better jobs would be higher level jobs and higher wages. She highlighted the different perceptions and felt that better jobs would be a balance of the right mix of jobs for the labour market.

Mrs R Morris referred to the 'Ambitions' column in the plan and felt that it would be better to have specific targets to monitor progress particularly in relation to the Planet theme as this would provide clarity for both the reader and user. In addition, she suggested that a review be undertaken annually and queried why the investment plan was a separate document and not part of the delivery plan. The Head of Economic Development explained that the delivery plan and investment plan worked to a slightly different timescale which would be made clearer going forward and clarified that statistics and measures would be reviewed annually and early warning systems and monitoring would be built into the plan. The Funding and Programmes Manager added that for every action identified in the plan there was justification as to why it was included and the rationale on what was expected to be achieved. She clarified that moving forward there would be more specific outcomes and confirmed that the format of the plan was a 'work in progress'.

Councillor J Miller referred to the assessment of sustainable travel routes and public transport connectivity between the county's main settlements and employment sites, and asked for clarification on the definition of sustainable travel routes and main settlements. He was concerned that further bus services could be removed if the number of passengers using the service was low. He highlighted that these services, especially in rural areas needed to be maintained as they were vital for people who relied on public transport to travel to work and attend hospital appointments. The Head of Economic Development advised that he would feedback these comments and concerns to the Head of Transport and Contract Services.

Councillor L Maddison referred to the 'People' aspect of the plan and the assumption that people would engage in various upskilling opportunities. She queried whether there were plans or provision in place to support those who would not engage. She added that provision was also required to provide support for existing businesses to develop and grow within their local community and not have to move outside the area because they were unable to extend existing premises. The Head of Economic Development advised that local plans identified land for growth and Durham County Council worked with business owners to identify future expansion needs and would intervene if the market was not delivering what businesses required. He added that a holistic approach was taken in relation to business support looking at the needs of business and growth plans and provide wraparound support to capture those needs. The Economic Development Manager acknowledged the challenges in engaging young people and noted the statutory responsibility up to the age of 18 years. He confirmed that Durham County Council work with partners to identify barriers, promote and encourage engagement so young people were aware of opportunities and had the ability to access wraparound support to help build confidence and employment skills.

Councillor A Surtees referred to the snapshot information and highlighted that it reflected performance of six parliamentary constituencies and suggested the plan be updated or additional information be provided alongside the plan to reflect the move to five parliamentary constituencies. She requested that real time figures be

used in relation to the Inclusive Growth Scorecard as Easington figures were disproportionate when the percentage method was used. In addition, she commented that the plan needed to reflect whether jobs were full time or part time, highlighted the need for the County Durham pound to be one of indicators within the plan and queried the work that had been undertaken with employers to help remove barriers in relation to childcare, shift patterns and transport issues. The Head of Economic Development advised that current data was a challenge and there would be a transition period in relation to parliamentary constituency changes where both boundaries would be mapped and referenced in future reports. In terms of childcare barriers, he agreed there were challenges and confirmed work was being done to tackle childcare barriers and added that jobs that accommodated childcare provision and people's circumstances was vital in providing security and was a key factor in providing 'better jobs'. The Economic Development Manager confirmed that some employers within the county were tackling issues in relation to the provision of childcare.

The Chair requested that final plan presented to Cabinet in November clearly identify officers and lead partners who were responsible for delivering actions within the plan and who had overall responsibility and accountability for the plan delivery. He asked for timescales in relation to Overview and Scrutiny Members having sight of the 'Place Branding' and when the plan would be available. Referring to allocated funding of £1.8m to provide advice to businesses and suggested that this funding should be used to provide a range of support to the business sector. He queried which areas had been selected for specific regeneration plans. He concluded by highlighting the need for specific targets within the plan to monitor performance going forward.

The Head of Economic Development confirmed that the lead partners were identified in the plan and would be responsible for taking actions forward. It was noted that Appendix 2 of the report provided Members with the draft plan that would be presented to Cabinet in November 2024 with the addition of minor tweaks.

Councillor A Surtees asked that employers be encouraged to self-recruit in future, rather than use recruitment agencies which would provide more opportunities for individuals.

Resolved:

That the comments made by Members during the meeting be captured and formulated into an Overview and Scrutiny response, which would be shared with the Service Grouping to further develop the final Inclusive Economic Strategy Delivery Plan.

6 Any Other Business

The Chair reminded Members that an informal information session had been arranged on the 30 October 2023 to discuss the Selective Licensing Scheme. In

addition, there was also a special meeting on the 3 November where Visit County Durham would present the Destination Management Plan, followed by a workshop where Members would work with colleagues from Visit County Durham and provide suggestions on promoting the Tourism offer in County Durham.