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KIRKLEES COUNCIL

ECONOMY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday 14th February 2019

Present: Councillor Rob Walker (Chair)
Councillor Bill Armer
Councillor Martyn Bolt
Councillor Judith Hughes
Councillor Richard Murgatroyd
Councillor Harpreet Uppal

Co-optees Mark Mercer
Andrew Bird

In attendance: Councillor Peter McBride – Cabinet Member, Economy
Councillor Graham Turner – Cabinet Member, Corporate
Sue Weston – Strategic Partnership Lead, Business and Skills
Jess Newbould – Economic Resilience Project Officer

1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 17 January 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

Matters arising:-

- In respect of the Brexit preparations update that had been requested at the last meeting; in light of the continuing uncertainty at national level and the tight timescale it was agreed that an update would be brought to a future meeting.
- In terms of Huddersfield and Dewsbury Town Centres; it was anticipated that the Masterplan would be published within the next few weeks and it was considered that this would be a good issue for the Panel to discuss at its first meeting (as a single item agenda) in the new municipal year. The structure and content of further meetings would then be given further consideration and shared with Members of the Panel for comment. This was a very important issue and it was essential that local communities, local businesses and the third sector were engaged in the development of the plans.
- The visit to Barnsley Market had been very interesting and informative. It was noted that there were a number of differences between Barnsley and Kirklees which affected the approach that could be taken. Large scale regeneration investment was proposed in Kirklees but this would be spread more widely across the district. The Cabinet Member for Economy added that there would be an opportunity for interested parties to make a meaningful contribution to the plans for development before final decisions were taken.

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2 Interests

No interests were declared.

3 Admission of the Public

It was agreed that all agenda items would be considered in public session.

4 Digital Strategy

The Panel received a report which outlined the background and context of the digital landscape across Kirklees and presented a draft Kirklees Digital Plan (Appendix 2) for consideration. The report also set out the local, regional and national strategies that supported Kirklees' digital ambitions and current local, regional and national investment schemes/funding programmes.

In presenting the report Sue Weston - Strategic Partnership Lead, Business and Skills and Jess Newbould – Economic Resilience Project Officer highlighted the following points:

- The importance of digital connectivity for inclusion, productivity and economic growth and the ever increasing demand for digital skills and high quality, fast and reliable digital networks and infrastructure.
- Digital infrastructure would be included as a strong priority within the refresh of the Kirklees Economic Strategy.
- The existing coverage and take-up of broadband provision for Kirklees residents and plans for the future. These included potential funding to target 'harder to reach' areas through the Superfast West Yorkshire and York Programme and investment by City Fibre which would increase coverage for Gigabit/FTTP (Fibre To The Premise/'full fibre') services and hopefully stimulate other investment.
- Investment into WiFi and 5G was also necessary.
- There was a need to address digital exclusion and to increase digital literacy and wage earning potential so that residents could afford access to the network.
- The draft Digital Plan aimed to stimulate affordable, accessible, appropriate digital infrastructure and skills development; it supported the priorities in the Economic Strategy and contributed to a number of the Corporate Key Shared Outcomes whilst also indirectly supporting others.
- The four priorities in the Plan covered:
 - Leadership and Collaboration
 - Stimulating investment
 - Extending the network
 - Demand Stimulation.

Councillor Peter McBride, Cabinet Member for Economy, highlighted the investment already being made into Huddersfield which would mean that its internet connections would be amongst the fastest in the world within two years; the plan was then to widen this to Dewsbury and other areas. Alongside the Network Rail Transpennine Fibre Project, investment into rail and road networks and the Local Plan this would make the district very attractive to business.

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Key points from the Panel's discussion and responses to questions were as follows:

- There were a small number of 'not spots' in the district where there was no superfast broadband connectivity (not all of which were rural areas). Work was being undertaken to address these in a number of ways including through the Superfast West Yorkshire Programme, although some of the funding through Defra was specifically for rural areas. Efforts were also being made to try and encourage investment by suppliers but there could be issues in respect of commercial viability.
- There were a number of initiatives that were being promoted, such as the Openreach Community Fibre Partnership programme and the Better Broadband Scheme. Some schemes would give opportunities for local businesses and residents within a community to aggregate Gigabit Broadband Vouchers, to assist in reaching a point where connection might be affordable. This could be a good opportunity to address the problem of poor connectivity and the Council should continue to raise awareness of these schemes and support local people in gaining better access to superfast broadband.
- The Government strongly supported the co-operative model; an example being the Tameside Digital Infrastructure Co-operative, as a good way of extending superfast broadband.
- By 2021 almost every home and business within 9 wards would have 'full fibre' connectivity.
- In terms of a 'Digital Innovation Zone'; work was being undertaken with the University in respect of how their connectivity, analytics and data could be utilised. Further information on this initiative would be shared with Members.
- Discussion was taking place with Network Rail about potential 'meet me' points along the route of the Transpennine Fibre Project; with three potential locations one in North Kirklees, one in South Kirklees and one in Huddersfield. Links into a resilient fibre spine through the district would be hugely beneficial.
- Ensuring that there was a strong emphasis within the plan on the development of skills and entrepreneurship, with an eye on the longer term economic benefit, was a key issue. People with the necessary skills would be crucial in order to take advantage of the gigabit capacity and improved infrastructure to develop business and increase and retain wealth in the district. There could be an increase in jobs and more highly skilled jobs but also the potential for automation and thus a need for re-training/re-skilling.
- The stated percentage of local adults who did not have, or did not use, the 5 basic digital skills was noted. Exclusion could be a particular problem for elderly people or those with a learning disability; so many services were now accessed online.
- To date, 73 small to medium local businesses had formally engaged with the Digital Enterprise Scheme, amounting to a value of approximately £266,000. In addition, many other businesses had benefitted from mentoring, workshops and masterclasses.
- It was important that the wider strategic/regional context and the potential for working alongside partners was considered. It was hoped that there would be representation from Kirklees at the Leeds Digital Festival and the Great Northern Conference to highlight the work the Council was doing and to connect at a regional level.

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Cllr McBride noted that the need for re-skilling had been recognised as a key issue, alongside the need to ensure that young people had the necessary skills to access future employment opportunities, and a working party had been established, with links to industry, to plan for this.

Councillor Turner said that:

- Public libraries had IT access points and staff/volunteers who could assist people in using them. The ambition was to develop community hubs in the future and he undertook to take back the points made in respect of the need for provision to assist local people in achieving the 5 basic digital skills.
- There could be huge potential for the use of innovations such as voice activated technology, in the area of health and social care for example, but the infrastructure needed to be in place first.

RESOLVED - The Panel:-

- Thanked the Cabinet Member for Economy, Cabinet Member for Corporate, Sue Weston, Strategic Lead for Business and Skills and Jess Newbould, Economic Resilience Project Officer, Investment and Regeneration, for attending the meeting;
- Welcomed the work that was ongoing; and
- Asked that reference to developing and utilising digital capacity to build businesses, encourage entrepreneurship and retain wealth in the district be strengthened in the Digital Plan.

5 Work Programme 2018/19

The work programme for 2018/19 was agreed.

6 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel would take place at 2.00pm on Thursday 21 March 2019.