

Minutes of the meeting of General scrutiny committee held at online meeting on Monday 7 December 2020 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor Jonathan Lester (chairperson)
Councillor Tracy Bowes (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Jennie Hewitt, Paul Rone, Louis Stark and William Wilding

In attendance: Councillors Ellie Chowns (Cabinet Member), John Harrington (Cabinet Member), Liz Harvey (Cabinet Member) and David Hitchiner (Cabinet Member)

Officers: Herefordshire Council: R Ball – Director for Economy and Place, R Allonby – Head of Economic Development, A Lovegrove – Chief Finance Officer, A Mcalpine – Senior Solicitor

Marches Local Enterprise Partnership: Mandy Thorn MBE DL – Chair, Gill Hamer - Chief Executive, Ilia Bowles - Director of Corporate Services; and Tim Yair - Regional Senior Energy Projects Officer

19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Durkin and Matthews.

20. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Rone substituted for Councillor Durkin.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

22. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2020 be approved as a correct record.

23. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The question received and the answer are appended to these minutes.

24. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

None.

25. MARCHES LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the achievements of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), its current priority activities and board membership.

The Senior Solicitor made a statement that given the dispute between the LEP and the Council with regard to the determination and clawback of the South Wye Transport Package funding it was considered that it would not be appropriate for the Committee to discuss matters set out at paragraphs 42-43 of the report.

The Head of Economic Development introduced the report.

The Chair of the LEP made some introductory remarks.

The Chief Executive of the LEP then gave a presentation, as published as an appendix to the agenda papers.

The committee discussed the report by the LEP asking a number of questions to which responses were given.

RESOLVED:

- That**
- (a) the update from the Marches LEP including current priorities and projects be noted;**
 - (b) the executive be recommended that:**
 - (1) the LEP be asked to bear in mind the importance of having regard to the needs of the market towns and the rural areas when considering allocating funding for projects;**
 - (2) the LEP be encouraged in its stated intention to revisit its Strategic Economic Plan and other policies to ensure that they are sustainable and resilient having regard, for example, to the impact of transport schemes in the context of the declared climate emergency;**
 - (3) the LEP be asked to consider how it can improve its engagement with creative industries;**
 - (4) the LEP be asked to consider appointing a creative industries champion to the LEP Board;**
 - (5) the LEP Board be recommended to appoint a rural and market Towns Champion;**
 - (6) the LEP be asked to bid for funding to address the impacts of flooding, noting that these are of a significance comparable to the impacts of Covid 19 for which the Government has provided funding;**
 - (c) the Executive considers how it can facilitate better engagement between the Herefordshire Cultural Partnership and the LEP;**
 - (d) the Executive work with the LEP to make representations for there to be a small towns LEP group along the lines of the national rural LEP Group;**
 - (e) the Executive ensures that it has a number of approved prioritised projects available for submission to the LEP in order to take advantage of funding opportunities when they arise;**
 - (f) the Committee establishes a task and finish group to review the processes in place to deliver projects, ensuring that the reasons that**

have led to delays in the past on council managed projects have been addressed and that the current processes are fit for purpose; and

(g) the LEP be asked to report to the Committee on the level of inward investment achieved.

26. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

The following additions and amendments were proposed:

- the Action Plan accompanying the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy be reviewed in March.
- That a task and finish group be established to examine why the council had previously not been able to meet project deadlines for council projects, the reasons for delays, what measures needed to be put in place including arrangements with LEP partners, governance, and processes to ensure projects could be delivered on time, budgeted and to the appropriate quality.
- It was noted that it had also been proposed that the Committee should establish a task and finish group to look at contract management, given considerable spend on these contracts.

The Chief Finance Officer agreed to submit a report to the Committee in January to assist it in deciding how best to proceed in considering the proposed topics on project and contract management.

- It was highlighted that an executive decision on the extension of the current contract with Balfour Beatty Living places was pending.
- An additional meeting should be scheduled for 26 April. It was proposed that this should consider the response to Covid 19 and progress on the Executive's responses to the task and finish group reports on the Waste Management Strategic Review and the Climate Emergency.
- In relation to the forthcoming consideration of the budget it was suggested that a checklist of questions would help the Committee to fulfil its role in scrutinising the budget. The Chief Finance Officer agreed to consider this request. He noted that a training session for all councillors was being scheduled.
- In considering the Hereford Transport Package review on 9 November the Committee had recommended (recommendation (b)): that the cabinet consider 'weighting of the preferred outcomes' to help determine the preferred package to take forward. It was requested that the Executive be asked to provide a fuller explanation of its response to this recommendation as set out in the schedule of recommendations made and responses at appendix 2 to the work programme report.
- It was requested that the County's MPs be invited to attend the Committee's meeting to consider the budget to provide them with a better understanding of the impact of COVID and flooding on the budget and the choices facing the council, as a result of lack of support and funding shortages from central government. It would also provide an opportunity to hear how they were working for the county to secure funds.

RESOLVED:

- That**
- (a) the draft work programme as set out at appendix 1 to the report be approved, subject to the amendments identified above;**
 - (b) a report be made to the next meeting on the options for scrutinising project management and contract management;**

- (c) the County's MPs be invited to attend the Committee's meeting to consider the budget; and
- (d) the executive be requested to provide a fuller explanation of its response to the Committee's recommendation (b) in its consideration of the Hereford Transport Package review on 9 November that the cabinet consider 'weighting of the preferred outcomes' to help determine the preferred package to take forward'.

27. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Friday 15 January 2020 11.00 am.

Appendix - Public Questions and Answers

The meeting ended at 6.19 pm

Chairperson

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO GENERAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 2 December 2020

Question 1

Mr R Palgrave – How Caple

The Marches LEP update for this meeting includes the following statement about the Hereford City Centre Transport Package: "The aim of the project is to improve the provision of housing in the County, providing a more sustainable and pedestrian friendly city centre and supporting the delivery of long-term economic benefits and sustainable growth for Herefordshire. The project has so far delivered 803 jobs and 107 homes. Over the lifetime of the project it will deliver 800 homes, along with other economic outcomes for the city". Would the committee please ask for evidence that supports the claim that 803 jobs and 107 homes have been delivered so far.

Response

The Hereford City Centre Transport Package project led by Herefordshire Council and funded by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) enabled the development of the new City Link road. This has already unlocked the growth of new jobs opportunities and housing development across the city centre by providing access to an area to the north of the inner ring road which was previously inaccessible. In accordance with the national government output guidance and the LEP funding contract for the project, Herefordshire Council has monitored and reported on the job opportunities that have been developed in new developments such as the Old Market shopping centre and the new homes that have been brought forward in the urban village area (for example in the five year housing land supply annual statement

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/16175/appendix_b_5_year_supply_april_18_updated_october_2018.pdf).

The City Link Road development will continue to enable the development of new job and housing opportunities.

