

ENTERPRISE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 22nd September, 2022

Present:-

Councillor Flood (Chair)

Councillors	Dyke	Councillors	Snowdon
	Coy		Brittain
	Hollingworth		Wheeldon

*Matters dealt with under the Delegation Scheme

18 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' AND OFFICERS' INTERESTS
RELATING TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

No declarations of interest were received.

19 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Caulfield.

20 **DEPUTY LEADER - UPDATE ON THE SKILLS ACTION PLAN
REFRESH**

The Senior Economic Development Officer presented an update to the committee on the Skills Action Plan refresh. A key objective of the Plan was to ensure that residents had the skills they needed to take advantage of economic growth in the town. The Plan would be aligned with the Council Plan and the Growth Strategy.

A number of consultation exercises had been completed following the previous scrutiny workshop including;

- Skills and Employability Conference
- An engagement group in Staveley involving 30 young people from Springwell and Netherthorpe Schools
- An Employer Round Table event at Chesterfield Football Club
- University of Sheffield research project, involving masters students investigating recruitment challenges, in conjunction with ten businesses

The findings of the consultation work suggested a number of areas of focus for the updated action plan. Youth unemployment had improved during the pandemic but was increasing again. Employers continued invest in training and upskilling their staff, which presented an opportunity to signpost organisations to funding support available.

High job vacancy rates were evident but businesses faced recruitment challenges and it was acknowledged that there were differences in employers' expectations versus candidates expectations which would need to be balanced. Apprenticeships had been impacted by the growth in low-skilled higher paid jobs available and there was continued demand for Green and Digital Skills.

The role of Chesterfield Borough Council (CBC) was seen as that of a conduit, to continue leading on skills acquisition by facilitating skills events, signposting employers and workers to available resources, engaging in partnerships and building on the successes of its Local Labour activity.

The Committee heard that Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP) were under development and that each Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) would be required to have one. The LSIP aimed to be more responsive to local labour demands and involve employers more. It would cover a three-year period and be predominantly focussed on post 16 employability. There was a clear expectation that cross-cutting themes such as digital skills would be a priority. The themes of CBC's Skills Action Plan should enable the council to engage with and complement the new LSIP.

The forthcoming introduction of the East Midlands Mayoral Combined Authority involved the devolution of some skills and education provision, predominantly training for over 19s, which would be important to support upskilling employees in the region. The details of the devolution deal had not been confirmed but reference had been made to how the Combined Authority would work strategically with the Department for Work and Pensions.

The committee was reminded of the planned projects that formed part of the Staveley Town Deal, including the Construction Skills Hub and the Derbyshire Rail Industry Innovation Vehicle (DRIIVe). An investment plan had been submitted to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) in July and had been successful in securing funds for future skills development, to replace European Social Fund (ESF) monies that would end in 2024/25. This would help to support the economically inactive cohort and align with the Derbyshire County Council Multiply initiative.

Discussion took place around industry sectors that have entry level jobs accessible to young people, such as hospitality, and whether any emphasis was placed on these, as this could offer multiple benefits ie by reducing youth unemployment but also stimulating the town centre economy. The Senior Economic Development Officer advised that CBC works with partners to focus skills delivery and provided examples where this has worked particularly well, such as the new Subway store that had opened in the town centre and the Premier Inn at the site of the former department store on Elder Way. The University of Derby were leading on a focus on jobs in the Care Sector which was acknowledged as an area of high demand.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update be noted.

2. That a further update be brought to the committee once the draft action plan was available as a draft document.

21 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED –

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

22 **CABINET MEMBER FOR TOWN CENTRES AND VISITOR ECONOMY - MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF TOWN CENTRE PROJECTS**

The Service Director for Economic Development introduced the Senior Economic Development Officer who presented an overview of the town centre. He outlined the economic context, including the cost-of-living crisis and the steep decline in demand for goods and services. There had been a significant switch to online retail, driven in part by the global pandemic and this had resulted in retailers moving out of the town centre or ceasing to trade. In contrast, there was significant capital investment planned in Chesterfield in the next few years.

It was explained that Town Centre Vacancy Rates were one of the indicators currently used to measure success. The data was collected monthly by CBC and although Chesterfield had consistently had a lower vacancy rate than the national average, the gap had narrowed and almost reached a level of parity.

Another measurement used was the level of footfall in the town centre, provided by Vicar Lane Shopping Centre. Levels were back to 80 – 90% of pre-pandemic figures and this was similar to what had been reported nationally.

Town centre car parks revenue had exceeded the 2019 levels since May 2022, but it was noted that there had been an increase in tariffs, so the figures did not necessarily equate to an increased usage of the car parks.

The town centre employment figures were available retrospectively and these did indicate a declining trend since 2016. The STEAM visitor numbers covered the borough as a whole rather than the town centre specifically. There had been a steady upward trend prior to the pandemic and although there had been a sharp decline due to lockdowns the recovery was positive and improving.

A discussion took place around how footfall statistics are determined and it was explained that as part of the redevelopment plans for the town centre a Wi-Fi net would be created and this would enable much more comprehensive data about the movement of people. A question was asked about whether there were any seasonal patterns in footfall numbers, and it was noted that the 'welcome back' funding and the

animations it provided had generated an influx of people but hybrid working continued to impact the number of people using the town centre.

The officer noted that compiling the data into this format had been a useful exercise. Members and officers agreed that providing this snapshot regularly would help to build a fuller picture and identify trends.

Ongoing conversations with retailers and town centre businesses would continue, particularly in relation to any disruptions caused by the redevelopment work. Work would be carried out at night where possible and an open dialogue ensuring that everyone understands the benefits of the schemes would be crucial.

A question was asked about the Northern Gateway Enterprise Centre and how the occupancy rates compared with the original business plan. It was explained that at the time the business plan was created both the Taptan and Dunston Innovation Centres were at capacity. The new centre had been open for two months, almost all of the smaller rooms were occupied, and the tenants were young and dynamic. The building was 52% let.

Members requested a further column of information on projects that detailed any partner agencies involved and highlighted where CBC was the project lead.

RESOLVED –

That a bi-annual update on the town centre projects be brought to the Enterprise and Wellbeing Committee.

23 RE-ADMISSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED –

That after consideration of items containing exempt information, the public be re-admitted to the meeting.

24 SCRUTINY MONITORING

The Committee considered the Scrutiny recommendations monitoring schedule.

RESOLVED –

That the Scrutiny monitoring schedule be noted.

25 FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan for the four month period 1 October, 2022 to 31 January, 2023 was presented for information.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

26 **WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE ENTERPRISE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The 2022/23 Work Programme for the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee was reported for information.

RESOLVED –

That the work programme be noted and updated to include the decisions of the current meeting.

27 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

The Minutes of the meeting of the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held on 14 July, 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.