

**Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities held at the
Bourges / Viersen Room, Town Hall on 8 March 2011**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors D Over (Chairman), D Harrington, D Sanders and N Sandford

OFFICERS PRESENT:

Alana Diffey Governance Officer
Karen Dunleavy Governance Officer

Also in attendance:

Neil Darwin Director of Economic Development, Opportunity Peterborough
Binal Karia Business Intelligence Officer, Opportunity Peterborough

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Dobbs and Shaheed. Councillor Sandford was acting as nominated substitute for Councillor Shaheed.

2. Declaration of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2011 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. Local Economic Assessment for Peterborough

The Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities received a report which presented the first draft of Peterborough's Local Economic Assessment (LEA), which had been prepared by Opportunity Peterborough (OP). The report was presented for discussion and to receive any comments into the ongoing consultation process.

In presenting the item, the Director of Economic Development explained that:

- The LEA had been required by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act (2009) however since the election, the coalition government had withdrawn the guidance on local economic assessments. Whilst there were no proposals to provide any new guidance, advice from government was that local areas could still chose to produce a LEA.
- Locally the view had been taken that understanding the economic state of the district was essential for planning ahead for the city's economic growth. The LEA was currently in draft form and was based on information and data that OP were able to access. There was not a lot of data available at ward level and rural Cambridgeshire and Leicestershire were in a similar situation. It was hoped that by working with the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities, a way to fill these gaps to create a more dynamic LEA could be found.
- The LEA was not about housing or planning, was but about the economy and finding improvements to tackle worklessness. This involved working with other departments within the authority.

- The LEA was also about identifying linkages, Peterborough's relationships with satellite towns, and Peterborough's strengths and weaknesses as an economic centre.

The Business Intelligence Officer explained that the data for the LEA had come from various sources, but acknowledged that there was a lag with the data, for example some of it was out of date until data from the 2011 census became available. OP had been meeting regularly with the former East of England Development Agency regarding best practice in LEA development, and had reviewed LEAs from around the country to see what worked. The LEA had been tailored to Peterborough and the working group was still identifying partners.

The key sections of the LEA included Business and Enterprise, People and Communities, Skills, Worklessness Assessment and Sustainable Economic Growth. Other authorities had determined that these sections worked well and also reflected issues that had been highlighted by the recession. The Worklessness Assessment was originally a separate document but was now included in the LEA. The LEA was intended to be a starting point and it was hoped that it would be made more comprehensive as time passed.

The Director of Economic Development explained that officers were still meeting with stakeholders, with a view to a final version of the LEA being available in April 2011. The Director of Economic Development acknowledged that the document was very long, and that work was being done to simplify it whilst ensuring it remained relevant to Peterborough.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- Councillor Sanford asked why rural areas did not receive a high profile, with people and communities only being covered across 3 pages of the document. The Director of Economic Development explained that this was due to the level and quality of data available at ward level, which was not so easy to come by.
- Councillor Sandford asked why, when Peterborough was aspiring to be the Environment Capital, only reference to the need for economic growth to be sustainable on page 196, and the natural environment and access, which was a major contributor to the economy, was mentioned on page 126. The Director of Economic Development acknowledged this and hoped to develop this area in the coming weeks.
- Councillor Sandford asked why increasing affordable housing was not considered a key recommendation, whilst providing executive housing was. The Director of Economic Development explained that it was about achieving a balance and that the LEA was not a housing document, but focussed on ways to boost Peterborough's economic growth and it was felt that executive housing was essential to drawing in business.
- Councillor Harrington asked why data for rural areas had not been very forthcoming or available. The Director of Economic Development explained that it was easier to gain such data from cities, which was typically gathered district wide. This had always been the case nationally and had never reached a point where it was challenged, though this was something that OP would like to address.
- Councillor Harrington raised concerns that Peterborough was completely ignoring its agricultural expertise, which correctly harnessed could put Peterborough on the map.
- The Director of Economic Development explained that Peterborough needed to continue to raise its profile in London, and had to spend money to do so. Overall, Peterborough was starting to see an upturn and was beginning to grow, but needed to remain proactive to encourage more growth in the area. The Director of Economic

Development also felt that it was a weakness for the city that the centre had not been developed and regenerated, though the Cathedral Square works went some way toward addressing this issue.

- Peterborough would continue to look at ways in which it could work with Cambridge, which was a high growth option and a global brand. Peterborough was in one of the top 2 or 3 areas for food production in the country, with Spalding seeing 80% of Marks and Spencer food going through the town. There was an interest for Peterborough to develop these connections.
- Councillor Harrington raised concerns that when previously asked about what agricultural courses the local university intended to offer, it stated that it planned to offer none. Councillor Harrington felt that this was rather strange, given that the university and Peterborough were well placed to be a centre of excellence in agriculture.
- The Director of Economic Development acknowledged this and commented that the National Centre for Food and Drink was established in Holbeach, which was not far from Peterborough and that this close proximity should be taken advantage of.
- Councillor Sanders commented that an increased supply of attractive, executive homes in Peterborough would encourage high wage earners to live within the city, as a lack of such homes currently meant that executives sought homes elsewhere, such as Oundle and Stamford.
- Councillor Sanders asked if it was possible to calculate the GDP of Peterborough. The Director of Economic Development explained that whilst the reliability of the data available made it difficult, he could provide information that would give the Commission a flavour for Peterborough's GDP.
- Peterborough experienced high levels of unemployment. In order to tackle this, it was felt that a better understanding of what skills employers were looking for was needed.
- Councillor Sandford referred to the Director of Economic Development's earlier comments that the Cathedral Square regeneration would attract retailers into Peterborough, and asked what work was being done to fill the three empty shops currently in the Square. The Director of Economic Development advised that there had been a high level of interest in the vacant premises and officers were currently in negotiations. For example, Nando's Restaurant had recently confirmed that it would be moving into the Square. The Director of Economic Development added that Peterborough needed more than just restaurants to create a greater mix to draw families into the city, which came back to the need to continually improve Peterborough's visibility.
- Councillor Sanders commented that not enough young, educated people were remaining in Peterborough once leaving school. Councillor Harrington agreed that education was paramount.
- Councillor Harrington asked what OP was doing to keep a sustainable link between rural areas and the city, as people needed to be able to move around more easily and the bus services needed to be realistic. The Director of Economic Development agreed and advised that if Peterborough worked to drive up what is happening in the city, the demand for these services would also be driven up. Work needed to be done to get the heart of the city buzzing with better quality shops, events in the Square and at the Embankment. Councillor Harrington agreed, saying that it had to

be a key element to the economy that if people can't access the city, they can't contribute to its economic growth.

- Councillor Sandford commented that there used to be a bus service to Showcase Cinema, which had been withdrawn completely. The Call Connect service ended at 6.30pm in the evenings. This left the whole evening period where people without private transport could not access the city. The Director of Economic Development agreed and informed the Commission that OP was working with the Council's transport teams to address the situation. As the latest Transport Plan has only just become available, more information can now be included in the LEA.
- Councillor Sandford raised concerns that the document needed some rebalancing in terms of Environment Capital. The Director of Economic Development advised that OP was reliant on other departments to provide contributions to the document and needed colleagues to understand the importance of being forthcoming with information.

In response to questions raised by the Chairman, the Director of Economic Development advised that:

- OP had been working with Rutland as part of a Local Enterprise Partnership and the ongoing situation with Wittering was being monitored. It was acknowledged that Wittering needed to be protected for as long as possible, and whilst Peterborough would never want to lose the base, a best use also needed to be considered should the situation change.
- Wittering may be well placed to become a good business park, as Peterborough was very short of good quality employment land and its situation on the A1 made it very viable. Great Haddon did provide good quality employment land however Peterborough wanted to attract more than just logistics.
- Peterborough needed a 'can do' attitude around improving sustainable energy supplies around the city, as the city's Environment Capital aspirations were working well in raising interest in Peterborough. Councillor Sandford suggested that businesses should be encouraged to install renewable or solar energy, by taking advantage of government incentives such as the renewable heating incentive.

The Chairman asked whether Peterborough's many languages had economic consequences for the city. The Director of Economic Development advised that Peterborough had some well educated people, if businesses could just through the language barrier.

Councillor Harrington commented that he travelled regularly to the Ukraine, which had expanded at a vast rate over the past ten years and was geographically much like the Peterborough area – flat and fertile. Whilst he realised that there were political barriers, Councillor Harrington felt that it was essential to develop links with other countries.

5. Work Programme

It was noted that the work programme for the forthcoming year would be developed at its meeting in June 2011.

6. Forward Plan of Key Decisions – 1 March 2011 - 30 June 2011

The latest version of the Forward Plan, showing details of the key decisions that the Leader of the Council believed the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would be making over the next four months, was received.

No items on the forward plan were identified as areas for scrutiny.

7. Date of the next Meeting

The Chairman advised that the next meeting would be confirmed at the Annual Council Meeting, which was scheduled to be held on 16 May 2011.

CHAIRMAN
7.00pm - 8.26 pm

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