

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

20 September 2022

-: Present :-

Councillor Douglas-Dunbar (Chairwoman)

Councillors Barrand, Brown, Kennedy, Chris Lewis, Loxton and David Thomas

(Also in attendance: Councillor Long)

8. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Atiya-Alla and Johns and it was reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group, the membership of the Board had been amended to include Councillors Chris Lewis and David Thomas in place of Councillors Bye and Barnby respectively.

9. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 6 July 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairwoman.

10. Draft Torbay Economic Growth Strategy 2022-30

Members considered the submitted report which set out the Draft Torbay Economic Growth Strategy 2022-30 (Policy Framework document) currently out to public consultation. Oral representations were heard from Matt Crabtree, Brixham Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Susie Colley, Torquay Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Sally Cope, Paignton Chamber of Trade and Commerce and Steve Reynolds, Torbay Business Forum who gave their views on the draft Strategy and how they could help Torbay improve economic regeneration. Their feedback included:

- continued and increased two-way communication so that they could help share information with their members to keep them informed and raise awareness of what was happening in Torbay and also share what their members could offer in terms of job, skills and training opportunities (many of which were provided free of charge);
- continued partnership working;
- concerns regarding delays in the planning process or refusals preventing new developments and access to suitable accommodation, including student accommodation;
- concerns over the skills shortage and ability to fill vacancies;

- impact of transport links and parking and appropriate signage on growing the local economy;
- support for extending the tourism season;
- support generally for the draft Torbay Economic Growth Strategy;
- more emphasis could be made on health, social care, fishing, new homes and climate change within the draft Strategy;
- how was the impact on the cost of living crisis going to impact on delivery of the Strategy;
- the need to also attract non-seasonal businesses to Torbay;
- the need to encourage young people to stay within Torbay and how local businesses, schools and South Devon College could help achieve this and highlight alternative options for career development within Torbay;
- how signage such as the ones used on the former Debenhams site could be used at other sites across Torbay to make them more attractive e.g. Crossways;
- the joined up working and reach of the Torbay Business Forum, three Chambers of Trade and Commerce, the Council and TDA and how more resource could help them achieve more to support local businesses to communicate what they need; and
- the need to be able to engage more with smaller businesses who have limited resources to step away from running their businesses and share their views.

Questions were asked and responded to in respect of the following:

- how the local businesses were feeling about their future;
- how would the Council/TDA ensure that the Torbay Economic Growth Strategy 2022-30 remained a live document which would adapt to changing circumstances over the lifetime of the Strategy;
- would SMART targets and milestones be refined within the Strategy and/or action plan so that Members could monitor delivery against the Strategy at least annually;
- how would the Strategy ensure appropriate links for health, social care, parking, planning, renewable energy and waste and other key strategies;
- from a business perspective were people not coming forward to fill roles because they do not have the skills or because they were not aware of what training and development opportunities there were to learn these skills on the job and how was this promoted;
- how would the Council/TDA ensure that key messages on what we have considered and why we may not have pursued certain issues such as harnessing renewable energy within Torbay were widely communicated;
- the Strategy mentions additional spend in tourism and new jobs, concerns have been raised about the ability to fill job vacancies and lack of suitable housing, how achievable were these ambitions;
- how does the business community work with the Job Centre and schools to promote opportunities and support young people to stay in Torbay;
- how could we do more to raise awareness of further education opportunities within Torbay;
- what was happening to address the risks around Freeports and how could this be picked up within the Strategy;

- what were we doing to help our businesses achieve the ambitions of the Strategy and how could we be assured that the Strategy would be implemented and have a real impact as many of the issues were covered in previous Economic Strategies but had not been resolved;
- what was being done about alternative transport, linked to jobs and keeping people moving; and
- there needs to be a focus on what we were doing differently.

The Board thanked the representatives from the Business Forum and three Chambers of Trade and Commerce for their contribution and recommended that their continued relationships and partnership working be highlighted within the Torbay Economic Growth Strategy 2022-30.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Cabinet be recommended to approve the Draft Torbay Economic Growth Strategy 2022-23 subject to the following:

1. that the Strategy includes SMART (Specific, Measurable, Aspirational, Realistic and Timely) targets with achievable milestones to enable Members to clearly monitor the progress made in delivering the key objectives of the Strategy;
2. to include reference to the risks associated with Freeports and that this has been consciously considered;
3. to include clearer signposting references to other key Council policies and strategies and to ensure that all strategies are cross referenced and complement each other (e.g. Housing Strategy, Local Plan, Parking Strategy etc.); and
4. that the continued relationships and partnership working with the three Chambers of Trade and Commerce and Torbay Business Forum be highlighted within the Strategy.

(Note: Councillor Barrand left the meeting for a short period during this item.)

11. Grant Funded Programmes

The Board received and noted the submitted paper which provided an update on the Torquay Town Deal and Paignton Future High Streets Fund Programmes. Members noted emerging proposals for Union Square which would be developed further and communicated wider once more details had been developed. The Divisional Director for Economy, Environment and Infrastructure, Alan Denby, and The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Tourism and Housing, Councillor Long, responded to the following questions:

- had the Cabinet Member visited the site outside Paignton Picture House to see the condition the pavement had been left in following the fencing put around during the Summer;
- when was Torbay Road closed to traffic;

- was there a risk of further delays to the demolition of Crossways if the additional funding was not received; and
- the LGA (Local Government Association) Peer Review recommended that the TDA provide quarterly briefings to all Councillors on their work and to hold an annual state of the nation event on how the TDA was delivering the ambitions of the Council, this had not been done, what action was being taken to address this and to improve communication to Councillors and the wider community.

Resolved (unanimously):

That Divisional Director for Economy, Environment and Infrastructure, be recommended to ensure wider communication with Councillors and the community on the progress of Council projects and to seek a slot at the community engagement event to share what is going on across Torbay.

(Note: Councillor Loxton left the meeting after discussion of this item.)

12. Budget Monitoring Quarter 1

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Tourism and Housing, Councillor Long, and the Deputy Head of Finance, Sean Cremer, outlined the submitted budget monitoring report which provided a high level budget summary of the Council's forecasted revenue and capital income and expenditure for the financial year 2022/2023. The report was based on figures as at the end of Quarter 1.

The report predicted a draft overspend for 2022/2023 of £3.564m but further mitigation had been identified by the Senior Leadership Team which reduced the overspend to £1.21m. Members were concerned over additional risks identified within the report as a result of the cost of living crisis, increased costs to the Higher Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, a request for £6m additional funding towards the increased adult social care costs, increased cost of capital projects and associated borrowing and felt that further detailed consideration was required in order for Members to be assured that all appropriate action and mitigation had been taken into account.

Resolved (unanimously):

That a 2022/2023 Budget Pressures Review Panel be established to undertake a review of the 2022/2023 budget to address the concerns raised in the Quarter 1 budget monitoring report and that the Cabinet be requested to support this process.

13. Highways Review

The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Councillor Douglas-Dunbar, presented the submitted draft report on the Review of Highways.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Report to the Cabinet on the Review of Highways be approved.

Chairwoman