



Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

13 March 2013

-: Present :-

Councillor Thomas (J) (Chairman)

Councillors Addis, Barnby, Bent, Darling (Vice-Chair), Kingscote, Pentney, Stockman and Pountney

(Also in attendance: The Mayor and Councillors Excell and Lewis)

46. Apologies

It was reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative Group, the membership of the Board had been amended to include Councillor Addis in place of Councillor Hill.

47. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 24 January 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

48. Economic Regeneration

In accordance with its Work Programme and following the meeting of the Board held on 12 September 2012, the Board had requested that the Mayor attend the meeting to discuss further his priorities and strategy around the economic regeneration of Torbay.

In particular the Board asked for updates on:

- South Devon Link Road and how the Council would be capitalising on the improved transport links into Torbay from the completion date of the road
- the recently announced £1.4 million which had been allocated to Torbay from the Government's Coastal Communities Fund
- the current position in relation to the European Union Transition Zone funding which was likely to be allocated to Devon
- the Council's relationship with the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership which would have a key role to play in the future economic strength of Torbay.

The Board also had before it extracts from the Quarter 3 Performance and Public Value Report which gave details of the “State of the Bay” including current statistics about Torbay’s economy together with updates on the Council’s and the Torbay Development Agency’s performance as it related to the economy.

At its meeting in September 2012, the Board had been reassured that the current Economic Strategy was being revised and that it, at that time, was scheduled to be considered by the Council in December 2012. The Board had asked to be provided with the opportunity to “critically engage with the consultation process” on the emerging Strategy.

The Mayor presented his briefing note which set out how the Economic Strategy was being revised taking account of the economic issues which Torbay continues to face. The Mayor stated that his main priority remained the creation of jobs (whether part-time or full-time). The number of jobs available needed to be increased and the numbers needed to be maintained.

The briefing note also gave details of Lord Heseltine’s report “No Stone Unturned in the Pursuit of Growth” which had been published at the end of October 2012. It was noted that the Local Economic Partnerships (LEP) would have an increasingly significant role in economic regeneration acting as a conduit for funding from central government to the regions. However, the level of funds available had substantially reduced and therefore bidding rounds were becoming ever more competitive.

The Chief Executive of the Torbay Development Agency was confident that he currently had the resources available to make successful bids. However, whilst recognising the increased pressure that Council finances were under, he expressed concern about his organisation’s ability to sustain the long term delivery of schemes to regenerate the economy if the funding of his organisation continued to be reduced.

It was also noted that match funding which in the past had been provided by the South West Regional Development Agency (RDA) for schemes was not available through the LEP and that the Council would need to take a different approach to providing match funding which may be consider more risky than in the past (such as use of Community Infrastructure Levy or increased Business Rates).

In response to questions about the number of inward investment inquiries, it was noted that the loss of RDA had created a vacuum and that there was a need to put in place new initiatives. This was also a role which could be filled by the LEP and it was noted that the Council’s relationship within the Partnership was crucial. The LEP needed to be in a position to be able to talk positively about Torbay as a good place to invest.

In considering the emerging Economic Strategy, it was noted that it needed to align closely with the Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plans. The Chief Executive of the TDA reported that it was difficult to set a strategy within the context of an annual (rather than longer term) budget cycle.

The Board was disappointed that the Strategy was still not available to it for comment and challenge. However, having heard from the Mayor and his officers

during this and the previous meeting on economic regeneration, the Board shared some of its views.

- The Strategy needs clear prioritisation in order to show a clear focus on what the Council (through Torbay Development Agency) can achieve. This is especially important given the increased competition for reduced funds.
- The need that has previously been highlighted by the Overview and Scrutiny Board to develop and work with voluntary and community sector should be highlighted within the Strategy. In particular, work to encourage social enterprise should be mainstreamed.
- Engagement with the voluntary sector should be articulated as creating a thriving voluntary sector enables those in deprived wards to develop confidence and skills to move onto work.
- There should be a focus on expanding, attracting and developing specific sectors which could operate well within Torbay rather than a broad approach.
- The impact of the South Devon Link Road also needs to be articulated within the Strategy together with the development opportunities within Torbay which the Road could help make successful.

Generally, the Board feel that there is a need for more work to be undertaken in schools so that students can gain an understanding of the breadth of jobs available in Torbay. There needs to be a better relationship between the curriculum within schools and the economy of Torbay. Business leaders need to be encouraged to go into schools to inspire students.

Chairman
