

Present: Councillor Judith Skinner (Chairman), Councillor Nigel Welton (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Anton Dani, Jonathan Noble, Barrie Pierpoint and Sue Ransome

In attendance:

Officers –

Chief Executive, Economic Development Manager, Head of Town Centre, Leisure, Events and Cultural Services and Senior Democratic Services Officer

66 APOLOGIES

There were apologies for absence from Councillors Colin Brotherton, Stephen Raven, Yvonne Stevens and Stephen Woodliffe.

67 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd August 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

68 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations were made.

69 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Committee considered an update on progress in delivering the strategic themes of the Economic Development Action Plan 2017/18, which was aligned to the Prosperity priority within the Council Plan 2016/17 – 2019/20.

The Economic Development Manager went through the report. At the meeting of 23rd November, in response to the adopted Council Plan, the Council was working to develop an economic framework that aligned to and underpinned the Prosperity priority creating a 'check and balance' through a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) system that would deliver open for business outputs and outcomes over the lifetime of the Council Plan.

The Growth Themes, detailed in the report, were designed to focus and contribute to the aims and objectives of the Council Plan and also help deliver on the identified jobs growth within the emerging South East Lincolnshire Local Plan.

The five themes were:

1. To promote and support inward investment into the borough
2. To support business development & growth of new and existing businesses
3. To support employability skills initiatives
4. To foster start ups and nurturing entrepreneurs, and
5. To encourage green innovation and infrastructure

The rolling Action Plan, appended to the report, was designed to be a fluid document but give direction of travel and would be subject to annual review to ensure that it remained responsive, appropriate and up-to-date.

The Action Plan headings replicated those within the Council Plan and provided that golden thread and the actions beneath gave the flexibility for the Council to engage partners to help deliver the Council Plan and take into account any collated data or information obtained by the Council through questionnaires, surveys or consultations.

Taking an annual 'Health of the Economy' survey would be one of the barometers that would be taken into account when developing further updates and admissions to future plans.

Results from the recent survey suggested that the Council was not too far away with its themes; however, the meaning of business support was changing and funding or financial support was no longer top of the list.

The survey results showed that 46% of businesses considered that they had performed a little stronger over the last 12 months compared to the previous 12 months; and 40% considered they would do so over the next 12 months. 46 % of respondents indicated that accessing finance might have less of an impact on business growth. Of those who responded, 27%, found the supervisory and middle management roles the most difficult to recruit to.

The top issues identified as having the greatest impact on business were:

- 25% - support to access a suitable workforce
- 25% - improved road infrastructure
- 15% - help to access suitable funding
- 13% - improved digital infrastructure

Members raised various issues and the Economic Development Manager responded as follows.

Businesses could apply directly for funding from the Council's funding partners. This information was available on the website and social media, and the Economic Development Manager also contacted businesses with the information.

Theme 3, to *support employability skills initiatives*, referred to offering young people improved aspirations, increased wage levels and alternative career paths. It was aimed to achieve this by working with education providers and businesses on up-skilling workforces in order to encourage increased levels of skills.

With respect to the infrastructure needed to support the increase in homes and jobs, particularly in terms of transport and health services, it was very much a partnership ethos. It involved working closely with Lincolnshire County Council and the utilities, as well as building relationships with Openreach for Super Fast Broad Band, working with partners to address the need for physical buildings and working closely on the Local Plan for employment space. The Business Centre would be utilised in a better way to

create and nurture businesses. Officers were examining transport issues and options were being considered, such as developing business parks outside the town.

With respect to the need to encourage inward investment, a key strength identified in the business survey was working with schools, colleges and the university to build a mass of employable people. Some businesses looked for infrastructure, which related to the Local Plan, but more immediately it was important to work with these education centres to raise aspirations and bring supply chains in.

The Department for International Trade (DIT) was a Government body that reached across continents and supported international investment opportunities. The Economic Development Manager was closely working with the DIT and with commercial agents in order to understand the benefits and demographic, and look to support businesses with guidance and help with the transition. A range of officers offered assistance to businesses – planning, business support, and business champions' network, for example – and the area was attractive in terms of retail offer, schools and further education etc.

The Council did not have a marketing pack containing key messages at present, but a marketing campaign – *Starting, Growing, Investing* – was being developed, which was gaining ground and attracting respect. Fact sheets, case studies and more user-friendly websites were being developed.

The Economic Development Manager was asked if businesses had reported any recruitment and labour difficulties at present. Some had reported a concern for the future, but there was some comfort that businesses had the people they needed at the present time. It was not known what the impact of Brexit would be, but currently some migrant workers were leaving and others were coming in. From discussions, some businesses seemed confident that they would secure the workforce they needed. There was a need to work closely with the business community regarding their position post-Brexit. When the Government gave them a steer they would speak to businesses about their direction and how they could help alleviate pressures, such as supply chains.

Approaches had been made to attract national retail businesses, but current vacant sites were not suitable for larger retailers and their merchandising models/floor plans and have limited scope for redevelopment due to their listed building status. However, monthly meetings were held with commercial agents to complement and support their work.

The Visit Boston website was still being developed. It was considered best to retain the website purely for Visit Boston and set up a separate business website based around the three core principles of Starting, Growing, Investing and it was planned to build a site in November. The domain name *Think Boston, Think Business* had been purchased and it was consistent with Visit Boston. The two sites would be cross referenced as tourism affected economic development and inward investors wanted to know what offer was available. They had not yet looked at business marketing on the website, but would consider it.

[Councillor Sue Ransome left the meeting at 7.05 pm]

The Economic Development Manager was thanked for his work and achievements over the 12 months since he was engaged, and for showing clearly the steps being taken. In particular, marketing was commended; it was more corporate and the message that Boston was open for business was being promoted clearly, as this was essential it was promoted within and outside of the borough. Thanks were also expressed for the work of the Corporate Management Team.

70 PROSPEROUS BOSTON TASK AND FINISH GROUP PHASE 3

The Head of Town Centre, Leisure, Events & Culture presented a report, which set out the details of all stages of Phase 3 of the Prosperous Boston Task and Finish Group's review and its outcomes.

This final phase had focussed on Tourism and Events and included a full review of any promotion of the town, all events and accommodation. The outcomes were listed in the report.

The phase had culminated in a final meeting to allow the group to monitor the activity that had taken place across the review and identify outcomes achieved from the initial consultations undertaken in 2015.

The group appreciated and recognised the quality of work and commitment level of all officers involved throughout the long, in-depth review. The group unanimously agreed that the improvements achieved were significant when compared to the start of the review. However the group decided to re-visit the Markets Service in line with the gradually declining trend in income and convene a meeting to scope the review.

Furthermore, the importance of monitoring all the outcomes from the review was agreed and the group would take up the review again in Spring 2018 to consider how the recommendations agreed over the two years were progressing.

The group concluded with two recommendations from the final phase relating to the need to support the ongoing sustainability of the Visit Boston website in future financial years.

The Chairman, who chaired the Prosperous Boston Task and Finish Group, then addressed the meeting and described the review's fluidity and scope covering multiple service areas. A number of common key areas of concern had been identified from the large scale initial consultations. Significant outcomes had been achieved in addressing the majority of concerns, not solely by the group, but through collective working alongside Portfolio Holders, Members, officers and partnerships, and partly with funding by BTAC. Due to this best practice joint working, the outcomes over the two years had justified the review and the time and effort it had taken. Many outcomes had already been achieved because agreed actions had been implemented as the review progressed rather than at the end of the review.

The group had concluded its review with the following two recommendations from the final stage relating to the need to support the ongoing sustainability of the Visit Boston website in future financial years and agreed to monitor all the recommendations in Spring 2018:

1. That the Council develop a corporate policy covering advertising to enable income strands through the Visit Boston website for private advertising.
2. That the Council develop a corporate policy covering corporate sponsorship to support private sponsorship to support the sustainability of the Visit Boston website.

Members commended the work of the group and the many excellent outcomes of the review, including the website, and much improved signage and toilet facilities.

Responding to questions, the Chairman said there had been many important outcomes achieved through constructive cross-party working; by Members going out and speaking to the public to obtain their views; and excellent support from officers. The review had raised public perception of the work undertaken by the Council. The two corporate policies were recommended in line with good practice, to ensure standard treatment with respect to advertising and sponsorship. The markets provision was being revisited specifically to consider what could be done to address the fall in market income and increase the number of traders.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the recommendations to Cabinet be reworded to read 'external' rather than private advertising and sponsorship to ensure it was clear that it was for businesses rather than members of the public.

A Member reported that two signs on the approach into Boston were broken, which did not give a good impression of Boston and asked if they could be replaced with signs placed higher up to avoid vandalism and others erected to attract people to places of interest. In response, it was explained that officers were discussing damaged signs with the County Council and they would replace them with smaller signs that would help prevent wind damage.

It was reported that consideration was being given to developing a site to properly launch iconic buildings with links to other sites. The PSiCA scheme was in operation, but had closed to new projects because the money had been allocated. Some significant work was still to commence. Separate Heritage Lottery funding could be available for the south side of Emery Lane, but match funding had to be identified and this was proving difficult. New applications had been received forming a waiting list in the event of the withdrawal of any that had not yet been started. The scheme should be completed in 8-10 months. It had been challenging working on this with agents and owners, some of whom were not present in the area and for whom buildings were part of pension funds. Where improvements had been made, the changes before and after the work had been impressive.

Action: PP

Send a briefing note to all Members to update them on the progress of the PSiCA scheme.

The Vice-Chairman thanked all officers involved for their hard work to make the significant changes resulting from the review, which were almost entirely completed. In particular, the newly-retired Head of Operations was praised for his contribution and it was suggested a letter of thanks be passed to him.

Action: PD/Chairman

Write to George Bernard to thank him for the significant contribution he made to the Prosperous Boston Task and Finish Group's review.

A Member of the group voiced appreciation for the opportunity of taking part in the review, which had proved interesting and informative, and thanked all those involved for their professional approach.

The Vice-Chairman stressed that the group's work to improve Boston would continue.

Members then discussed an issue raised regarding people on scooters acting in an intimidating way in the Market Place. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that details had been passed to the police. The Vice-Chairman suggested the matter be discussed with Boston's policing inspector at the next BTAC meeting.

During discussion of negative media coverage, it was noted that the Communications team spent a significant amount of time promoting good news about Boston and working with the media. It was hoped that the Visit Boston website would help change perceptions. A meeting with the new editor of a local newspaper had been very positive.

In response to a question regarding the current number of empty shops in the town, the Vice-Chairman confirmed that this had been too fluid to pinpoint. The Economic Development Manager confirmed that a fixed number could not be provided, though he worked closely with agents regarding which were operating.

Action: CG

E-mail Members with an indication of the approximate number of shops currently empty in the town.

RESOLVED That it be recommended to Cabinet that:

- 1. The Council develop a corporate policy covering advertising to enable income strands through the Visit Boston website for external advertising.**
- 2. That the Council develop a corporate policy covering corporate sponsorship to support external sponsorship to support the sustainability of the Visit Boston website.**

71 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted that the item on A-Boards would be considered at the January meeting and would be the sole item on that agenda.

The Chairman then suggested holding an Inquiry Session one hour prior to the next meeting on environmental enforcement in line with the new ways of working agreed following scrutiny training earlier in the year. The sessions were informal and the first one held had been very successful. The public Committee meeting could take place immediately afterwards.

It was confirmed that the environmental enforcement officers dealt with litter and dog fouling only; not street drinking.

Members discussed the options. The Committee had agreed to enter the update onto its work programme in accordance with scrutiny's usual method of reporting prior to receiving the scrutiny training. There was a view that the update should be considered as an agenda item because it was already on the work programme. However, Members reviewed the work programme at each meeting; it was flexible and reflected changing priorities.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the environmental enforcement officers would attend either the informal or formal meeting, but suggested that meeting them in an informal session could be more constructive as those taking part could speak more freely. However, it would be difficult to consider this topic at both meetings; Members might find the Inquiry Session sufficient, but if any issues arose that Members wished to scrutinise, these would be used to form the basis of a report to the Committee at a later stage. The Committee meeting could be used to consider items resulting from the forthcoming scrutiny workshop.

Action: PD

Arrange an Inquiry Session for Members to meet with environmental enforcement officers at 6pm on 22nd November with items for the following Committee meeting to be confirmed. *[This was subsequently postponed to a date to be arranged.]*

During further discussion, it was confirmed that The Stump was supplied with tourist information and the Portfolio Holder suggested the Committee might wish to invite Transported Arts to a meeting to talk about their work.

Action: PP

Invite Transported Arts to a future meeting of the Committee.

72 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Chairman reminded Members of the Scrutiny Workshop arranged to take place on 16th October.

The Meeting Closed at 8.15 pm