

GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 14 MARCH 2022

Present:

Councillor Bentley Strafford-Stephenson (Chair) (in the Chair)

Councillor Nigel Barker
Councillor John Funnell

Councillor Suzy Cornwell
Councillor Philip Wright

Also Present:

| | |
|-----------|--|
| M Cooper | CBE+ |
| I Hands | Ian Hands Consultancy |
| M Ross | D2N2 Business Advisor |
| K Apps | Head of Economic Growth, Regeneration & Housing Delivery |
| D Stanton | Senior Scrutiny Officer |
| N Calver | Governance Manager |
| A Bond | Governance Officer |

GSC/ Apologies for Absence

53/2

1-22 Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors M Emmens, A Hutchinson and M Roe.

Councillor L Hartshorne joined the meeting virtually and so was unable to vote or be classed as present.

GSC/ Declarations of Interest

54/2

1-22 Members are requested to declare the existence and nature of any disclosable pecuniary interest and/or other interest, not already on their register of interests, in any item on the agenda and withdraw from the meeting at the appropriate time.

There were no interests declared at this meeting.

GSC/ Minutes of Last Meeting

55/2

1-22 RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Growth Scrutiny Committee held on 24 January 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

GSC/ Spotlight Scrutiny Review

56/2

1-22 Approval of Project Plan and Timetable

Members agreed with the aims and objectives of the review as set out in Appendix 4a. They considered that there was also an overarching aim to improve Council services and growth.

RESOLVED – That Committee approved the project plan and timetable.

Consideration of Briefing Paper and Relevant Documentation

RESOLVED – The briefing paper and relevant documentation were noted.

Consideration of Questions that Members wish to ask Stakeholders

RESOLVED – The questions were approved.

**GSC/
57/2
1-22** **Scrutiny Review - Spotlight Review - The Council's Communication with Businesses**

Interview One with Mark Ross D2N2 Advisor, Marie Cooper CBE+ and Ian Hans Consultancy

Members heard from Ian Hands Consultancy that it was often difficult to receive engagement from businesses. Out of 1300 business contacted, only 10% had responded. The majority of good data have been obtained via door knocking exercises taken place in towns, rather than surveys, emails or social media.

Committee were also informed that businesses only tend to approach the Council when they are in need of a specific Council service or function such as transactional arrangements.

Businesses advised Committee that were a number of events happening throughout the region such as Corner Stone meetings held by the County Council or Destination Chesterfield. It was suggested that the District Council could send a representative to these events as a networking exercise.

Businesses also considered that a key or single point of contact would be beneficial as it would allow for closer working relationships and a reduction in time taken to achieve answers or results.

Committee heard that when notifying eligible businesses about grant schemes, it was important not to overload them with information but instead explain the benefits and potential achievements. It was suggested that the Council could conduct phone calls with any eligible business.

Businesses outlined their main concerns post-Covid which were recruitment, import and export concerns, logistics, and energy.

Members discussed the interview at length and considered that a Council Relationship Manager for Businesses or business account managers could be a good way of improving connections with local businesses. The District could also work alongside local businesses with resilience planning and community engagement.

Interview Two with the Assistant Director Economic Development,

Regeneration & Housing Delivery

Assistant Director Economic Development, Regeneration & Housing Delivery delivered a presentation to Committee on the Council's business engagement. This highlighted historical and current engagement as well as some points on what has worked well such as; door knocking, business grants and business networks. Areas that had not worked well included passive forms of communication such as leaflets and emails, promoting what businesses require rather than what the funder has on offer, reaching the decision maker in the business.

Committee also heard future plans such as a business ambassador for the Clay Cross Town Deal, the visitor economy network, localised initiatives and a Clay Cross Town Deal Newsletter.

Members asked the Assistant Director a series of questions and heard that the Council had not been very successful connecting with businesses in the past and that a more targeted approach was needed for the future.

A number of businesses would not engage with the Council due to negative stigma attached to the organisation. To combat this, the Council would be jointly branding webinars and events with the East Midlands Chamber.

The Officer considered that a micro-site and/or separate social media pages solely focussed around businesses could be a good idea as it would help to create a more targeted approach and could be updated regularly so business would have a desire to look at it. This would have relevant financial and security implications that would need to be considered.

Members heard that the District was one of the best Councils in the country at supplying Covid grants to businesses but often the Council was not being proactive with grants and funding in relation to businesses.

Committee were informed that the Council often acted as a signposting organisation for businesses but could work with them in areas such as skills, growth or finding new potential sites or locations. All of this would be done at no cost to the business but these services could only be performed if the businesses approached the Council which at present they were not doing.

Members discussed the interview and discussed what role the authority should play in assisting businesses in this area, as well as the fact that the Council offered a number of services but that they were not packaged as an offer. It was considered that a relationships manager could help to alleviate some of these issues.

The Assistant Director agreed to provide the completed report on the North East Derbyshire District Council Business Advisor Programme Project to the next meeting of Committee.

GSC/ Scrutiny Review

58/2

1-22

The Committee then considered all of the evidence which it had received

during its review of the Council's engagement with local business.

Committee identified areas of good practice such as the temporary resource in Mark Ross as a business advisor funded by the Covid grant, the effective use of door knocking and face to face engagement, the amount of services offered by the Council.

Members also highlighted a number of areas for improvement. These included; a lack of a dedicated and appropriate channel of communication, a lack of a single point of contact, and a struggle to effectively define and communicate what it offered to businesses.

RESOLVED – That the draft report on the Committee's review be prepared and submitted to Committee for approval.

GSC/ Forward Plan of Executive Decisions

59/2

1-22 RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan of executive decisions be noted.

GSC/ Work Programme

60/2

1-22 RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.

GSC/ Additional Urgent Items

61/2

1-22 There were no additional urgent items.

GSC/ Date of Next Meeting

62/2

1-22 The next meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee would be held on Monday 9 May at 1pm.

GSC/ Venue for Next Meeting

63/2

1-22 The next meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee would be held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, 2013 Mill Lane, Wingerworth, Chesterfield, S42 6NG.