PRESENT: Councillors

Todd, R. (Chairman)
Gamble, B. (Vice-Chairman)

Alcott, G.  Stretton, Mrs. Z.P.
Davies, D.N.  Dixon, D.I.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

No Declarations of Interests were made in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members’ Interests.

3. Minutes and Matters Arising

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March, 2013.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration reported that Youth Unemployment had been included on the work programme for 2013/14 following the focus given to the topic by last years Committee. The representatives from Tesco and South Staffordshire College who had been unable to attend the Committee’s meeting in March would be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss employment provision and skills support for unemployed 18-24 year olds (minute 28 refers).

In relation to this, the Economic Development and Planning Portfolio Holder reported that a press release had been issued which outlined the Council’s work to expand provision of apprenticeships for 16-24 year olds within the District, specifically supporting a national initiative which allowed businesses of less than 1,000 employees to apply for up to ten individual grants of £1,500 each in order to hire apprentices.

Regarding bus services provision in the District, officers reported that this work would be picked up with Staffordshire County Council as part of work on the
Integrated Transport Strategy for Cannock Chase which had been carried over from the March Committee (minute 27 refers).

The Economic Development and Planning Portfolio Leader updated the committee regarding the meeting arranged between the Council and Arriva (minute 26 refers) where a list of concerns had been raised by Councillors on behalf of local residents. It was agreed to circulate a copy of the report from the meeting. Key matters raised included:

- Loss of one third of the service since 2001
- Arriva did not have to notify Cannock Chase District Council when a service ceased, as Staffordshire County Council, and not CCDC, was the transport authority for this area.
- Arriva admitted that there had been issues with vehicles breaking down and that this had been rectified with newer vehicles being brought in.
- Problems raised by users including the prohibitive cost of the fare; the general maintenance of the vehicles; and (un)reliability.

Members expressed concern regarding the No.32 bus service and its imminent curtailment which would cause Norton Canes residents problems. Concerns were also expressed about service provision to the major Kingswood Lakeside site and other employment sites in the district.

Arriva had argued that the general service in Cannock Chase district was no worse than other areas. New buses had been promised for the services to Pye Green and Walsall early in the new year.

The Committee noted that the Integrated Transport Strategy with Staffordshire County Council was on the work programme for November 2013. This would enable a fuller debate with the County Council regarding the public transport aims for the district, including how to better serve the employed and unemployed.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed

4. The Economic Development and Planning Portfolio

Members gave consideration to the following:

- The Economic Resilience Priority Delivery Plan (PDP) 2013-14 (Item 4.1-4.22)
- Performance Outturn 2012-13 (Item 4.23-4.30);
- Labour Market Profile – Cannock Chase (Item 4.31-4.42)

In respect of the Economic Resilience PDP for 2013-14, the Head of Planning and Regeneration drew Members' attention to the following:

- Education and skills – the District faced long standing issues in this area, particularly in relation to workforce skills and lower educational attainment
when compared to the County, regionally and nationally:

- Unemployment – comparatively high in the District against the County, although it was on a par with regional figures, and below the national average;
- Youth Unemployment – highest in the County after Stoke-on-Trent, and high compared to regional peer group of district councils;
- Job attraction into District – businesses were attracted to the District due to its location, and the previous VAT registration data suggested that businesses could grow in the district;
- National Context – the Government had been focussed on establishing Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) as a means of delivering growth across the Country. The Council was a member of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP and the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP in order to maximise support and development for the District.

With reference to the Economic Resilience PDP (Item 4.1 – 4.29), the Head of Planning and Regeneration reviewed the main points of the report and its key messages. He updated information regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule (on item 4.14). The Committee in March had identified a revised programme which proposed a preliminary draft would now be available in Quarter 3 with the formal publication being available in Quarter 4. The Head of Planning and Regeneration sought agreement for the PDP ‘action’ to be moved to Quarter 4 which was agreed.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration reported on the service aim to increase the economic, social and environmental prosperity of the District through the delivery of sustainable development (Item 4.17). It was noted that the targets relating to the speed and quality of decision making on planning applications were written before the publication of the Government’s indicators. The indicator which relates to the time taken to determine major applications met the Government’s requirements. However, the indicator dealing with the quality of decision making is now unsuitable. Accordingly it was agreed to amend it to read no more than 20% of the Council’s planning refusals are rejected at appeal to meet the national target.

The Economic Development and Planning Portfolio Leader commented that while the reduction of unemployment and the provision of jobs were valid concerns it was notable that tourism as a business sector had grown significantly in the district.

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager provided an update in respect of the Nomis labour market statistics (Item 4.31 – 4.37). He advised that the latest employment rate figure, one of the PDP indicators, had increased.

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager referred to the comparative qualification table (Item 4.33), which showed a much smaller sector of the workforce with either a level 3 or level 4 NVQ compared to the West Midlands. He also advised that this reflected a local trend which did not see a high rate of young people staying on at school for A levels and then going on to undertake a degree. It was explained that this was characteristic of former mining communities.
The Economic Development and Planning Manager then referred to the Out of Work Benefits tables (Item 4.34); advising that monthly updates on unemployment and youth unemployment figures would continue to be produced and reported to the Committee at each meeting.

The Economic Development and Planning Portfolio Leader questioned if students having to remain in education or training from the 1 September, 2013 until they were seventeen would have an impact on the youth unemployment figures. He further commented that young people needed up-skilling with the relevant skill sets for the emerging local businesses for example the new i54 development and Jaguar Land Rover.

The Planning Economic Development Services Manager advised that raising the age of remaining in education or training would probably not impact on the youth unemployment figures in the first twelve months; while the following year may see a small dip in the youth unemployment figures. He agreed with the Portfolio Leader’s comments in respect of emerging business and the skill set required.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and that in respect of:

Publication of the draft Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule should to be moved to Quarter 4 (Item 4.14)

KPI PEDP 7 the target figure of 50% planning appeals overturned to be reduced to ‘no more than 20% of all refusals’ to meet the National Programme target.

5. 18-24 Unemployment Update

Members considered the latest data relating to youth unemployment (Item 5.1-5.2).

The Planning & Economic Development Services Manager reported that there had been an improvement in the general employment figures with the trend continuing. An investigation had been undertaken with Job Centre Plus to ensure there were no statistical anomalies which confirmed that the labour market in Cannock was improving along with job opportunities. A benchmarking exercise with Tamworth had also been undertaken which showed the same results.

RESOLVED:

That the reported be noted

6. Provisional Work Programme 2013-14

Members considered the proposed work programme for the Economic Development and Planning Policy Development Committee for 2013-14.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained that the Work Programme had been compiled with the involvement of the Chair of the Policy Development
Committee who had suggested that the 18-24 unemployment theme of the previous Committee be carried forward into the new programme. This and the suggested topics were agreed.

The Economic Development and Planning Portfolio Leader enquired if it would be possible to ascertain to which types of jobs employees travelled to work outside of the Cannock Chase area and whether it would be possible to entice these employers to set up their businesses in Cannock Chase District.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that this would be a statistical challenge and that the most up to date data would be to compare the travel to work census data of 2001 and 2011. It was unlikely that this information could be broken down into individual types of businesses.

RESOLVED:

That the Provisional Work Programme 2013-14 be agreed.

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CHAIRMAN

(The meeting closed at 5.15 p.m.)