

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
BETTER JOBS AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 9 DECEMBER, 2015 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT:
Councillors

Cooper, Miss J. (Chairman)
Dudson, Miss M.J. (Vice-Chairman)

Allt, Mrs. A. Johnson, T.B.
Freeman, Miss M.A. Preece, J.T.
Gamble, B.

Also in attendance:-

Councillor G. Alcott (Economic Development and Planning Portfolio Leader – observer)
Councillor Mrs. D.M. Todd (Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader – observer)
Jeff Tucker – Connectivity Operations Manager, Staffordshire County Council
David Poole – Skills and Further Learning Manager, Staffordshire County Council

5. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor G. Molineux.

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

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

7. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 September, 2015 be approved as a correct record.

8. Improving Skills and Access to Employment and Training

(i) Skills Update

David Poole, Staffordshire County Council provided a presentation to Members

which gave an overview of the skills landscape, outlined the key issues for Post-16 in Cannock Chase District and the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent LEP Education Trusts vision, outcomes and ambitions.

Members noted that there was a significant skills challenge in Staffordshire; the county had a low wage economy and a low skills base particularly at level 4. The Post-16 area based reviews which would be undertaken between January and May 2016 were outlined. This would see potential changes to colleges and 6th forms in the future. Members also noted the national target of 3m new apprenticeships by 2020 (7,863 of these were to be created in the Cannock Chase District). The implications of the Living Wage were also noted.

The key issues for Cannock Chase in relation to the Post-16 context were as follows:

- The district has the highest proportion of residents with no qualifications and the lowest proportion of residents with level 4+ across all Staffordshire districts.
- The district has the highest percentage of 16-18 NEETS across all Staffordshire districts, (August 15 NEET 217 - 6.1% of 16-18 district cohort - Staffordshire average 3.9% of Staffordshire cohort)
- The district has the lowest percentage of level 3 students progressing to HE against all Staffordshire districts (27%)
- The district has the highest percentage job seekers allowance claimant count across all Staffordshire districts. (October 15 number of claimants 694, claimant rate against working age population 1.1%)

It was explained that the Stoke & Staffordshire LEP Education Trust had been established made up from business / business groups, education / training providers / public sector with the main aim of raising aspirations and achievement. The Education Trusts vision was for a Skills System where business and education worked together to achieve shared outcomes. They sought to support the creation of 50,000 jobs in the next 5 years and to create 80,000 apprenticeship starts in the next 5 years (7,863 starts attributed to Cannock Chase).

Members noted the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in March 2017. All employers with a wage bill in excess of £3m would contribute towards the levy with the aim of improving the quality of Apprenticeships.

The work that the Education Trust had undertaken so far was outlined together with the key achievements with regards to career guidance and workforce skills.

Following the presentation Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions. The Officer was asked what happened once an apprentice had completed the apprenticeship. David Poole confirmed that apprenticeships ranged from between 12months to 4 years. An apprentice was employed by the company they worked for and once the apprenticeship had been completed they remained employed by the organisation. Reference was made to the rumour that some Further Education colleges in the area were to be

closed. The Committee noted that there may be changes to the way colleges operated following the Post-16 area based review as it would address the demand for the colleges and consider if they were fit for purpose.

Reference was made to the statistics for Cannock Chase regarding Post-16 in the District and the Officer was asked to confirm what date the figures were based upon. David Poole confirmed that the figures were based on Census information from 2011. He explained that, although the figures may have changed since 2011 the ranking of the district within Staffordshire would likely remain unchanged.

A Member asked what the growth sectors were and whether any of these sectors were in the Cannock Chase District. David Poole confirmed that Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering, Tourism and Leisure and Business and Professional Services were the growth sectors in the jobs markets. The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager commented that Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering was a growth sector in Cannock Chase due to the connections with the automotive industry. Tourism and Leisure was also a growth sector due to the visitor economy in the District and he confirmed that it made up 9% of the local employment. However, Business and Professional Services was under represented in the District and this needed to be addressed.

In response to a question from the Planning and Economic Development Services Manager, David Poole confirmed that the Apprenticeship Grant supported employers in paying the salary costs of Apprentices. However, the Apprenticeship Levy, due to be imposed in April 2017, would ensure employers with a wage bill of more than £3m would pay for training Apprentices.

The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager considered that the target to create 7,863 new apprenticeships in the District in the next five years was fairly ambitious as 6,220 new apprenticeships had been created since 2010. David Poole explained that the Government views Apprenticeships as the answer to fill the skills gap and the introduction of the Levy would assist in this process. Employers who were contributing to the Levy would want quality programmes fit for the needs of young people.

The Head of Economic Development referred to the statistics for Cannock Chase in relation to Post-16 and asked whether the Education Trust was undertaking any work to address this. David Poole explained that the Education Trust had identified further support for Cannock Chase to address the position with regards to Post-16 in the District. Cannock Chase was selected to participate in some of the programmes that had been developed by the Education Trust. The Trust diverted programmes and funding to the respective needs of the District and Cannock Chase received a higher portion due to the statistics regarding NEETS and JSA claimants being the highest across all the Staffordshire districts.

The Chairman thanked David Poole for attending the meeting and providing the presentation.

(ii) Bus Service Reviews and Access to Employment Locations

Jeff Tucker, Staffordshire County Council was in attendance to discuss the impact of the recent service changes and consider the scope for better bus connectivity with the District's main employment sites. He explained that there had been significant changes since September 2015 with operators changing their schedules. This was a commercial decision by operators in response to requests and travel patterns. He confirmed that the supported bus network net budget had reduced from £3.1m to £2m. They were not looking at significant changes in supported funding for the next two years and funding opportunities arising from new developments would continue to be drawn from. He then referred to the Buses Bill to be introduced next year which would strengthen partnership working and offer franchise opportunities.

He made reference to the work with employers, in particular i54 – the business park in Wolverhampton where Jaguar/Land Rover was located. He confirmed that National Express had won the contract to run the 154 service from Hednesford to Wolverhampton and discussions had taken place with Jaguar/Land Rover regarding shift patterns of their employees to ensure the service met their needs. Funding was in place to run the service until April 2016 and further funding was available (at a lower level) for 2017. National Express was keen to retain the service.

Reference was also made to Amazon whose requirements had not fitted with the standard local bus service provision due to the shift patterns of employees and the changes in employment levels each season.

The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager asked whether there was any information on the number of people using the 154 Service and he sought confirmation as to whether it would become a viable service in terms of usage. Jeff Tucker advised that the 154 Service was a little way off becoming viable as the pattern of service was varied. The Cannock and Hednesford (Staffordshire) section of the route had not yet reached its target; however the Wolverhampton to i54 (Southern) section was ahead of its target. The service was in competition with other services and so the demand and usage was spread over more than one company.

The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager considered that as the i54 employment site and Amazon were two big employers it would be useful to connect the two together. He asked whether it was possible to engage with the recruitment agency for Amazon. A large portion of their workforce came from the Black Country and this may generate more demand for the 154 service. Jeff Tucker advised that this could be considered. He commented that discussions had taken place with the CCG regarding the bus service from Cannock to New Cross Hospital and consideration had been given to linking the hospital service to the i54 employment site. However, due to the time requirements this had not proved successful.

It was suggested that Jeff Tucker be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the opportunities regarding the Buses Bill and to

ascertain the views of the County Council.

The Chairman thanked Jeff Tucker for his attendance at the meeting.

AGREED:

That Jeff Tucker be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the opportunities regarding the Buses Bill and to ascertain the views of the County Council.

(iii) Unemployment and Youth Unemployment Data

The Committee considered the data as outlined at Item 4.1 – 4.2 of the agenda which set out the Overall Unemployment (JSA Claimants) in Cannock Chase District and the Youth Unemployment (18-24 year olds claiming JSA) in the District.

The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager asked the Committee to note that the data showed that there was a general fall in the level of unemployment since January 2014 in the Cannock Chase District and this trend was also reflected in the level of youth unemployment. He advised Members that the data was subject to seasonal variations and there would probably be a slight increase in unemployment during the first couple of months of the year.

A Member asked whether any data was available on the number of people not in work. The Officer explained that the data regarding the number of people not in work would not be up to date information and was therefore not used. Information regarding the number of JSA claimants was used instead as monthly figures were published.

It was requested that regional data be presented to the Committee in the future so that a comparison could be made between Cannock Chase District and the Staffordshire districts.

AGREED:

That regional data that outlined the Overall Unemployment (JSA Claimants) and Youth Unemployment (18-24 year olds claiming JSA) be presented to the Committee in the future.

9. Quarters 1 and 2 Performance Report

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Governance (Item 5.1 – 5.4 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

A Member made reference to the Cannock Friday Street Market which was now being run by a new operator. She considered that, although the appearance of the market had improved, there had been a reduction in the number of stalls since the new operator had taken over. She also noted that the condition of the town centre was in need of improvement as bollards and

paving stones had been removed and not replaced.

The Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader commented that these issues raised by the Member had been discussed with Officers and a meeting with the new operator was to be arranged. The operator had some events planned for Friday 18 December with a visit from Father Christmas but she agreed that there was a need to increase the number of stalls in the street market.

Officers were asked whether the Cannock Friday Street Market had increased footfall within the town centre. The Head of Economic Development explained that information regarding footfall was not gathered on a regular basis. However, the revenue from ticket sales on car parks could be looked at. The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager commented that the operator of Cannock Shopping Centre might agree to provide the information regarding footfall they had collected prior to the change in the Street Market operator. Officers confirmed that information on the Direction of Travel Indicator regarding the footfall (visitor numbers) would need to be reviewed.

AGREED:

- (A) That the Committee note the performance information relating to Better Jobs and Skills Priority Delivery Plan in Quarters 1 and 2 as detailed at Appendix 1 of the report.
- (B) That the Committee notes the actions and indicators which are rated Yellow, Orange or Red and the associated commentary/remedial action proposed by the Lead Officer.
- (C) That information on the Direction of Travel Indicator regarding the footfall (visitor numbers) be reported to the Committee at a future meeting.

10. Work Programme Update

Consideration was given to the updated Work Programme enclosed at item 6.1 of the agenda.

Members noted the items for the agenda for the meeting on 8 March 2016 including the invite to the Traders Association representatives for them to attend the meeting.

The Head of Economic Development invited suggestions from Members for any further items for the meeting on 5 April, 2016. It was suggested that an item be added to the agenda regarding the way schools prepared young people for employment.

AGREED:

That the Work Programme for the Committee be noted and an item be added to the Work Programme for the meeting on 5 April, 2016 regarding the way schools prepared young people for employment.

The meeting closed at 5.55pm.

CHAIRMAN