

Economic Prosperity Sub Committee

Tuesday, 22 March 2022

Present: Councillor M Wilson (Chair)
Councillors L Bones, T Brady, M Hall, Janet Hunter,
B Pickard, J Walker and G Westwater

Apologies: Councillors H Johnson and W Samuel

EP26/21 Appointment of Substitute Members

There were no substitute members reported.

EP27/21 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

EP28/21 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 January 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

EP29/21 Green Skills Sub-group

Consideration was given to a report which provided an update on the work of the Green Skills Sub-group. It was explained that the Sub-group had reviewed the evidence that it had received to date and had formulated its preliminary findings and conclusions. It had also decided to hold a further meeting with training providers prior to the preparation of the final report.

It was suggested that there might be a need to hold an additional meeting of the sub-committee in order to agree the final report prior to its submission to the Overview, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee and then Cabinet.

It was **agreed** that the Chair liaise with Members should a further meeting be required.

EP30/21 The State of the North Tyneside Economy

The sub-committee was presented with data which provided an indication of the state of the economy in North Tyneside. The data included the number of people claiming Universal Credit, the number of employments furloughed, the town centre vacancy rate, the number of job advertisements, levels of earnings and qualifications within the population and new business start-ups. Some of the data elements had been compared with that of other regions across England.

In addition, in response to members requests at the previous meeting, data had also been

provided in relation to the number of sole traders setting up in business, the rates of vacant properties in the retail parks and the numbers of apprenticeships created.

It was suggested that it would be helpful for members to have comparative information on the current state of the economy and how it was prior to the pandemic. Officers agreed to provide this information to a future meeting

Members sought clarification in relation to the spike in February of the 7-day Covid infection rate per 100,000 of the population and were advised that the reasons for this would be checked with the policy team. Consideration was given as to whether the slides in relation to Covid rates were still needed and it was agreed that they would be provided at the next meeting and further consideration be given at that time. It was suggested that the data in relation to employments on furlough could be discontinued as it was no longer applicable due to the ending of the furlough scheme.

Reference was also made to the information provided in relation to the number of new sole trader start-ups in the borough which was down on previous years and lower than had been expected.

It was **agreed** that the update be noted.

EP31/21 Bus Partnership and Bus Services

The sub-committee received a report which provided an update on the work which had been undertaken at regional level to develop an Enhanced Partnership for bus service changes within the borough.

It was explained that in March 2021 the Government had announced that future funding for bus services had been dependent on local authorities and bus operators participating in new arrangements including the development of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with bus operators. Each area had also been required to develop a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The 7 authority areas covered by the North of Tyne and North East Combined Authorities had a single Joint Transport Committee which had approved the North East's BSIP in October 2021. The BSIP had also included a bid for £804M funding to transform bus services in the region.

In November 2021 the Deputy Mayor, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and appropriate Directors had been authorised to approve the Enhanced Partnership plan and scheme for consultation and to agree any amendments to the plan and scheme following the conclusion of the consultation exercise.

Each area was required to share a draft EP plan and scheme with the Department of Transport (DfT) by the end of April 2022. Once the plan and scheme has been considered and finalised with the DfT formal consultation with the public and bus operators would be carried out prior to the EP plan and scheme being approved.

It was noted that bus usage had not returned to pre-Covid levels and the Covid grant support funding for bus operators had been extended to October 2022. Details of the changes being made to bus services in the area by the bus operators from the 27 March 2022 were outlined. It was explained that Nexus and the bus operators had worked

together to ensure that the changes had been timed to accord with the changes that Nexus had made to the secured bus services.

Reference was made to the implications of high fuel costs and whether this was expected to lead to an increase in demand for the use of public transport and more active travel, such as cycling. It was explained that whilst it would be a personal choice to use public transport there were several issues which would need to be addressed to encourage more people out of their cars, including addressing safety concerns, encouraging concessionary pass holders to make more use of their passes and improving the information available to the public about bus and Metro services. It was suggested that the appropriate Cabinet member and a representative of Nexus or the Joint Transport Committee be invited to a future meeting to provide an update on public transport in the borough.

It was suggested that there was a perception that there had been an uncoordinated approach to the provision of bus shelters in the borough. Reference was made to bus shelters being installed in locations that had recently had bus routes that used the bus stop either ended or diverted to another location. It was suggested that Members raise specific examples within their ward with Nexus.

It was **agreed** that (1) the Cabinet Member be invited to a future meeting to provide an update on public transport in the borough; and
(2) a representative of Nexus and/or the Joint Transport Committee be invited to attend a future meeting to provide an update on public transport in the borough and how this was communicated with residents.