

Place Panel

Date: Thursday, 02 March 2023

Time: 16:00

Venue: Flensburg Room

Present: Councillor Trevor Allison, Councillor James Bainbridge, Councillor Ms Jo Ellis-Williams, Councillor Mrs Anne Glendinning, Councillor Mrs Linda Mitchell, Councillor Michael Mitchelson, Councillor Peter Sunter, Councillor Dr Les Tickner

Also Present: Councillor Mrs Bowman, Economy, Enterprise and a Housing Portfolio Holder

Ms Lappin, Chief Executive of Cumbria LEP

Officers: Corporate Director of Economic Development
Head of Regeneration
Policy and Scrutiny Officer

PLP.12/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence submitted.

PLP.13/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

PLP.14/23 PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED - It was agreed that the items in Part A be dealt with in public and the items in Part B should be dealt with in private.

PLP.15/23 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

There were no items which had been subject of call-in.

PLP.16/23 CUMBRIA LEP UPDATE

The Chair gave a warm welcome to Ms Lappin, Chief Executive of the Cumbria LEP.

Ms Lappin gave a presentation to the Panel updating them on the work of Cumbria LEP in enabling economic growth in Cumbria. The presentation covered challenges presented in enabling growth; an overview of the working age population and workforce jobs growth statistics; economic output and productivity in Cumbria; the economic structure and innovation score for Cumbria and projections for Cumberland Council.

Ms Lappin detailed the opportunities for growth and the 'Re-Think' Themes which were the focus of work, she set out the key enablers and reported on the work that would continue regardless of the Local Government reorganisation.

Ms Lapping reported that Cumbria had the slowest growth population and there had been a decline in working age people. Detailed work had been carried out to understand the under 50 existing labour market and how those over 50, who no longer worked, could be encouraged back into work. The change to remote working enabled people to live in Cumbria and work elsewhere and this should be encouraged.

In considering the presentation Members raised the following comments and questions:

- A Member raised issues in the agricultural market, where remote working was not an option, and felt that problems in this area of productivity needed to be addressed.

Ms Lapping responded that the Innovating for Success Programme aimed to help businesses grow and improve productivity, there had been some real innovation in the farming sector. The focus on agriculture was important and the Future of Food was a priority, this looked at investment, environmental consideration, product output and diversification.

- There had been some staffing challenges for businesses in the area following Brexit and additional pressures due to the rise in energy costs, Cumbria needed to attract major investors.

- It had been reported that there was a significant shortage in heat pump technicians, was it possible to introduce courses to help fill the skills gap?

Ms Lapping acknowledged the skills shortage and reported that there had been courses on offer which had been cancelled due to the lack of interest.

- There was some discussion regarding the statistics presented and Ms Lapping clarified that the statistics reflected everyone in the working age population. She highlighted the excellent work that was undertaken by the Observatory and the work they undertook nationally.

The Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder placed on record her thanks for the excellent work that the Observatory undertook, noting how valuable the monthly information which was provided to Members was.

- A Member felt strongly that there should be a focus on the retention and attraction of people to the area, this should include good social housing.

Ms Lapping agreed that the retention and attraction of people was vital, she outlined the promotional strategy that aimed to change the perception of the location of Cumbria. The strategy showed Cumbria as the centre of Britain with excellent connections. The Futures Campaign would be relaunched for young people at schools, colleges, and universities and the Your Future campaign also engaged with people to encourage them to the area. Ms Lapping agreed that available and affordable housing really mattered and the CLEP had provided a response to a Government Consultation on the matter. She agreed to share the response with the Panel.

- A Member asked if people should return to offices to support the local economy.

Ms Lappin acknowledged that working from home had impacted the economy, however, the change to working also provided opportunities for people to live in Cumbria and work elsewhere. Evidence showed that pre pandemic online shopping accounted for 16% of purchases, this figure had reset to 20%.

RESOLVED - The Panel considered the presentation and noted the work undertaken by the Cumbria LEP.

PLP.17/23 CARLISLE RURAL STRATEGY

The Regeneration Manager submitted an update on the Carlisle Rural Strategy.
(ED.06/23)

The Regeneration Manager reported that the Strategy had been developed following a workshop with Members and set out six aims designed to deliver economic, demographic and environmental sustainability rural communities and businesses of Carlisle.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- Would new technology for farming be included in the Strategy?

The Regeneration Manager acknowledged that new technology for farming was essential.

- How would services be made more accessible to rural communities, especially given the current cost of living and infrastructure issues.

The Regeneration Manager informed the Panel that the Strategy aimed to strengthen and enhance rural hubs. A rural hub would provide all the services required so individuals would not have to travel longer distances to a larger town or city to access essential services.

- A Member highlighted the challenges facing rural communities including transport and lack of good broadband. He noted that rural communities needed technology to develop businesses and services.

The Regeneration Manager agreed that digital connectivity was an issue and good connectivity would be a solution to some of the other issues rural areas faced.

The Corporate Director of Economic Development reminded the Panel that digital connectivity had been an issue identified in the Borderlands Project. The project had issued vouchers to help people improve their connectivity, however, this was in 2018/19 and technology had changed significantly in that time. The digital connectivity project would need to be revisited and updated.

- A lot of partnership work was undertaken with Eden District Council, how would the Local Government Reorganisation affect the projects?

The Corporate Director of Economic Development responded that there was a statutory duty to co-operate with other authorities and cross border partnership would continue.

- What would happen to the Strategy next?

The Corporate Director of Economic Development explained that the staff structure was different at the new authority and the Strategy would go to the new Policy Development Team to inform decision making and policy development.

RESOLVED - That the Carlisle Rural Strategy be welcomed.

PLP.18/23 OVERVIEW REPORT AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer submitted the Draft Place Panel section of the Scrutiny Annual 2022/23 report. (OS.07/23)

A Member asked that the information on the Section 106 monies, that had previously been requested, be circulated to Members as a priority before Vesting Day.

The Panel noted that this was the last Scrutiny Panel to be held by Carlisle City Council and thanked the Scrutiny and Policy Officer and Democratic Services for their support.

RESOLVED - That the Panel considered the report and commented the attached section of the annual report.

The Meeting ended at: 17:28