

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 January 2015

PRESENT – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Carson, Cossins, Culley, Harman and Lawton. (6)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baldwin, Donohue, L Hughes, EA Richmond and Wright. (5)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Lee, Macnab and Newall. (3)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Ada Burns, Chief Executive, Dave Winstanley, Assistant Director, Transport and Capital Projects, Steve Petch, Place Strategy Manager and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were not declarations of interested reported at the meeting.

P38. TEES VALLEY UNLIMITED GOVERNANCE – Submitted – A report (previously circulated) of the Chief Executive and Director of Economic Growth which had been considered by Cabinet, at its meeting held on 2 December 2014, detailing arrangements for the establishment of a Combined Authority for the Tees Valley in order for this Council to achieve its economic goals and to receive greater devolved powers. A PowerPoint presentation accompanied the report.

The submitted report detailed what the Combined Authority would do; its membership; its relationship with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP); the scrutiny arrangements and how they would be funded; timescales following a recent discussion with Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG); plans for consulting on the Combined Authority; and the decision-making process going forward.

The PowerPoint presentation outlined the background to a Combined Authority, where the Council is now and the function and advantages of Tees Valley Unlimited.

Discussion ensued on the role and powers of a Combined Authority which included being able to compete with regions in the United Kingdom and internationally, effective, timely, decision-making and enabling a new era of joint working, building on our strengths and qualities.

Members noted that it was envisaged that a Combined Authority for the Tees Valley would help to achieve the Council's economic goals and receive greater devolved powers.

Scrutiny Committee was pleased to learn that our role as a Council would be undiminished, we would continue to agree Darlington's economic strategy and feed into the Tees Valley investment plans and strategies. Members also noted that there would be minimal impact on resources.

Particular reference was made to the membership of the Combined Authority and discussions ensued on the role that Scrutiny would play. Members were keen to determine the financial implications to this Council and sought assurances that no additional allowances would accrue.

The consultation process and timetable for establishment of the Tees Valley Combined Authority were also outlined.

Concerns were expressed regarding reduced Central Government Funding and European Funding being allocated to more deprived areas other than Darlington. Scrutiny was pleased to note that Tees Valley funding was allocated on the basis of investment plans with each Tees Valley Authority submitting plans for employment and economy growth. It was also stressed that a satisfactory transport infrastructure was vital to the Tees Valley to ensure a diversified economic growth and enable a variety of employment opportunities to be accessed by Tees Valley residents and that rural areas were provided with improved broadband facilities.

References were also made to business rates within the Enterprise Zone, ownership of land within a Combined Authority and the success of the Tees Valley Health Scrutiny arrangements.

Members also suggested that Scrutiny should have an observer on the Local Enterprise Partnership to attend combined meetings, raised concerns over Darlington's clerking of Scrutiny due to current resources and questioned the need for an Opposition Scrutiny Chair due to the complexities of Tees Valley politics.

Scrutiny was informed that speedier decision making would support more effective application of funds. It was stressed that £58m had been secured for Tees Valley bus improvements and that Arriva would be attending a future meeting of Scrutiny to highlight what could be achieved by effective partnership working.

Members pointed out that European countries attracted more funding due to the Combined Authority model of working and welcomed this opportunity.

RESOLVED – (a) That this Scrutiny Committee endorses all the arrangements as set out for Combined Authorities.

(b) That it be recommended that this Council review its capacity to support a Scrutiny Panel of the Combined Authority.

(c) That it be recommended that two Members from Place Scrutiny Committee and one Member from Efficiency and Resources Scrutiny Committee be allocated a place on the Scrutiny Panel.

(d) That this Scrutiny Committee endorses the Local Enterprise Partnership connection to the Combined Authority.

(e) That this Scrutiny Committee raises concerns on the requirement of the Chair of the Panel being from the Opposition Party due to the diverse politics across the Tees Valley.

(f) That it be recommended that Scrutiny has an observer on the Local Enterprise Partnership to attend combined meetings.

(g) That reassurances be given that the costs of a Combined Authority although minimal are off-set by the advantages that accrue.

(h) That this Scrutiny Committee receives updates in relation to an Integrated Transport Authority.