

**Minutes of the Economic Development Committee
21 September 2021**

Present:

Councillor C.F. Barnard (Chairman)
Councillor V.J. Leighton (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

A. Brar	T. Fidler	L. E. Nichols
S. Buttar	M. Gibson	

375/21 Apologies and Substitutes

Councillors John Doran and Helen Harvey gave apologies for absence.

376/21 Disclosures of interests

There were no disclosures of interest.

377/21 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2021 were agreed.

378/21 Questions from members of the Public

None.

379/21 Ward Issues

None.

380/21 Revenue Monitoring Report (Qtr. 1 April - June)

The report was presented to the committee.

There were variances to various budgets, particularly with regard to rental income, principally because of Covid-19. The council was receiving government support, although it was not certain when this arrangement would end.

Written clarification on the budget line for Staines Town Centre Management would be provided after the meeting.

Councillors were invited to provide feedback on the presentation of future reports outside the meeting.

The report was **NOTED**.

381/21 Capital Monitoring Report (Qtr. 1 April - June)

The report was presented to the committee.

An error had been identified in the appendix, however it did not impact on the reported variance. Expenditure on the Elmsleigh Centre had been approved in a previous budget, prior to the implementation of the committee system. Written confirmation of the date of this approval would be provided after the meeting.

Councillors were invited to provide feedback on the presentation of future reports outside the meeting.

The report was **NOTED**.

382/21 SLR Southern Light Railway

The committee received a presentation on the proposed southern light railway.

It was planned for the scheme to be funded by private investment. This investment was contingent on the project being able to source initial investment to fund the preparation of a full business case. It was hoped that a high-level business case, which would include financial projections, would be available by the end of the year.

The bid was being managed by a consortium whose membership included Spelthorne Borough Council (SBC) and various specialist organisations. Representation from other organisations would be important to the project. SBC was intending to act as a facilitator to the project.

There was discussion about the government's specification around their requirements for southern access to Heathrow, which was still currently awaited. The consortium was keen to sell the benefits of a light railway, instead of a heavy railway which would have a greater environmental impact and not be able to operate services at the same frequency. The light railway option would also more easily enable the creation of intermediate stops that would benefit the residents of Stanwell in particular. Staines would also benefit, as it would then have a direct connection to London Heathrow Airport.

Work had been carried out to compare the proposed light railway to other similar successful schemes around the world. It was also hoped that the London Transport travel zones could be extended to Staines (so the borough would sit within zone 6), which would cut the cost of travel to the area and promote economic development and modal shift among commuters and those travelling to the airport.

Councillor engagement, particularly in the newly adopted committee system, needed careful consideration. There was the possibility of recommissioning a previous Heathrow expansion working group to fulfil this need.

The presentation was **NOTED**.

383/21 Spelthorne Youth Hub

The report was presented to the committee.

A2Dominion had been awarded the contract to operate the hub due to their expertise in this area and their work with disadvantaged and hard to reach families such as those with SEN, with disabilities and young carers. A2Dominion was contracted to help at least 189 families by the end of the project.

It was planned to offer services in local outreach locations, with a main recruitment office in Staines town centre (location yet to be determined). The new service was also going to be promoted via social media and an app that was being developed.

384/21 Additional Restrictions Grant Monitoring

The report was presented to the committee.

The economic development and business rates teams had worked hard to process grant applications, of which around 400 had been received. The two teams had also been carrying out spot checks on the businesses concerned, to ensure that they were making legitimate use of the grant funding. Government funding was available until March 2022, after which there was uncertainty over whether it would continue.

It was suggested that the previous task group be reconvened. The notes of previous task group meetings would be circulated as soon as possible.

The report was **NOTED**.

385/21 Business Rates Retention

The report was presented to the committee.

SBC had retained over £1m in business rates, which was ringfenced for economic development activities. There was no time limit on when the money had to be spent, which meant that projects could be closely assessed before any funding was committed. It was hoped that some of the money could be used to help businesses during their recovery from Covid-19.

The report was **NOTED**.

386/21 Local Economic Assessment

The report was presented to the committee.

SBC was sometimes not comparable with other Surrey districts. It had however generally performed better than had been expected.

Various statistics were reviewed. The number of people qualified to at least NVQ4 had increased, but this trend was identified across other boroughs. Pay in the borough was often high, but many posts were occupied by residents from other areas. The local job market was also heavily dependent on London Heathrow Airport, which had seen a significant numbers of redundancies due to Covid-19. The ending of the government's furlough scheme was expected to be a key point in the borough's economic recovery.

[Councillor Nichols left the meeting.]

A local economic strategy was due to be developed in the near future. It would focus on areas where the council could have the greatest possible impact.

The report was **NOTED**.

387/21 Monitoring of Economic Development element of Corporate Recovery Plan

The report was presented to the committee.

The committee reviewed the areas of the corporate plan that were within its remit in particular:

- ER2 – provision/signposting of advice and support – the council had performed strongly in this area.
- ER8 – pop up shop for entrepreneurs – this was planned for when restrictions had eased.
- ER9 – business incubator – this had now opened and businesses had started occupying the site. Planned capacity was 80% after 12 months of operation.
- ER11 – shop local – the council's procurement standing orders had changed to promote greater use of local businesses and suppliers.

The report was **NOTED**.

388/21 Forward Plan

The following was **AGREED**:

- Add the draft economic assessment to the agenda for the 16 November 2021 committee.
- Move the draft economic strategy to the 25 January 2021 committee.

389/21 Urgent business

None.