

## **North East Combined Authority**

### **Economic Development and Regeneration Advisory Board**

1 October 2015

Meeting held: Committee Room, Civic Centre, Sunderland, Burdon Road, SR2 7SN

#### **Present:**

Councillor: Watson (Chair)

Councillors: Anglin, McCarty, Foster and Twist

Co-opted Members: G Hall, B Farhat, S Glendinning and J Walker

#### **9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Foy, Hepple, Malcolm and Pickard and Mr Hanson.

#### **10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **11 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 July 2015 subject to the deletion of Councillor N Foster from the list of attendees were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **Matters Arising**

##### **Regional Investment Plan**

(Minute 7 refers)

The Chair asked that information on the availability of land and the principles used for land allocation for housing and business should be provided as part of information on projects.

#### **12 EDRAB MEMBERSHIP PROPOSALS - UPDATE**

Submitted: A report of the Thematic Lead for Economic Development and Regeneration (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Members considered the report which provided an update on the work to develop arrangements to enhance the work of the Advisory Board with expertise of additional private sector business representatives.

As an update, it was noted that Councillor Hepple had expressed an interest in participating in the work of the sub-group to develop ways of engaging with the business leaders; Councillor Hepple would be invited join future meetings of the sub-group.

During the ensuing discussion, Members commented on the importance of securing a specialist business perspective whilst being mindful about the busy diary of business leaders, the importance of being inclusive and the importance of utilising the existing business engagement services. Members generally supported the proposals set out in the report.

**RESOLVED** – That the report and Members’ comments be noted.

### 13 **DEVELOPMENT OF NECA INVESTMENT GATEWAY FUNCTION AND SECTOR PROPOSITIONS**

Submitted: A report of the Thematic Lead for Economic Development and Regeneration (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Members considered the report which provided an update on progress that had been made to establish an enhanced regional Inward Investment Gateway function and develop a series of sector-based propositions to be used to attract inward investment into the North East Combined Authority (NECA) area.

Amongst the matters discussed during the ensuing discussion were the following:

- Skills, including demand, challenges and the long-term strategy. Skills were articulated as a theme in the Strategic Economic Plan;
- The benefits of an independent and dispassionate assessment of the proposed sectors by the consultant team.
- The potentially wide use of data on sector propositions, which was expected from the consultant team; and possible limitations due to confidentiality or appropriateness.
- The importance of standardisation of statistics to ensure common messages.
- The competitive nature of the national and global market and the importance of emphasising the strengths of the region, including the region’s offer of quality of life.
- The importance of focusing on the creation of good and well-paid jobs rather than prioritising the region as a cheap area for business. It was noted that this aspiration had been imbedded in the proposals.
- The speed of progress and the importance of avoiding delays to ensure the region was ahead of the game, competing favourably with other areas. It was noted that the establishment of the Invest North East England Team would provide additional capacity and help to speed up processes whilst enabling a

proactive rather than reactive approach to dealing with enquiries for investment.

- The importance of developing a good understanding of the basics, including how decisions were made by investors and the differences in needs. This understanding was necessary in order to develop an offer that provided all the necessary elements sought by investors.
- The importance of looking at the offer for investors from the customer's perspective, who did not always understand the differences between different parts of the region and who wanted an easy and accessible infrastructure.
- The importance of understanding the business plan, including financial aspects and their impact, including what progress could be achieved with additional resources.
- The capacity within the existing budget envelope and general constraints of the public sector, including as a result of the austerity measures.
- The importance of working to explore various opportunities for additional funding.
- The importance of having more information on and influence over the European Union funding opportunities.
- The importance of avoiding duplication of work that had already been undertaken thus continuing to ensure value for money.
- The possibility of a devolution deal for the region and the associated review of functions, capacity and budget to ensure the Combined Authority was fit for delivery of its functions, particularly in the light of the impact of austerity measures on the capacity of the local authorities to provide shared resources.
- The opportunity for the comments of the Advisory Board to be fed into the budget setting process.
- The importance of reflecting the long-term opportunities for attracting investment in the budget setting process.
- The importance of Members being kept informed about progress.

Information was provided verbally to Members on the wide range of investment enquiries received. It was noted that timescales for securing investment depended on the type of business and its needs.

Information was also provided on co-operative working with partners, including the UK Trade & Investment (UKTI), the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and local authorities, on enquiries for investment. Anonymised information would be provided to Members on the successful outcomes of this work.

**RESOLVED** – That the report and Members' comments be noted.

## 14 REGIONAL INVESTMENT PLAN

Submitted: A report of the Thematic Lead for Economic Development and Regeneration (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Members considered the report which provided an update on progress to develop a Regional Investment Plan for the NECA area. It was noted that the schedule of projects relating to economic assets and employment sites, and also information on the current set of opportunities for funding, would be made available to Members as soon as possible.

Amongst the matters raised by Members during the ensuing discussion were the following:

- The importance of Members' input in the work on the proposed projects at early stages, including on sub-regional level. And also the importance of input from the business sector.
- The importance of Members being kept up-to-date on progress.
- Information was needed to aid the understanding on how choices were made, including which criteria was applied. Consideration should be given to developing a package of set principles and criteria.
- The importance of a strategic, regional approach to ensure the best use of sites, a balanced programme of projects and a positive impact on the region as a whole.
- The importance of being able to demonstrate the benefits of the projects.

**RESOLVED** – That the report and Members' comments be noted.

## 15 DEVOLUTION UPDATE

Submitted: A report of the Head of Paid Service (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Members considered the report which provided information on progress of the negotiations with the government on the devolution of funding, powers and responsibilities to the Combined Authority. Members noted a verbal update from the Head of Paid Service on progress since the September submission of the Authority's proposals for devolution.

The ensuing discussion included matters such as:

- the speed and nature of the discussions with the government and the tight timescales involved;
- the importance of a devolution deal and the value of a reputation for the region;
- the importance of keeping stakeholders informed about progress;

- the importance of discussions with all affected parties as soon as possible;
- the next stages of the process once a devolution deal was made and announced; and
- the indicative timescales involved.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

16 **DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

18 December 2015 at 10am at Durham County Hall.