



Report to the Joint Executive Committee

Meeting Date – 9th September 2024

Key Decision – No

Public/Private – Public

Portfolio – Cllr Mark Fryer, Leader Cumberland Council and Cllr Jonathan Brook, Leader Westmorland and Furness Council

Directorate – Place, Sustainable Growth and Transport

Lead Officer – Isobel Brown, Programme Director, Enterprising Cumbria

Title – Enterprising Cumbria and Economic Strategy Update

Brief Summary:

This report provides an update on developing an Economic Strategy since the updates provided at both the 30th July 2024 and 28th March 2024 meetings when the Transition Visual Overview was presented. The report recommends that the Joint Executive Committee (JEC) notes the paper and comments on the work in progress.

Recommendations:

For the reasons set out in this report, the Joint Executive Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the decisions by the Appointments Panel to appoint a Chair and Board members for the Cumbria Economic Growth Board
2. Note the work in progress to develop the Cumbria Economic Strategy
3. Comment on the alignment with both Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Economic Strategies
4. Note the dependencies on the developing devolution proposals
5. Note the timescale for bringing the strategy for approval by end November 2024

1. Background

- 1.1 In line with Government policy, the functions and responsibilities previously delivered by Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership (CLEP), in respect of strategic economic delivery, were transferred to local authorities nationally on 1st April 2024. In Cumbria, Cumberland Council is performing the role of Delivery Body and Accountable Body and Westmorland and Furness Council is providing the Assurance role.
- 1.2 To support the policy change, the previous Government published technical guidance in August 2023 and on 19th December 2023, published the final piece of guidance on the core functions of business representation and local economic planning. In the absence of any further published guidance from the new Labour administration, we are continuing to work to expected deliverables.
- 1.3 The previous Government laid out its expectation that an Economic Growth Board would be created for a functional economic area (FEA) geography (minimum 500,000 population) made up of local business leaders and representative bodies to create an economic strategy for the area. It also expected areas to publish their (existing, new, or updated) strategy within six months of receiving funding.
- 1.4 As agreed by the JEC at the meeting on 30th July 2024, the JEC will be responsible for approving the Cumbria Economic Strategy.

Cumbria Economic Growth Board

- 1.5 At the meeting held on 12th August 2024, the Appointments Panel approved the appointment of the Chair of the Growth Board along with its chosen Board members. The Growth Board composition will be sixteen Board members plus the Chair, representing a diverse range of business sectors, business size and geographical spread, whilst ensuring diversity and equality of representation. The inaugural Board meeting is scheduled for 16th September 2024.
- 1.6 The Chair of the Board, David Beeby, will report into the Joint Executive Committee (JEC) going forward.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 Proposals presented at the previous JEC meeting outlined a series of steps to bring forward an Economic Strategy for approval at the November 2024 meeting. The aim is still to bring a strategy for approval at this date but the vision, ambition and priorities being developed within the strategy have been paused at present until we respond to the Labour Government's request for devolution proposals and completion of an Expression of Interest (EoI) by the end of September 2024, as these may impact upon the developing themes.
- 2.2 Whilst development of these proposals is ongoing, multiple stakeholder engagement sessions have already been held to bring together key themes for consideration with our aim being to:

- Set out a vision and tell the story about the strengths/opportunities and weaknesses/challenges of the Cumbria economy that is evidence based
- Identify 4 or 5 top priorities or themes for Cumbria for how we want to grow the economy and tackle our challenges – these could be our strategic “missions” given Government’s mission led approach and will align clearly to our need to develop a Local Growth Plan as part of the emerging devolution proposals
- Articulate our ask and the key things we need through devolution to help in influencing the Devolution Bill and the funding allocations
- Explain the added value of devolution and the extra things that we could do through working collaboratively together across Cumbria that we would otherwise not be able to do alone
- Create a narrative, supported by the Cumbria Growth Board, MPs and key stakeholders, that enables Cumbria to speak with “one voice” on the strategic issues that matter to us

Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Economic Strategies

- 2.3 Both authorities are also developing their own council-wide economic strategies, and it is therefore recognised that there is likely to be interdependencies and overlap, however the three strategies will be distinct due to the different responsibilities of the Economic Growth Board, and the sovereign responsibilities for both authorities. The membership of the Strategy Writing Group (discussed at previous JEC meetings) will ensure that there is strategic alignment and support the priorities of both authorities and the wider business community
- 2.4 On conclusion of a procurement exercise to appoint external help, Cumberland Council is currently in a contract standstill ahead of commencing work to develop its strategy and similarly, Westmorland and Furness are about to begin a concurrent process for development of their strategy.
- 2.5 Government’s direction was that Enterprising Cumbria’s strategy (as the successor to the CLEP) should be informed by and, where possible, be developed alongside other local plans that have the ability to contribute to economic growth (such as Local Visitor Economy Partnerships, local transport plans, and those plans addressing local planning and skills provision).
- 2.6 Timescales for note:
- 3rd September – review of outline proposals to support the Ministerial meeting and assist with decision making around completion of the EoI
 - 5th September – meeting with Jim McMahon, Minister of State (Housing, Communities and Local Government)

- 16th September – inaugural Cumbria Growth Board meeting
- 22nd – 25th September Labour Party Conference
- 30th September submission of Expression of Interest for entering into devolution discussions
- October and November – development of Economic Strategy
- November – Economic Summit across business community to test strategic intent
- 22nd November – Joint Executive Committee for approval of Economic Strategy

3. Alternative options considered

N/A

4. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

The JEC is asked to:

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Contribution to the Council's Plan Priorities –

The activities set out in this report will help support sustainable, inclusive, economic growth across Cumbria. The proposed strategies create the opportunity for the two Councils to continue to work together to develop a shared approach to supporting economic growth across Cumbria and in turn contributing to the visions and ambitions set out in the two Council Plans.

Relevant Risks and explain how risks can be mitigated –

Failure to meet the Government's instruction to publish an Economic Strategy could result in reputational damage and be regarded as non compliance with direction of travel but given our stated intention to bring such a strategy to JEC for approval would mitigate this risk.

Consultation / Engagement –

Business consultation will be conducted through the Cumbria Economic Growth Board and through a wider audience at the Economic Summit in November.

Legal –

While the recommendations do not contain any direct legal implications at this stage, Joint Executive Committee may in the future be asked to take associated decisions that will have

legal implications and these will be fully explored with both S151 Officers and Chief Legal Officers.

Finance –

None at this stage.

Information Governance –

There are no direct Information Governance Implications arising out of this report.

Impact Assessments –

Not a key decision

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Background papers:

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government Act 1972 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

None

Appendices attached to report:

None