

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Monday 26 July 2010 AT 6.00 P.M.

Panel Members Present Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)
Councillor D. Anson (Vice-Chair)
Councillor I. Azam
Councillor D. Coughlan
Councillor S. Coughlan
Councillor L. Harrison
Councillor J. Rochelle

Officers Present Tim Johnson – Executive Director (Regeneration)
Mark Lavender – Head of Strategic Regeneration
Kevin Kendall – Head of Property Services
Dan Mortiboys – Service Accounting and Financial Reporting Manager
Andrew Rumble – Partnership of Walsall Enterprise Manager
Danny Edwards – Enterprise and Business Support (Team Leader)
Jane Kaur-Gill – Economic Wellbeing (Team Leader)
Craig Goodall – Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

07/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors M. Ahmed and B. Tweddle.

08/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor R. Rochelle substituted for Councillor B. Tweddle.

09/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

10/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2010, copies having been previously circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

11/10 ASSET MANAGEMENT 2010

The Panel were provided with an overview of the process being undertaken with regard to reviewing the Councils assets and the potential to make

financial savings through managing them more efficiently.

The Head of Property Services gave a presentation (annexed) on phase one of the Asset Management 2010 project. He highlighted the approach undertaken, progress to date, baseline analysis, potential future options and the phase two project plan.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- The project was a part of the working smarter programme.
- The project had been funded by the Regional Development and Efficiency Partnership. PricewaterhouseCoopers had worked with Property Services Officers to develop a process for evaluating property related assets.
- Council services had been challenged on their needs for office space.
- A database of property assets had been developed as a part of the project. The Council had 900 property assets. This included office space, vacant buildings, schools and parks. Of the 900 assets 600 were buildings. This required a revenue spend of £30m per year £20m of which was in schools.
- The Council spent £11m on its corporate assets each year. £4.6m was on office space, £1.1m on leisure centres and £1.9m on libraries.
- Investigations had shown that 51% of the council's property assets were not in good condition. The majority were also energy inefficient.
- It was thought that 23% of the Councils office estate was surplus to requirements. However, to remove this space would require the development of new ways of working for office based staff. This included options such as hot desking, remote working and increased home working.
- Opportunities to share accommodation with public sector partners was being pursued.
- The project had identified three key options for the future of the Councils assets. The radical option of reducing the use of a significant amount of assets was being investigated. Draft proposals were expected in September 2010.
- Asset transfer to community groups was an option included in the project.

The Panel requested that the draft proposals regarding asset management were reported to them in September before Cabinet to allow them to feed their views into the process before any decisions on the next stage of the project were made.

RESOLVED:

That the outcome of the asset management options appraisal be reported to the 23 September 2010 meeting of the Panel to allow Members to feed their comments into Cabinet before any further decisions with the programme are undertaken.

12/10 2009/10 FINAL BUDGET POSITION PRE-AUDIT

Members were informed of the outturn revenue and capital position for the year ended 2009/10, subject to external audit, for services within the Panels remit.

The Service Accounting and Finance Reporting Manager informed Members that there had been a revenue underspend of £163,000 and a capital underspend of £2,631,000.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- The overspend in Planning Services was caused by increased legal fees and delays in negotiating redundancies.
- The Regeneration Directorate had contributed £308,182 to the Building Schools for the Future project which had now been cancelled by the Government. The total cost of the project was approximately £1.9m the majority of this funding had been received from schools.

13/10 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Members were informed of the work being undertaken by the Council and its partners to support economic development in the borough.

The Head of Strategic Regeneration co-ordinated a presentation (annexed) on Walsall Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) programme. He was supported by the Partnership of Walsall Enterprise Manager who provided an overview of the WNF programme; followed by the Enterprise and Business Support (Team Leader) who reported on the Enterprise programme and the Economic Wellbeing (Team Leader) who explained the worklessness programme. The presentation was supported by two plans setting out the enterprise and worklessness programmes (annexed).

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- The Audit Commission had recognised Walsall's WNF programme as an exemplar project.
- £840,000 had to be saved from the programme due to Government reductions in grants. This money was saved through cancelling non-confirmed activity and through negotiating with individual projects to make savings from their work.
- Extra resources were used to target hard to reach groups such as black and minority ethnic groups, disabled and homeless people. Another example was the sending of the mobile information unit that provided employment, skills and training advice to the probation centre to engage with residents on site.
- The Chair was concerned about young people leaving school without the skills for work. It was explained that a project was underway teaching entrepreneurial skills in schools. In additions to this there were schemes underway to help young people gain work experience to improve their

employment prospects. As well as this competitions were offered that would offer the winners the opportunity to deliver a piece of work in a professional environment. Activity was also taking place to target children who were excluded from school. The Future Jobs Fund was also being used and was providing 415 work placements in the last year.

- Concern was expressed that the local private sector was not suitably developed to pick up the expected numbers of surplus local government employees that were expected to appear as Council reduced their budgets.

The Head of Strategic Regeneration circulated a briefing note on regional economic development changes and the establishment of Local Economic Partnerships. He explained that Advantage West Midlands had been closed by the Government but this was not going to impact on the Gigaport development.

14/10 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11

The Panel considered their work programme and the latest version of Cabinets Forward Plan of key decisions.

RESOLVED:

That the following items be considered at the next meeting of the Panel:

- 1. Asset Management;**
- 2. Local Economic Assessment, and;**
- 3. Enforcement and Private Landlords.**

15/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted at 23 September 2010.

The meeting closed at 7.20 p.m.

Signed:

Date: