

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 28 October 2010 at 6.00 p.m. in a Conference Room at the Council House

Panel Members Present: Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)
Councillor D. Anson (Vice-Chair)
Councillor M. Ahmed
Councillor I. Azam
Councillor D. Coughlan
Councillor S. Coughlan
Councillor E. Hughes
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor B. Tweddle

Portfolio Holder Present: Councillor A. Andrew - Regeneration

Officers Present: Mike Tichford – Assistant Director (Regeneration)
Paul Rowlands – Chief Executive, New Deal for Communities
David Elsworthy – Head of Planning and Building Control
Louise Biffin – Finance and Administration Manager, New Deal for Communities
Craig Goodall – Scrutiny Officer

28/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor L. Harrison.

29/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor E. Hughes substituted for Councillor L. Harrison

30/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

31/10 MINUTES

Councillor Ian Shires noted that he had not been contacted regarding his particular housing issue raised at the last meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2010, copies having been previously circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record. (annexed)

32/10 RESPONDING TO THE RECESSION

The Panel considered the approach taken to tackle the recession and plan for economic recovery.

The Assistant Director (Regeneration) gave a presentation on responding to the challenges of the economic downturn (annexed). He noted that this issue was a corporate risk.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- Business start ups and new business survival was low in Walsall. This often meant there were not enough jobs for local people. There were a number of reasons for this including:
 - Low skills base and low aspirations of local people;
 - Poor development land;
 - Poor building stock.
- Opportunities for local people were an important consideration when granting permission for development and regeneration. For example, activity has taken place to preparing local unemployed people for job opportunities when large scale employment opportunities could be anticipated and 'meet the buyer' events where local companies can pitch for business with national developers.
- Local businesses could expect advice and guidance from the local authority. Financial assistance was not available.
- The importance of providing office and other work space to small businesses was discussed and recognised as important by Members.
- The possibility of building links internationally, as Birmingham had done recently with Abu Dhabi, was discussed.
- It was felt that the borough could do more to capitalise on the opportunities created by being located near Birmingham.

RESOLVED:

That Members be provided with data informing them of the numbers of local people who have been assisted into employment through targeted intervention programmes.

33/10 NEW DEAL FOR COMMUNITIES – EXIT STRATEGY

The Panel considered the exit strategy developed to sustain the benefits of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) scheme once government funding ends on 31 March 2011.

The Chief Executive of the NDC explained the exit and sustainability plan, the financial carry forward of reserves and provided a short summary of the performance, outcomes and successes from the programme. The Finance and Administration Manager explained the complex VAT situation that faced the NDC and consequently reduced the level of reserves that could be carried forward.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- The Council, as accountable body, unsuccessfully challenged a Her Majesties Revenues and Customs (HMRC) ruling of not allowing NDC VAT to be claimed by the Council. As accountable body for NDC grant, the Council was also responsible for any decision on whether to pursue the matter to Tribunal, should the challenge to HMRC ruling be unsuccessful. New Horizons Community Enterprise (the successor company to NDC) have also tried to mitigate the VAT issue by registering for VAT themselves following advice from an independent charity VAT advisor, which has been unsuccessful. NHCE have challenged HMRC and also sought specialist tax counsel advice who had advised that the rewards of a successful tribunal for the charity, were small.
- The succession strategy was being reviewed with the Department for Communities and Local Government in early November. No problems were anticipated following a positive evaluation report.
- The recent problems with regards to financial carry forwards could not have been anticipated at the start of the programme. Rules limiting New Deal organisations to a £500,000 carry forward of reserves were introduced in 2008 after the NDC had already made plans to carry forward over £1m.
- NDC staff being made redundant due to the end of the programme were guaranteed an interview if they applied for the new positions at the successor organisation.
- A number of problems at the Stan Ball Centre were discussed.

RESOLVED:

THAT:

1. the report be noted;

and;

2. the Chief Executive of New Deal for Communities provide feedback to Councillor Bill Twedde on issues arising at the Stan Ball Centre.

34/10 PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

Members were advised of the available resources and progress undertaken by the planning enforcement function and how the work interacts with the joint local enforcement board.

The Head of Planning and Building Control explained the importance of planning enforcement within the role of development management, the positive effects of a recent restructure and the role of newly expanded Joint Enforcement Board which engaged with the new neighbourhood management arrangements. He also explained that the Planning Committee monitored ongoing enforcement action quarterly.

RESOVLED:

That the report be noted.

35/10 ASSET MANAGEMENT 2010

RESOLVED:

That the item on Asset Management 2010 be deferred to a future meeting.

36/10 REGENERATION DIRECTORATE – SERVICE REDESIGN

The Panel were given an overview of the service redesign process taking place in the Regeneration Directorate.

The Assistant Director (Regeneration) explained that the majority of services in the Regeneration Directorate were currently beginning the process of service redesign. This involved defining the purpose of the service and identifying customer needs. He highlighted the 'Strategic Regeneration' and 'Development and Delivery' teams as key services taking part in the process.

RESOLVED:

That 'Regeneration Directorate – Service Redesign' be considered at the Panel meeting on 11 January 2011.

37/10 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11 AND FORWARD PLAN

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

RESOLVED:

THAT:

1. Forward Plan Key Decision 77/10 'Adoption of Black Country Core Strategy' be considered at the Panel meeting on 6 December 2010;

and;

2. an item on community asset transfer be considered at the Panel meeting on 11 January 2011.

38/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 6 December 2010.

The meeting closed at 8.00 p.m.

Signed:

Date: