

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Monday, 23 April, 2012 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

Panel Members Present: Councillor I. Shires (Chair)
Councillor I. Azam (Vice-Chair)
Councillor D. Anson
Councillor S. Fitzpatrick
Councillor D. James
Councillor L. Jeavons

Portfolio Holders Present Councillor A. Andrew - Regeneration

Officers Present: Tim Johnson - Executive Director (Regeneration)
Mike Tichford - Assistant Director (Regeneration)
Mike Lavender - Head of Strategic Regeneration
Deb Slade - Creative and Development Team Manager
Jane Kaur Gill - Economic Development Team Leader
Zoe Slattery - Think Walsall Team Leader
Dan Slee - Senior Press and Publicity Officer
Daniel Carins - Regeneration Officer
Craig Goodall - Scrutiny Officer

160/12 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R. Carpenter.

161/12 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

162/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

163/12 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 March, 2012, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

164/12 CREATING AND SUSTAINING BUSINESS IN WALSALL

Members considered a range of issues that affected the Panel's key workstream of creating and sustaining business in Walsall.

(a) Final report of the Business Start Up and Business Sustainability Working Groups

The Panel considered the joint final report and recommendations of the two Working Groups who had been considering issues around creating and sustaining business in Walsall.

The report and its recommendations were introduced. The Chairman made a number of amendments which were agreed by the Panel. Namely: -

- To amend the vision to include “Walsall should aspire to achieve business density rates in line with regional and national averages”;
- The report should note that manufacturing in Walsall is succeeding, albeit with a reduced workforce due to technological improvements. A comment should also be added reflecting the supply chain opportunities that will be created by local companies supplying Jaguar Land Rover at the i54 site. This should be noted under Priority 1.

The Panel felt that further work in this area should continue in the future, in particular, further work was required to strengthen the link between education in the workplace. It was felt this area was key to the Borough’s long term prosperity. It was noted that ongoing work with Walsall Works and the Education Business Partnership should contribute to improving this issue.

RESOLVED:

That:-

- (1) the conclusions and recommendations, as amended, of the “Creating and Sustaining Business in Walsall” report be approved and forwarded to Cabinet for consideration;**
 - (2) the Panel consider a report in six months time detailing Cabinet’s response to the reports recommendations;**
- and;**
- (3) education and the workforce should be a topic for further investigation in 2012/13.**

(b) Support for creative and digital industries in Walsall

The Panel considered the outcome of an informal meeting with businesses in the creative and digital industries.

The Regeneration Officer reported the feedback from the meeting which included:-

- A lack of suitable premises and environment and it was difficult to attract creative businesses to the area. This also made it difficult to attract staff as they preferred to work in more established creative areas in other parts of the Midlands;

- The Gigaport was considered an opportunity for Walsall to brand itself as high tech;
- Co-marketing space is a good way to cluster creative businesses.

A Member commented that the Council could use buildings from its own property portfolio to create office space with facilities that would attract creative businesses.

A further informal meeting will take place on 5th May with artists and local people with an interest in making Walsall a more creative place.

The Creative Development Manager reported the potential economic benefits the creative arts brought to the area. For example, a recent exhibition on heavy metal music at The New Art Gallery was calculated to have attracted over £1 million of spending from visitors. It was reported that The New Art Gallery was considering bidding to host the Turner Prize. If successful, the boost to the local economy from increased visitors would be significant. Finally, Members were informed that the Council was collaborating with other Local Authorities to bid for “Creative People, Creative Places” funding which could provide £3 million over three years.

RESOLVED:

That following the implementation of the remodelling of the existing Strategic Regeneration section, the Sector Growth manager (or equivalent, subject to the outcome of current consultation and cabinet approval) will present to the panel on options, based on existing best practice, feedback from the meeting with Walsall creative industries and other information.

(c) Brewing in Walsall

Members were informed of feedback received from the setting up of a Facebook Group to consult interested parties on how brewing in Walsall can be supported.

The Senior Press and Publicity Officer reported that take up of the Facebook Group had been slow and that it would be re-marketed. A Member suggested linking the social media accounts of pubs and breweries to gain interest.

RESOLVED:

That the Facebook Group on brewing in Walsall be pro-actively promoted.

165/12 WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 AND FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED:

That:-

- (1) the Panel’s Work Programme 2011/12 be noted;

and;

(2) the Forward Plan be noted.

166/12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be agreed by annual council on 23 May, 2012.

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked all the Members and officers who had supported the Panel during the previous year for their hard work.

The meeting closed at 6.59 p.m.

Signed:

Date: