

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday, 15 March, 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 R. Carpenter
Councillor B. Douglas-Maul
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
Steve Law - Asset Manager
Zoe Slattery - Think Walsall Team Leader
Chris Knowles - Lead Accountant
Dan Slee - Senior Press and Publicity Officer
Craig Goodall - Scrutiny Officer

149/12 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M. Munir.

150/12 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

151/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

152/12 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January, 2012, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

153/12 **CREATING AND SUSTAINING BUSINESS IN WALSALL**

The Panel received a report and recommendations from the Business Start Up Working Group (BSUWG) and feedback from Councillor Carpenter following a business networking event.

Councillor Fitzpatrick highlighted the findings and recommendations contained in the report of the BSUWG (annexed) following their meeting with the Princes Trust and the Princes Initiative for Mature Enterprises.

Councillor Carpenter reported on a 'Best of Walsall' business networking meeting that he had attended on behalf of the Business Sustainability Working Group. He explained that approximately 100 small businesses offering diverse services were in attendance at the event. The main issues raised concerned rates, rents and funding.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:-

- Finance was an issue to small businesses but issues such as skills were more important to larger companies;
- It was felt that the Council could do more to make it easier for local companies to tender for services;
- Regarding the purchase of services, it was felt that the Council was often viewed as a 'cash cow';
- A Member commented that the Council was spending too much employing external consultants.

In closing the item, the Chair requested that the two Working Groups hold a joint meeting to discuss the evidence they had received throughout the year before drafting a joint report and recommendations for the next meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (1) the report of the Business Start Up Working Group be noted;**
and;
- (2) a report be presented to the 23 April 2012 meeting of the Panel presenting the conclusions and recommendations of the Business Start Up and Business Sustainability Working Groups.**

154/12 **BREWING IN WALSALL**

The Panel considered the brewing industry in Walsall with a selection of invited guests following a request from a Member of the Panel.

The Chair opened the item and explained that the Panel were interested in hearing about local achievements, challenges and what support was required for growth.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:-

- It was felt that the main issues affecting the local brewing and pub trade were national issues. Principally:-
 - Beer duty set at 2% above inflation. A pint was set to rise by 11p in April, 2012. Approximately £1 of the price of any pub bought pint was taken up in tax and other duties;
 - Cheap alcohol sold in supermarkets;
 - Business rates for pubs were based on profitability, not premises size, which penalised successful operations;
 - The national 'Pub Co' industry which was focussed on profitability rather than the local communities their retailers served;
 - The number of pubs was declining. There are approximately 52,000 pubs in the UK at the current time compared to 100,000 100 years ago;
 - Planning issues that meant a pub could be turned into any one of many enterprises without permission. This was particularly pertinent now as so many pubs were closing and being left empty. A pub building could also be demolished without permission;
- Sales of alcohol in pubs were declining by approximately 3% each year;
- The decline of heavy industry had impacted on local pub trade and the brewing of mild;
- Changing social conditions had also impacted on the pub trade. Previously, people would visit the pubs as a treat but now comfort and entertainment available in the home had improved dramatically;
- There had been a large rise in the number of micro-breweries. This had come about due to the decline of large national breweries;
- To qualify as a micro-brewery a maximum of 5,000 litres a year could be produced;
- Micro-breweries qualified for tax benefits, however, larger breweries such as Highgate did not qualify but they were too small to compete with multi-national breweries;
- Pubs and breweries were not operating in the free market. Pubs connected to large breweries could not buy products from micro-breweries;
- There was a decline in pub based games such as darts and cribbage;
- Beer festivals were an excellent way to promote ales, however, they were very time consuming to organise and were arranged by volunteers;
- The possibility of pubs becoming the centre of the community was discussed, including the idea of hosting community meetings and providing additional services such as post office facilities;
- Links to wider issues around health and wellbeing were discussed. It was suggested that pubs promoted sensible and supervised drinking;
- The idea of a Walsall Council mark of approval for pubs was discussed. It was felt that the scope for the 'Best Bar None' awards could be extended to include new categories around pub and beer quality.

The Portfolio Holder (Regeneration) explained that he was sympathetic to the issues being faced by breweries and pubs and felt that there was a need to lobby the Government.

The Chair thanked the witnesses for attending the meeting and suggested that the Panel write to the All Party Parliamentary Beer Group regarding the valuable evidence that the Panel had heard. He also requested that a Facebook Group be set up to discuss pubs and brewing in Walsall and the wider audience and feedback be reported to the next meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

That:-

- (1) the Chair write to the All Party Parliamentary Beer Group to feedback the issues discussed at the meeting and support their work;**
- (2) the 'Best Bar None' awards include awards around the quality of public houses and beer;**
- and;**
- (3) a Facebook page be established on local brewing and pubs to engage a wider audience and feedback from this Group be reported to the 24 April, 2012 meeting of the Panel.**

155/12 GROWING THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES EMPLOYMENT SECTOR IN WALSALL

The Panel were informed on progress made on consulting with members of the creative industries in Walsall.

The Senior Press and Publicity Officer reported that a Facebook page 'Can we make Walsall a more creative place' had been set up at the request of the Chair. Almost 50 people had signed up to the page and he explained the feedback that had been received so far.

Members were pleased with the engagement that had taken place and were enthusiastic for further engagement to take place off-line with local creative people. The Panel were keen to see the creative industries grow in Walsall.

RESOLVED:

That:-

- (1) an informal meeting to discuss how to make Walsall a more creative place be set up in a local coffee shop with the costs met by Walsall Council;**
- (2) the Facebook group 'Can we make Walsall a more creative place' continues as a means to consult;**
- and;**
- (3) Members be e-mailed information regarding the IDeA document**

'Investing in Creative Industries: Guide for Local Authorities'

156/12 OUTCOME OF COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION LEASE TRIAL

Members were informed of the outcome of two pilot projects with local community associations.

The Asset Manager explained that the two pilots involved the Manor Farm Community Association and Old Hall People's Partnership. He reported on the application process and identified the need to develop the capacity of community associations in:-

- Formal options appraisal techniques;
- Objective setting tools;
- Premises management requirements;
- Risk management tools.

A Member highlighted how Rushall Community Association had been able to secure a £116,000 grant following the agreement of a long term lease with the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the approach taken to the Community Association lease trial be endorsed.

157/12 QUARTER 3 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2011/12

Members were informed of the predicted revenue and capital outturn position for 2011/12 based on the performance for quarter 3 (to end of December, 2011) for services within the remit of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

The Lead Accountant highlighted the forecast revenue outturn was an underspend of £409,000 following the use of earmarked reserves. It was also anticipated that there would be a capital underspend of £543,000.

It was reported that a £347,000 saving had been made as a contribution to the 'Health Through Warmth' project was no longer required.

The Executive Director (Regeneration) explained the priorities for the allocation of the New Homes Bonus in response to a question. Members heard that money was being allocated to support new homes, empty properties and economic development.

RESOLVED:

That:-

- (1) the Panel be provided with further information on how New Homes Bonus funding was allocated;**

and;

(2) the report be noted.

158/12 WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered their Work Programme and the latest version of Cabinet's Forward Plan and key decisions.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel be provided with further information regarding Forward Plan decision 12/12 'Inward Investment/Economic Approach Service'.

159/12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 6.00 p.m. on 23 April, 2012.

The meeting closed at 8.10 p.m.

Signed:

Date: