

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday 11 January 2011 at 6.00 p.m. in a Conference Room at the Council House, Lichfield Street, Walsall

Panel Members Present: Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)
Councillor Anson (Vice-Chair)
Councillor I. Azam
Councillor M. Ahmed
Councillor D. Coughlan
Councillor L. Harrison
Councillor I. Shires

Officers Present: Mike Tichford – Assistant Director (Regeneration)
Kevin Kendall – Head of Property Services
Mark Lavender – Head of Strategic Regeneration
Liz Connolly – Management Information Officer
Craig Goodall – Scrutiny Officer

Witness Present: John McCreadie - Ekosgen

49/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Coughlan and B. Tweddle.

50/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

51/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

52/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2010, copies having been previously circulated, be approved a true and accurate record.

53/10 ASSET MANAGEMENT 2010

The Panel received a presentation on the latest situation with Asset Management 2010 (AM2010) project.

The Head of Property Services gave a presentation to the Panel (annexed). He explained the context of the project, the future vision for accommodation,

peer comparisons with desk sharing and a range of potential future office accommodation options.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- It was strongly believed that Council desk space could be reduced to 70% of existing levels. Staff would no longer have their own individual desk but share from a pool of desks allocated to their individual teams.
- Filing would be completed electronically.
- Currently there were more desks than people.
- Reducing the number of desks would allow the Council to reduce the number of office buildings from 26 to 6. The remaining buildings would need to be reconfigured to fit in more desks. This should allow most services to be located in a single area.
- Drop in office space would be located around the borough for mobile staff to prevent them having to return to their central office between appointments.
- Offices would only be provided to Director level appointments.
- There were some concerns regarding the potential demoralising effect the changes could have on staff.
- The Panel were supportive of more home working from staff and recognised its potential of increasing staff productivity subject to investment in information technology.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet pursue Option 2 'Refurbish and Consolidate' with regard to its office accommodation strategy and work towards delivering Option 4 'Radical and Home Working' with the emphasis on achieving further savings through increased home working for staff.

54/10 LOCAL ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

The Panel considered progress so far with the development of the Local Economic Assessment (LEA) for Walsall including details of research completed on the different sectors in the local economy.

Members received a presentation (annexed) from John McCreadie, Ekosgen, who had completed an analysis of the different sectors in the Walsall economy. He highlighted the decline in the overall number of jobs in Walsall and the Black Country compared to strong growth seen in the West Midlands and England. He reported that there had been a lack of jobs growth in the private sector. He also explained that a survey of local businesses had revealed a predominance for localised trade and the desire for many local businesses to relocate to new premises. Therefore there was potential to grow trade for local businesses regionally and nationally but there was also an urgent need to provide employment land and premises in the borough otherwise businesses could relocate to other local authority areas. He stated that the Gigaport development was a real opportunity to revitalise Walsall in terms of creating new jobs and changing the image of the town centre.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- The Panel felt it was essential that new employment land was urgently required to enable the borough to attract new businesses and allow existing companies opportunities to relocate. Members recognised that there were large sites available that were being developed, such as the Darlaston Strategic Development Area, but noted these sites were unlikely to become available shortly. Therefore land was required to be made available in the next 1-3 years.
- The Panel strongly felt that Government funding should be made available to decontaminate former industrial land that had been made identified for strategic regeneration.
- Members were informed that the land making up the Darlaston Strategic Development Area that was currently owned by Advantage West Midlands was set to be sold to a private developer who would work in partnership with the Council to develop the site.
- The strategic importance of the M6 toll road was discussed. The Panel recognised there was an opportunity to develop employment land in the areas with good access to the M6 toll road.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel call on Cabinet to recognise economic development in the borough of Walsall as a key priority for the Council;**
- and;**
- 2. Cabinet urgently identify and develop new employment land that can be brought into use within the next three years to attract new private sector businesses and allow the relocation of existing local businesses to larger modern premises.**

55/10 REGENERATION DIRECTORATE – SERVICE REDESIGN

The Panel were informed of the service redesign activity currently taking place in the Regeneration Directorate.

The Assistant Director (Regeneration) highlighted progress to date with service redesign activity as part of the Working Smarter programme in the following areas:

Asset Management 2010

As featured earlier on in the meeting this was the most advanced scheme currently underway and had the potential to deliver substantial savings.

Homelessness and Housing Advice

Changes to way that clients were assessed how meant that 81% of enquiries were resolved in the clients first transaction with the Council. Previously clients would be offered appointments and asked to come back another day.

Joint home visits for between housing and social care and inclusion officers were now taking place. All of this activity had significantly reduced the need for temporary accommodation. Therefore there were plans to reduce the number of units and staff in the future.

Dedicated Facilities Grant

Joint work was taking place, including budget sharing, to provide residents with home aids and adaptations to reduce the need for residential care.

Development and Delivery

The Development and Delivery Team were currently developing a framework to assist in the future development of Walsall Town Centre.

RESOLVED:

That the activity with service redesign be noted.

56/10 WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11 AND FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED:

That the following items be considered at the Panel meeting on 17 March 2011:

- a. Community Asset Transfer Strategy;**
- b. Impact of the Localism Bill on Regeneration;**
- c. Regeneration Projects Update;**
- d. Quarter 3 Financial Monitoring, and;**
- e. Information and long term plan details on council-owned void properties.**

57/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 21 January 2011.

The meeting closed at 7.52 p.m.

Chair:

Date: