

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday 3 November 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)
Councillor D. Anson
Councillor L. Harrison
Councillor K. Phillips
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor B. Tweddle

Portfolio Holders present

Councillor A. Andrew - Regeneration

Officers present

Tim Johnson	Executive Director – Regeneration
Mark Lavender	Head of Strategic Regeneration
Kevin Kendall	Head of Property Services
Stephen Law	Estates and Property Manager
Louise Powell	Economic Regeneration Manager
Richard Rumble	Partnership of Walsall Enterprise Regeneration Manager
Jane Kaur-Gill	Regeneration Team Leader – Economic Wellbeing
Neville Ball	Principal Regeneration Officer
Craig Goodall	Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

29/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor K. Sears.

30/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

31/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest for the duration of the meeting.

32/09 MINUTES

Craig Goodall reported that there had been an alteration to the draft minutes contained in the agenda papers. During Item 27/09 'Work Programme 2009/10 and Forward Plan' the Panel discussed decision '72/09 Heritage Centre for Walsall' from the Forward Plan. The comment in relation to item of the forward plan had been amended to read:

'Tim Johnson reported that he was unaware that capital money had been allocated to fund this project'.

The minutes signed by the Chair had been amended to reflect this change.

Resolved:

That the minutes, as amended, of the meeting held on 1 October 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

33/09 RESPONDING TO THE RECESSION AND PLANNING RECOVERY

The Panel assessed the impact of the recession on Walsall and how the Council and its partners were responding to it and planning recovery in the current economic climate.

Members received a presentation and handouts (annexed) outlining:

- The impact of the recession on Walsall.
- Walsall Partnership and the Council response to the recession.
- How Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) was being used to address priority areas and the targeted action plans for worklessness and enterprise.
- Regional and sub-regional working being undertaken.
- The outcome of a recent Audit Commission study into tackling worklessness across the seven metropolitan borough councils in the West Midlands.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- Worklessness was a problem in Walsall. Even before the recession started Walsall's worklessness figures were higher than the national average.
- Walsall's traditional manufacturing industries had suffered particularly badly due to the recession.
- The Council was taking positive action to encourage traders into empty shop units but the biggest barrier still remaining was high letting costs.
- All WNF monies had been committed towards projects and came to an end in 2011. Each project had its own contract setting out what was expected to be delivered. Other funding streams, such as the European Social Fund, were being drawn down and providing further projects within the same priority areas.
- Statistical evidence showed that Bloxwich One-Stop-Shop was a success.
- Tendering for a One-Stop-Shop in the Palfrey and Pleck area was currently underway. A mobile bus would also be sourced to provide the same services across the same area.
- The City Region Strategy had been proving successful in reducing unemployment across the West Midlands until the recession started.
- It was important that local priorities matched the regional priorities in the Multi Area Agreement.
- A Member emphasised the importance of the West Midlands working together to address the problems that were being experienced. He noted that the Gross Domestic Product for the region had not exceeded the national average since 1975 which strongly suggested that urgent action was needed to improve the future long term economic health of the area. Reference was made to the high levels of investment being received in Birmingham and the importance of engaging with it.
- Tim Johnson reported that the Homes and Communities Agency had proved £8.5m to enable the first stage of the Waterfront South Development. This would see the creation of jobs as well as the creation of 120 mixed tenure homes and office space.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel be provided with a copy of the evaluation report on Bloxwich One-Stop-Shop.

34/09 CORPORATE ASSET MANAGEMENT 2009-2014

The Panel were informed of current asset management activity taking place as part of the process to completing a new corporate asset management plan (CAMP) during 2010.

Kevin Kendall started by correcting an error in the report published in the agenda papers. He explained that the last CAMP had been approved by Cabinet in October 2008 not 2007. He went to explain the key objectives of the CAMP and ongoing actions to achieve these objectives. He reported that it was targeted to reduce the Councils office accommodation by 20% by 2012 (a reduction of 10% was already achieved). It was also targeted to reduce the Councils carbon production by 40% over the next 10 years. In order to achieve these targets property services was restructuring its service to maximise asset management expertise in order to complete a large asset management project which included reviewing every building in the Councils ownership with the remit of challenging its use.

Members questioned the potential £300,000 saving that could be achieved if public toilets were disposed of. Kevin Kendall indicated that the figures were indicative only.

35/09 JOINT CORE STRATEGY

The Panel received an update on the development of the Joint Core Strategy (JCS). A handout was tabled summarising the key policies contained in the JCS.

Mark Lavender explained that the once completed the JCS was to be the spatial land use policy for the entire Black Country. It was an ambitious plan that identified areas for employment, transport and housing development across the region until 2024. The JCS would replace the current Unitary Development Plan once approved.

Once the draft JCS had been approved by Cabinet it would go out to public consultation. Before being submitted to Government and finally being subjected to a public examination before becoming planning policy.

With respect to employment land a Member asked a question about the Darlaston Delivery Development Area. Tim Johnson explained that Advantage West Midlands had re-profiled the money that was to be used to clear the site. However, a study was currently being completed to assess the work that was required on the site. The Darlaston transport scheme to open up the land was still scheduled to take place in 2012/13.

36/09 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10 AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered their work programme for the year ahead and the latest forward plan of Cabinet key decisions.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. the following items be added onto the agenda for the 6 January 2009 meeting of the Panel:**
 - a. Building Schools for the Future, and;**
 - b. The Councils Role Working with Private Sector Landlords.**
- 2. Members be provided with an update report on the Centro Review of Public Transport.**

37/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted the date of the next meeting as 3 November 2009.

The meeting terminated at 7.46 p.m.

Chair:

Date: