

## **REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

Thursday, 3 November 2011 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

**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  
Sarah Middleton - Chief Executive (Black Country Consortium)  
Steve Law - Asset Manager  
Jackie Hodgson - Team Leader (Asset Management)  
Jane Kaur Gill - Team Leader (Economic Wellbeing)  
Craig Goodall - Scrutiny Officer

### **113/11 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L. Jeavons and Councillor M. Munir.

### **114/11 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

### **115/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

Councillor I. Shires declared a personal interest in Item No. 6 'Creating and Sustaining Business'.

### **116/11 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT, 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the item set out in the private part of the agenda for the reasons set out therein and Section 100A of the Local Government Act, 1972.**

### **117/11 MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September, 2011, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

## 118/11 CREATING AND SUSTAINING BUSINESS

The Panel considered the interim report of the Business Sustainability Working Group following their meeting with two micro-businesses.

Councillor Carpenter highlighted the main conclusions from the Working Group's interim report and explained that the next stage was to meet with medium sized businesses to understand what their experiences were.

The Chair invited Graham Cornfield, a local sole trader, to address the Panel with his views. He highlighted:-

- The Working Groups may benefit from an external advisor;
- Good practice elsewhere would not necessarily work in Walsall;
- It was important that small businesses were recognised as an important part of the local economy that needed supporting just as much as larger firms;
- Many small businesses were content with their size and did not seek to grow into large companies;
- Any targets for business growth should aim for best in class;
- Small grants and loans could make a big difference to small businesses.

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

- Previously funding for small businesses had been available through Working Neighbourhoods Fund. Unfortunately, this funding had now come to an end. The Black Country Re-investment Society had recently established the Walsall Loan Fund which was established to help local businesses who could not raise finance from banks. Members welcomed this and encouraged flexibility in the way that businesses were supported to access finance;
- It was reported that the Business Start Up Working Group had been unable to meet with banks as planned. It was hoped this meeting would now take place on 16 November, 2011;
- The use of networks for supporting small business was acknowledged as extremely valuable;
- It was suggested that Members speak to local people who operated social enterprises and mutuals for their perspective;
- It was suggested that the Council increase the number of staff it employed working in the Think Walsall Team. The Portfolio holder explained that whilst the Think Walsall Team was small, a large part of the regeneration directorate was focussed on economic regeneration. He reported a number of recent activities that had taken place to engage and provide opportunities to local businesses;
- It was noted that previously Advantage West Midlands and Business Link had existed to stimulate the economy and work with local businesses but these had been lost through Government spending reductions. The Council was now trying to fill these gaps but with smaller resources;
- The Panel requested information from any working smarter activity that had taken place with local businesses.

The Chair welcomed the findings of the Working Group so far and the Panel supported the next steps for each Working Group.

**RESOLVED:**

**That:-**

- (1) the Business Start Up Working Group meet with banks to discuss issues relating to providing finance to businesses;**
- (2) the Business Sustainability Working Group meet with medium sized businesses;**
- (3) feedback received from working smarter activity with local businesses be reported to a future meeting of the Panel;**
- (4) the interim report of the Business Sustainability Working Group be noted.**

**119/11 BLACK COUNTRY LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP**

The Panel received a report on the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (the LEP).

The Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium (BCC) and secretariat to the LEP (the Chief Executive) highlighted the following areas to Members:-

- The purpose of the LEP;
- The membership of the LEP;
- Governance arrangements of the LEP;
- How the LEP links with Local Authorities;
- How the LEP could be influenced.

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

- Members expressed disappointment that Walsall had not attracted any finance in the recent allocations of Regional Growth Fund;
- The Panel were informed that the LEP and Chief Executive had been instrumental in securing an Enterprise Zone (EZ) in Walsall and Wolverhampton. These two EZs would benefit the entire West Midlands;
- The LEP was managed by the BCC. All Black Country Local Authorities paid £180,000 a year to support the BCC. It was important that the LEP promoted itself, its successes and the benefits this would bring to the region;
- It was important that local residents living near to the Walsall EZ were reassured about the reclamation works that were required to be undertaken.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

## 120/11 WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 AND FORWARD PLAN

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

### *49/11 University Technical College*

The Chair expressed an interest in receiving further information about the development of the business case for the new University Technical College (UTC). It was felt that this issue linked strongly to the theme of creating business in Walsall as the UTC would be responsible for developing the future workforce. It was requested that representatives running the UTC be invited to the meeting.

The Chair suggested two additional items for the Panel's Work Programme:-

- Technical reforms of Council Tax. It was explained that the Department for Communities and Local Government was currently consulted on changes to Council Tax that would affect second homes, empty homes and properties with solar panels on their roofs. It was suggested that the Panel participate in a consultation on the proposed changes;
- "Delivering quality first" BBC consultation. It was explained it was desirable to consider the economic impact on the West Midlands of the proposed relocation of post production roles from Birmingham to Bristol. It was proposed that the Panel take part in the consultation on the proposed changes.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the following items be added to the Panel's Work Programme:-**

- (a) University Technical College;**
- (b) Technical reforms on Council Tax;**
- (c) Delivering quality first.**

## 121/11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 6.00 p.m. on 5 December, 2011.

## 122/11 PRIVATE SESSION

### **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC**

### **RESOLVED**

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting as the item for consideration contains exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended). Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information).

*Please note that whilst the item was considered in private the below minute is a full account of the discussion that took place.*

## **123/11 COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION LEASES**

The Panel considered the report on the lease arrangements the Council had in place with local Community Associations (CAs).

The Asset Manager explained the overall strategy for managing CA leases, including two pilot asset transfer projects. He also highlighted the financial costs and liabilities. Details of individual lease arrangements for building condition and the potential cost of repairs was contained in the private Appendix.

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

- It was important that liabilities for CA buildings were tackled;
- It was suggested that support and capacity training was required for individuals who were involved in the operation of CAs. Comparisons were made to School Governors who received training in order to prepare them for the responsibilities they had undertaken;
- CA assets could be used to create opportunities for businesses, co-operatives and social enterprises;
- It was important that CA leases were performance managed, particularly with regard to building maintenance and repairs. It was explained that under the pilot arrangements, quarterly monitoring arrangements were in place. Due to the number of CAs, it would be impossible to monitor each one quarterly so more experienced CAs would be monitored less frequently;
- Long leases were often required for CAs to gain external funding;
- It was explained that a number of CAs had no lease in place as it had not been possible to agree standard lease terms with individual CAs. Often CAs were reluctant to accept full repairing leases as they were not satisfied with the current condition of their buildings;
- As a safety control, the Council would seek possession of the building if there were serious concerns about the way it was operated. However, it was important to trust local people to manage their own assets so this would be a measure of last resort.

The Panel were pleased with the new pilot arrangements that were in place and requested a report on the outcome of the pilot at a future meeting.

### **RESOLVED:**

That a report on the outcome of the pilot asset transfers be considered at 15 March, 2012 meeting of the Panel.

*The meeting closed at 7.50 p.m.*

Signed:

Date: