

## **ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**21 June 2018 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall**

<b>Committee Members Present</b>	Councillor I. Shires (Chair) Councillor A. Hicken (Vice – Chair) Councillor B. Allen Councillor B. Chattha Councillor D. Coughlan Councillor S. Coughlan Councillor K. Ferguson Councillor L. Jeavons Councillor C. Jones Councillor W. Rasab	
<b>Other Member Present</b>	Councillor Wade	
<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	Councillor A. Andrew Councillor C. Towe	Deputy Leader and Regeneration Education and Skills
<b>Officers Present</b>	Simon Neilson  Simon Tranter  Mark Holden David Lockwood  Appollonaris Fonka Kelly Valente  Matthew Powis	Executive Director – Economy and Environment Head of Regeneration and Development Head of Service – Clean and Green Housing Standards and Improvement Manager Team Leader Housing Services Economy and Environment Lead Accountant Democratic Services Officer
<b>Other Person Present</b>	Sarah Middleton	Chief Executive – Black Country Consortium

### **1/18 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors M. Bird, S. Craddock, C. Creaney, L. Harrison, G. Perry and G. Sohal.

### **2/18 Substitution**

Councillor K. Ferguson substituted for Councillor S. Craddock and Councillor D Coughlan substituted for Councillor C. Creaney.

### **3/18 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whips

### **4/18 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to consider in private session.

### **5/18 Petition: Bring Back Brownhills Market**

The Committee considered a petition in regard to the re-establishment of Brownhills Market which had received more than 500 signatures. The Chair outlined the format for the item and invited the petition organiser to introduce their petition.

Councillor Wade (Lead Petitioner) introduced the petition which called for the Council to consider reinstating Brownhills Market to aid regeneration in the area and to boost local economy. He highlighted that he had received significant interest from members of the public in Brownhills who wished to see the Market return to benefit the local community and high street.

Members noted additional information from the petition which included correspondence from Council Officers and photographs of potential market locations in Brownhills.

He stated that whilst the previous market location had been sold to developers, Council Officers had located a site on Pier Street, Brownhills with potential for the market to be held once a month. In addition, he stated that Pier Street had the opportunity to be used for both the market and community to run events to benefit Brownhills and attract customers from the wider area.

Following the presentation from the Lead Petitioner, a question and answer session took place as follows:-

- Councillor Wade highlighted that there had been a difficult retail climate in recent years, however, he stressed that the market would need to be smaller in size and tailored to seasonal events to attract customers throughout the year;
- Consideration would need to be given to identify a day to host the market so to not impact surrounding areas;
- Historically Brownhills Market was held twice a week and this was still a viable option for the town;
- The petition had been supported by the local community, however, further research was required to assess viability as the retail environment had changed since 2010;

- It was reported that Wolverhampton City Council, operated a scheme at Wednesfield Market which offered reduced rents for operators who dispose their own waste;
- A Member noted Markets were valued by communities in the Borough, the Council had previously invested in district centres which aided the regeneration in markets;
- A Markets Working Group would allow further investigation into investment and retention of markets in Walsall.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration stated that he would welcome any recommendations from a Markets Working Group. He noted that the future of markets had been an issue that had been discussed at length by various former Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Darlaston Market had previously been reinstated and had been successful with assistance from the Town Centre Partnerships teams. He stressed the importance of developing markets and supporting existing traders as well as the benefits of specialist seasonal evening markets.

He informed the Committee that Brownhills had seen an increase in the development of new properties in Brownhills and the reinstatement of a market may attract local families to the high street. However, further investigation was required on local interest for the market to return to Brownhills to ensure that it was a viable enterprise.

The Chair thanked Councillor Wade and the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for their attendance at the Committee. He stated that a Markets Working Group would allow further investigation into issues around the Borough's Markets including Brownhills and welcomed nominations from Members of the Committee.

A Member highlighted that a Working Group would need to understand how markets would fit in the future retail environment across the Borough while investigating best practice in other areas of the country.

The Committee suggested the previous Market Charter for Walsall and options for themed evening Markets as potential issues the working Group could consider.

**Resolved:**

1. **That, the Petition: Bring Back Brownhills Market be noted;**
2. **That, a Markets Working Group be established with the following membership:-**
  - a. **Councillor S. Coughlan;**
  - b. **Councillor Jeavons;**
  - c. **Councillor Jones;**
  - d. **Councillor Hicken.**
3. **In connection with (2) above, Councillor Craddock be invited to join the Markets Working Group.**

**6/18 Economy and Environment Financial Performance – Pre-Audit Outturn for 2017/18**

Members considered the pre-audit revenue and capital outturn position for 2017/18 for services within the remit of the Committee.

The Economy and Environment Lead Accountant informed the Committee that the year-end position for 2017/18 reported a revenue under spend of £1.143m (net use of earmarked reserves) and request to carry forward £0.386m. In addition, the capital budget of £73.942m reported an under spend of £13.654m of which £13.653m had been requested to be carried forward.

**Resolved:**

- 1. That, the Pre – Audit Outturn Financial Performance for 2017/18 be noted.**

**7/18 Standards in the Private Rented Housing Sector and Selective Licensing**

The Chair informed the Committee that he had requested a report on standards in the private rented housing sector, following a report from the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee on Private Rented Housing Sector in April 2018. An additional report was tabled at the request of the Chair from the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

The Housing Standards and Improvement Manager informed the Committee of the findings of the inquiry and provided an update on the consideration of a Selective Licensing Scheme.

He highlighted that whilst the inquiry had investigated housing standards nationally, standards in Walsall were lower than national averages. However, strategic assessments into housing standards in Walsall had not been carried out since 2007.

A Member sought clarification on whether Selected Licensing had been successful in other Local Authority areas for both private and public sector housing tenants. The Housing Standards and Improvement Manager responded that several Local Authorities had successfully implemented Selected Licensing. However, proposals had been only implemented for private rented sector housing.

A question and answer session took place, the principal points from the ensuing discussion were as follows:-

- Four areas in Walsall had been selected for consultation on proposals for Selective Licensing;
- The Council had seen reductions in Housing Standards Enforcement Officers and Members raised concerns at the number of properties in Walsall failing to meet adequate housing standards which had been reiterated in the inquiry's findings;

- The Council encouraged dialogue between landlords and tenants to improve housing standards;
- Members expressed concerns that tenants fail to report inadequate housing standards for fear of eviction and other retaliatory measures;
- It was reported that a number of landlords were not aware of their statutory responsibilities when renting out properties;
- Wolverhampton City Council's Selective Licensing Scheme had been successful and had a positive effect;
- Concerns were raised over the lack of available social housing in Walsall;
- Enforcement with noncompliant landlords was deemed to be inconsistent;
- It was reported that there was no evidence to suggest that Selective Licensing Schemes increase rental house prices;
- A private rented sector housing and selective licensing working group would enable further investigation into issues faced by tenants and landlords in Walsall.
- A Member requested that representatives from both Children's Services and Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee be represented on the working group, which was agreed by the Committee.

The Chair noted that a working group would need to investigate best practice throughout the country and build upon work carried out by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration highlighted that the safety of tenants in private sector housing was important to the Council. He confirmed that discussions on standards of housing in Walsall and resources in housing standard enforcement in the Council were ongoing.

Councillor D Coughlan gave a response following an investigation into allegations made at a meeting of Full Council in regard to Selective Licensing on 9 April 2018. She highlighted that the investigation had concluded that the former Corporate and Public Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not been lied to at its meeting on 5 March 2018 during consideration of the Call-in on the Cabinet decision regarding Selective Licensing.

**Resolved:-**

1. **That, the Standards in the Private Rented Housing Sector and Selective Licensing report be noted;**
2. **That, a Private Rented Sector Housing and Selective Licensing Working Group be established with the following membership:-**
  - a. **Councillor I. Shires (Lead Member);**
  - b. **Councillor S. Coughlan;**
  - c. **Councillor Jeavons;**
  - d. **Councillor Rasab;**
  - e. **One nomination from Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee;**
  - f. **One nomination from Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

**8/18 Areas of focus – 2018/19**

The Committee considered a presentation from the Executive Director of Economy and Environment on current and upcoming issues within his remit. Following a request from the Chair, the Chief Executive from the Black Country Consortium gave a presentation which outlined the role of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

The Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium highlighted the Black Country Strategic Economic Plan which included references to priorities and projects ongoing in the Black Country.

The Executive Director (Economy and Environment) tabled an organisational chart [annexed] highlighting personnel and responsibilities for the Economy and Environment Directorate.

Members welcomed the success of Walsall Works with employment and skills assistance to young people in Walsall.

Members debated the issues and selected items for their work programme.

- 1. The following items be included on the Committees work programme for 2018/19:**
  - a. Presentation from West Midlands Combined Authority;**
  - b. Air Pollution and Air Quality in Walsall;**
  - c. Transportation Links in the Borough – M6 Corridor/Black Country;**
  - d. Employment, Growth and Skills.**

**9/18 Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 11 September 2018.

Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 8.10p.m.

Signed: .....

Date: .....