

## **REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

Thursday, 17 January, 2013 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

**Panel Members Present:** Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)  
Councillor I. Azam (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor D. Barker  
Councillor S. Fitzpatrick  
Councillor M. Longhi  
Councillor S. Wade

**Officers Present:** Simon Tranter - Head of Regeneration, Development and Delivery  
Chris Knowles - Lead Accountant, Children's and Regeneration Finance  
Mark Lavender - Head of Strategic Regeneration  
Zoe Slattery - Walsall Employment Growth Officer (Regeneration)  
Elizabeth Connolly - Economic Intelligence Manager (Regeneration)  
Nikki Gough - Committee Business and Governance Manager

### **216/13 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jeavons, Andrew and Tim Johnson.

### **217/13 SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Fitzpatrick substituted for Councillor Jeavons for the duration of the meeting.

### **218 /13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

### **219 /13 MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 27 November, 2012, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to the following amendments:**

- **Page 3 - the fourth bullet point be amended to read £300k - £500k.**

## **220 /13 ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT TRENDS IN WALSALL, TOGETHER WITH EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES**

This item, introduced by the Head of Strategic Regeneration, aims to provide Members with key data and information that help to raise their understanding of the key issues facing the Borough and the Regeneration Directorate.

The Economic Intelligence Manager (Regeneration), who co-drafted the Area Partnership Profiles with members from the Walsall Intelligence Network, briefed Members on the economic data for each Area Partnership. These profiles would be refreshed with information from the census, and were accompanied by a summary of the Economic data for the Borough as a whole.

It was agreed that further information would be provided on the following points:

- Long term trends in job vacancies;
- Reasons why Willenhall and Short Heath was performing better than average at getting NEETs back into work.

The report included the Regenerating Walsall Priorities' document, which starts to set out the key Economic Development priorities for the borough. One element to be added to the plan was transport, as improving the highway networks was key to facilitating access to employment sites and for movement throughout the area.

Members accepted that large regeneration projects and initiatives could take many years to come to fruition, and noted many of the successes achieved to date including: the new Highway, Walsall College building, Tesco, WHG building and the Waterfront development.

Members asked for suggestions as to how they could get further involved in live regeneration work as part of their role as scrutiny panel members. Cllr S Wade stated that he had spent some time with colleagues in Regeneration (Development & Delivery) and found this a valuable experience, recommending this approach to other members of the panel.

It was agreed that officers would return and suggest areas of work that members could get closer to and be invited to spend time with officers to understand their work and the benefits / outcomes as a result to the people and businesses of Walsall.

### **RESOLVED:**

- 1. That officer's return to a future meeting with suggestions for consideration, outlining where Members may consider joining in the work of officers / teams within the Councils Regeneration Directorate.**

**That further information is distributed outside of the meeting on the following:**

- 2. Long term trends in job vacancies;**
- 3. Reasons why Willenhall and Short Heath has a higher number of NEETS gaining employment.**

## **221/13 THE EFFECTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S BENEFIT CHANGES ON WALSALL BOROUGH**

Members were informed that a review had been commissioned to set out the known implications on the population and economy of Walsall of Government's proposed benefit changes. However, this did not include figures from the autumn statement, as these had not yet been quantified, but that this process was underway and would be reported to a future meeting.

Proposed benefit changes would reduce the numbers of people eligible to claim benefits, move people from incapacity benefits onto other arrangements, including Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), with some claimants entirely removed from the benefit system altogether.

The net effect of these proposed changes will be a loss of overall income to the borough, as benefit payments are planned to reduce in both value and scope. A further report that captures the scope of these changes will be presented to the panel once completed and evaluated.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the impact of benefit changes report for Walsall Borough is taken back to the Panel, once the Autumn Statement figures have been calculated.**

## **222 /13 SUPPORTING BUSINESS CREATION AND GROWTH IN WALSALL**

The Panel were informed of the Small Business Start Up Grants Programme, which supported the establishment of new businesses. Officers stated that this was a very positive story to tell the Panel about, as 163 people gained or remained in employment as a result, including 83 full time posts.

The report included the lessons learnt and the On-Going Support Timeline, which sets out the key aspects of support required during the first 2 years of a new businesses life, if they are to stand the best chances of success.

Councillor Longhi asked what the types of healthcare businesses were supported, officers agreed to send Councillor Longhi this information.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the Supporting Business Creation and Growth in Walsall report was noted.

## **223 /13 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR 2013/14 FOR REGENERATION PORTFOLIO**

Members were informed that there were no changes to proposals in the capital table on page 2 since the item was last seen by Members. The Panel were informed that there was another element to the report which was the grant funded budget (not Government funded). However, this would not affect the budget overall. The Lead Accountant ran through the additional grant funded items with the Panel.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the draft revenue budget and capital programme 2013/14 is noted.**

**224/13 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13**

The work programme was discussed.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the following items were added to the Work Programme:**

- 1. Business engagement.**
- 2. Site and premises.**

**22513 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 6.00 p.m. on 28 February, 2013.

*The meeting closed at 7.05 p.m.*

Signed:

Date: