

AT A MEETING
- of the -
**REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND
PERFORMANCE PANEL** held at the
Council House, Walsall on
26 APRIL 2007 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor Shires (Chair)
Councillor Coughlan
Councillor Anson
Councillor Clarke
Councillor Arif

OFFICERS PRESENT

Tim Johnson	Executive Director Regeneration
Martin Yardley	Assistant Director Regeneration
Steve Lewis	Head of Regeneration- Delivery and Development
Mark Clough	Strategic Transport Manager
Clive Wright	Director WBSP
Helen Dudson	Performance and Scrutiny Manager
Colin Teasdale	Performance and Scrutiny Officer

55/06 APOLOGIES

The Chair advised the panel that apologies had been received on behalf of Councillor Yasin.

56/06. SUBSTITUTIONS

The Chair advised the panel there were no substitutions for this duration of this meeting.

57/06. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

58/06. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Members noted that there were no items for consideration in private session at this meeting.

59/06. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING –

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2007, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

60/06. FEEDBACK FROM WORKING GROUPS –

Strategic Transformation 19 April 2007

Mark Clough circulated draft minutes from the working group. The draft report was well received by the working group though they did comment that they wanted it to be more aspirational. Centro had commented that they felt the timing of the report was very apt and this was the first rail development plan in the region.

The time scale for feedback for comments from the working group was 4 May 2007 which would be integrated into the final draft in time for the first round of scrutiny meetings next municipal year. This would be promoted regionally for further consultation prior to final sign off.

Councillor Clarke commented that he had been rather annoyed that initially Centro were not invited to the working group to discuss the report but he was now pleased that Walsall Council and Centro were working closer together.

Helen Dudson apologised to Councillor Clarke for Centro not being invited initially but said that this was down to an administrative error concerning the distribution list that had now been corrected.

Mark Clough went on to say that the group had then discussed about how it now moves forward in terms of future topics to consider, with the issue of identifying future scheme priorities a possibility.

Tim Johnson said there was a need to get to grips with the objectives and revisit in line with what we know of redevelopment in the borough. He mentioned about the pilot scheme recently underway linking in with the New Deal to help people get transport to interviews and work.

Mark Clough said officers had just commissioned a consultant to do accessibility work, based on LNP areas, looking at links to employment, health and other services.

Councillor Shires asked when all this work would best feed into Scrutiny.

Martin Yardley talked about the Town Centre model work with Centro and the Highways Agency and suggested this may be a good place for the working group to start.

Tim Johnson stated panel should look at the work plan over the next 12 months as a whole to see where they could fit in and who they could work with. The Children and Young People's service were looking at access to schools and the traffic problems associated with term times was something to consider, initiatives such as staggered school terms could be looked at. He suggested that a timeline is drawn up of all these issues, to inform Scrutiny when they reconvene after the elections.

Councillor Clarke stated that there was full support across the parties for school buses as this was a very important issue.

Councillor Shires informed the panel that a meeting he had scheduled with MPs for the 27 April, to discuss regional development had been cancelled. He said he was disappointed with this as felt that there was a need to think about the links into the

region as Network Rail. There was a need to include MPs and MEPs from the region so as not to miss out on opportunities such as the potential to have the Euro Star extended up to Birmingham New Street.

Tim Johnson stated that his understanding was that the move of Euro Star from Waterloo to St Pancras was part of a plan to improve the link into the regions so the opportunity was there.

61/06. ITEMS REQUESTED FOR INFORMATION

a) Transportation Issues around the Manor Hospital

Helen Dudson informed the group that this was a referral from the Health Panel.

Councillor Shires stated that this was not in their remit but it should be noted and passed to the Neighbourhoods panel.

b) Black Country Joint Core Strategy

Mark Clough distributed and presented a briefing note to members updating them on the development of the Black Country Joint Core Strategy, which involved 4 Black Country authorities working together to develop a strategy for 2026.

Mark Clough mentioned that one member event had already been held but that only one person had attended.

Councillor Coughlan stated that events members had to attend were not coordinated centrally.

Helen Dudson stated that this was something that had come up at other panels but that the team were only able to use information that was in the municipal diary. If members had other regular commitments such as LNPs then they should inform the scrutiny team who would try to take them into account.

Mark Clough mentioned that they were working to try to avoid duplication by linking with the work the LSP are doing around the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

Councillor Shires asked how these discussions could link into the WBSP.

Clive Wright said that greater member engagement was something they were working on but it was still work in hand.

Helen Dudson informed the group that she had a meeting with Imke Goalby from the LNPs on the 27 April and this would be something they would discuss.

Mark Clough stated that much more member engagement on the core strategy would be coming up.

c) Progress update report on the corridors programme

Steve Lewis gave a verbal update on the consultation over the corridors programme. Officers were seeking to bring a report to cabinet in June-July; there had already been initial discussion with Advantage West Midlands.

62/06. KEY DISCUSSION ITEMS.

- a) NRF implementation within the LAA and
- b) Possible exit strategies for currently NRF funded schemes

Clive Wright gave a presentation on NRF implementation, focussed on the economic side and also about life beyond NRF and exit strategies. He also distributed charts detailing funding information for the different pillars.

Councillor Arif said he felt it was an interesting presentation, but having gone through the Warden scheme, the issue is the impact on staff. He asked Clive Wright what was the likely impact on staff if there was no more funding from NRF.

Clive Wright said they would look at what partners wanted to contribute to keep services going. There wouldn't be a need for as many staff but they are planning well in advance to give staff every opportunity, though he recognised it would still be difficult.

Councillor Coughlan said he believed the real concern was the impact on communities. The main element of NRF was about closing the gap between the most deprived areas and could we evidence that this gap had been closed?

Clive Wright stated that all the stretch targets from the LAA were being met on all fronts except one, which was worklessness. The reasons for this were that the economic pillar was new and that targets set were too demanding. Also unemployment had risen across the region and all other authorities in the West Midlands were in the same position.

Councillor Shires commented that a lot of stall was being set by the LNPs but that the recent shift puts a question mark over these.

Clive Wright said that the key item on the agenda for the next meeting of the WBSP was clarity between LNPs and the LSP.

Tim Johnson stated that the concept of the LSP will remain even though the focus may change. Certain services are best undertaken by the LSP as they need to happen collectively at a strategic level. The LSP remit was likely to be strengthened under the new white paper.

Clive Wright commented that these were exciting times and there would be lots of opportunities for development.

Councillor Coughlan stated that he did not want a political debate this time next year where the local administration blames central government for stopping NRF.

Councillor Shires said that LNPs made members more accountable in their communities so where it was starting to work people's expectations were being raised; he was concerned of the backlash if this ground to a halt.

Clive Wright stated that NRF was not the only funding for LNPs and that the council's commitment to LNPs was consistent. The key was getting other partners to contribute and use LNPs as 'the way they do things'

Tim Johnson said that LNPs can start to see joint resource decisions being made; momentum is going strong and should continue.

Clive Wright said it was about improving on what we are currently doing and asked if there was anything that could be done to raise the bar?

Councillor Shires mentioned an example of a workshop showing access to GPs within 400 metres which showed that whilst Walsall was performing poorly, Willenhall was particularly so, and members were able to pick up on this and act on it.

Clive Wright said that information that has gone into LNPs is unique to those LNPs. The Sustainable Community Strategy is a lead document which brings everything together, the old system wasn't well linked so could have different conflicting priorities.

Councillor Anson stated that he wished he had had the information charts distributed by Clive Wright beforehand so he could have had a chance to explore the detail. He said that if you asked people in Pleck how much difference NRF has made it would be very little. Over 3 years on LNPs, less and less people have been turning up- at the last LNP meeting it was just him and the officers in attendance.

Councillor Shires replied that whilst they may not be making a difference today, by engaging with the public and doing things differently he felt that they will make a big difference in the long term.

Councillor Coughlan agreed with Clive Wright's presentation and said that it was important to concentrate on the mainstream budget, the £100 million available here was more significant than the £7 million available through NRF.

c) Draft End of Year Report

The Draft End of Year report, previously distributed, was presented to the panel.

Councillor Shires stated that it had been a good year for this panel, its members, officers and partners. He said there was now a need to move on and show that scrutiny does have a big role to play. He stated that the Markets work showed that Cabinet was also now starting to recognise their work and that others can learn from their work.

Tim Johnson said it was important to learn why the Markets was a success; it was, in his opinion, because there was a clear focus about what they wanted to achieve and this should be borne in mind for next years programme.

Councillor Arif stated that he believed the markets work was a success because they were able to leave politics behind and that transportation was also a success for this reason.

Councillor Shires commented that he believed there had to be politics and a political direction.

Councillor Coughlan stated that in his role as an officer at another authority, he had the benefit of seeing two separate systems running and with no officer split in the other authority, things hadn't progressed as well there.

Councillor Clarke commented that he believed Scrutiny had worked well.

Councillor Anson said he had enjoyed the last year.

Helen Dudson told the panel that this report would inform what goes into the annual report to Council.

Councillor Shires said he believed this was extremely useful to raise the profile of scrutiny and the good work it does.

d) Markets Work Group

Martin Yardley informed the panel that the potential developers of the market wished to speak to the sub-group to get further clarification on the development brief also they would be seeking advice as to the best way of engaging with key stakeholders as they move through the design process. A meeting had been arranged for the 15 May.

The panel noted that this meeting clashed with the Willenhall LNP, Helen Dudson agreed to see if it could be moved.

Councillor Shires said the meeting had been set up so that the impetus wasn't lost.

Helen Dudson informed the panel that due to constitutional restrictions, those councillors up for election would not be able to attend this meeting.

Some members questioned this and Helen Dudson agreed to reconfirm this with constitutional services but had been assured that it was the case.

Councillor Anson asked if the council was now running a similar system to Bury in terms of management style.

Tim Johnson replied that the interim manager was very experienced and agreed that markets do need a very specific style of management but that there were also a number of long term issues to consider.

63/06. CONSIDERATION OF SERVICE ISSUES:

Tim Johnson gave a presentation to the group on budgetary pressures Regeneration could expect over the next year.

Councillor Shires commented that this helped to get involved early with the budget process. This had been brought to bear from pressure from scrutiny panels and that we should now use panel to feed in early enough to exert pressure and have an influence.

Tim Johnson commented that this involvement would be a real help to officers. He stated that in Regeneration, the solutions for financing did not lie with the council's core budget but from exploring all external revenue streams.

Councillor Shires put this into the context of the LNP discussion and stated we can't do things on our own and shouldn't do things on our own. He also said he believed this should be revisited on a regular basis.

Councillor Arif suggested that as part of the future programme, the panel could look at our relationship with partners.

Councillor Shires stated that this had been done before in the past but agreed it would be useful to revisit it to keep up-to-date.

Tim Johnson commented that changes in the context we were working in needed to be understood, as a service they were very clear about what the key relationships were and this is something they could share with panel.

Councillor Shires suggested it would be useful to have a presentation from Advantage West Midlands.

Martin Yardley said it would be useful to see how various schemes have been brought forward and have an overview of what they think will be happening over the next 12 months and who the key partners will be.

Councillor Shires commented that it was about understanding where we fit so can use what is out there.

Councillor Coughlan said that Local Authorities are now enablers so scrutiny needs to understand how we enable.

Resolved:

That officers present to Panel an overview of how various schemes had been brought forward, what they think will be happening over the next 12 months and who the key partners will be.

64/06. TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES:

The Chair referred the members to the previously circulated / tabled flyer for a course entitled

- a) The Councillor, The Community Call for Action and the Role of Overview and Scrutiny (16 May 2007)
- b) Charing Scrutiny (22 May 2007)
- c) The Principles and Practices of Overview and Scrutiny (5 June 2007)

Councillor Coughlan questioned how funding for training worked.

Helen Dudson explained that there was a central budget set aside for member development and the Yvonne Evitts was the contact for this.

65/06. FORWARD PLAN:

No comments

66/06. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

As this was the last scrutiny meeting of the municipal no new dates would be set until after the meeting of full council after the elections.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.55pm.

Chair.....

Date.....