

## **REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

Monday, 16 July, 2012 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 M. Longhi  
Councillor L. Jeavons  
Councillor S. Wade

**Officers Present:** Mark Lavender - Head of Strategic Regeneration  
Simon Tranter - Head of Development and Delivery  
Zoe Slattery - Think Walsall Team Leader  
Jackie Hodgson - Asset Management Team Leader  
Daniel Carins - Regeneration Officer  
Craig Goodall - Scrutiny Officer

### **173/12 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C. Creaney.

### **174/12 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

### **175/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

### **176/12 MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June, 2012, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

### **177/12 STARTING A BUSINESS IN WALSALL**

Members considered how issues surrounding business start-up and survival rates.

The Head of Strategic Regeneration highlighted:

- Business survival rates in Walsall from 2004 - 2009;
- Figures on survival rates for businesses supported by grants from the Council;
- The reduction of key business support bodies due to Government funding reductions;

- Lord Young’s report “Make Business Your Business”;
- That the Council is currently remodelling services to support an economic growth programme.

The Think Walsall Team Leader highlighted the range of business support available and reported on the success or otherwise of new businesses which the Council provided start-up grants to. It was common for businesses to survive the first year before coming up against problems in year 2. Often the majority of problems could be avoided if business owners undertook better planning and preparation or accepted advice and support. Further evidence demonstrated that those businesses that attended pre-trading start-up business courses survived longer. The business start-up grants were no longer available following the conclusion of working neighbourhoods funding.

The following were the principal points from the ensuing discussion:-

- Members questioned whether it would be better in the future to support existing businesses as they could be more likely to create new jobs than start-up companies;
- A barrier to support business growth was regulation, for example, when some businesses employed more than 5 employees, it was required to provide a pension offer, however, once this ceiling was broken, many firms would grow very quickly.

The Chair reflected on the research that she had taken into the availability of business start-up advice. She explained that she had looked for advice online and had been overwhelmed by the number of sites available offering advice. Some websites offered free advice whereas others wanted to charge a small fee. She commented that the paid sites often appeared more dynamic. Other Members supported these findings and added that seminars and mentor support could be other good ways of gaining advice.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That:-**

- (1) the report be noted;**
  - (2) that further reports be received by the Panel on what is available and what new schemes are developed to assist new businesses;**
- and;**
- (3) request a further report on the implications of the “Make Business Your Business” report.**

#### **178/12 GROWING THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN WALSALL**

The Panel were updated with progress on work that had been taking place to understand the role and potential for growth in the creative and digital industries in Walsall.

The Regeneration Officer explained what businesses qualified as a creative or digital industry and explained that feedback had been received from the two focus groups that had taken place.

It was noted that the feedback from the focus groups reported that Walsall was overshadowed by Birmingham and its creative environment. A Member argued that this provided opportunities for joined up work and supply chain business.

The Head of Strategic Regeneration tabled a report (annexed) detailing key economic growth sectors in Walsall. The Head of Development and Delivery added that the Council was currently undertaking engagement work with the Borough's top 100 strategic companies so that needs could be understood and taken into account.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the following items be prepared and presented to a future meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel:**

- (1) An analysis of creative and digital businesses in Walsall, including case studies;**
- (2) A SWOT analysis of the sector;**
- (3) Following the above analysis, an options appraisal, including potential uses of action be developed.**

**179/12 2011/12 FINAL BUDGETARY POSITION PRE-AUDIT**

Members were informed of the outturn revenue and capital position for the year ended 2011/12, subject to an audit, for services within the remit of the Panel.

The Lead Accountant reported that there was a revenue underspend against budget of £1.086 million and a capital underspend of £195,000. He highlighted the areas in which the savings had been made to the Panel.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

**180/12 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN**

The Panel considered the latest version of the Forward Plan and their work programme.

The Chair reported that she had given permission for Cabinet to consider making a decision that had not appeared on the Forward Plan. The decision was regarding the Darlaston Transport Scheme.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) the Forward Plan be noted;**  
**and;**
- (2) “Markets Working Group Terms of Reference” be considered at 6 September, 2012 meeting of the Panel;**

**181/12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 6.00 p.m. on 6 September, 2012.

**182/12 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT, 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

**RESOLVED**

**That the following item be considered in private as the item under consideration requires discussion of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding the information) as described in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).**

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

**183/12 PUBLIC SECTOR PROPERTY MAPPING**

Members considered the findings from a recent exercise regarding public sector property mapping across Walsall.

The Asset Management Team Leader explained that many public sector organisations in the Borough were currently working together to analyse their property portfolios and identify opportunities for collaboration.

The Panel considered an appendix identifying properties which had potential for joint working opportunities. Members requested maps of all properties under consideration to be presented to a future meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Panel consider the public sector property mapping at a future meeting with detailed maps showing all properties being considered as part of the exercise.**

(Exempt information under Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972) (as amended)

*The meeting closed at 7.10 p.m.*

Signed:

Date: