

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday, 19 January, 2012 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)
Kevin Kendall - Head of Property Services
Steve Law – Asset Manager
Chris Knowles - Lead Accountant
Jane Kaur Gill - Team Leader (Economic Wellbeing)
Zoe Slattery - Team Leader (Think Walsall)
Craig Goodall - Scrutiny Officer

Witnesses Present: Will Foster, Associate Dean, Wolverhampton University
Steve Snoddy, Director, New Art Gallery
Maria Gilling, Principal, Walsall Adult and Community College
Sue Grainger, Head of Libraries, Heritage and Arts
Mike Parrott, Head of Arts and Events
Deb Slade, Principal Creative Development Officer

138/12 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor L. Jeavons.

139/12 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

140/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

141/12 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December, 2011, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

142/12 GROWING THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES EMPLOYMENT SECTOR IN WALSALL

The Panel considered what steps were required to create the creative industries employment sector in Walsall with a number of invited guests.

The Chair introduced the item explaining that the purpose of the evening was to have an informed debate which could lead the Panel into researching further areas on how to enhance and improve local creative industries. The invitees introduced themselves and the Chair initiated the debate.

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

- It was important that a definition of creative arts was set out to assist the development of policy. The Government definition included visual arts, theatre, design, digital and culture (highbrow and popular);
- There were 240 creative businesses in Walsall. These were mainly micro or small businesses (less than 5 employees);
- Importantly, the arts provided employment opportunities. Creative people were often self-employed or operated micro businesses. The Executive Director (Regeneration) explained that, because of this, creative industries played a key part in employment plans as they were relatively easy businesses to establish;
- It was stated that incubation space would assist in the development of creative start-up businesses;
- It was acknowledged that often creative jobs were not advertised like regular jobs;
- There was a shortage of music teachers;
- Creative people were good for regeneration. Experience elsewhere in the country had shown artists encouraged development and could bring unused buildings back into use;
- A cultural scene was needed to attract external creative people and businesses. Walsall has an industrial reputation, has no theatres and lacks a live music venue. Walsall had the basic creative infra-structure with a jewel in the Art Gallery. The Vine Trust was constructing a 400 seat auditorium which could be used for showing productions;
- It was felt that creativity needed to be stimulated more through education:
 - National curriculum - it was felt that the arts were squeezed out of the school curriculum in favour of achieving higher grades in more traditional subjects;
 - There was a lack of opportunity for film in schools and colleges;
 - Performing Arts schools do not necessarily give prominence to creativity in the curriculum;
 - There was a need to stimulate enterprise among students;
- Aspirations - it was essential for local people to hold aspirations and ambitions to pursue creative careers. It was suggested that many families may discourage young people from the arts to stay focused on "proper jobs";
- Creative industries create spending and wealth in other areas;
- The Portfolio Holder - Regeneration expressed an aspiration to establish a 'Walsall Festival' to showcase creative arts in the Borough, including niche areas.

RESOLVED:

That further work be undertaken by the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel, the Business Start Up Working Group and the Business Sustainability Working Group on how to increase creative industries in Walsall.

143/12 WALSALL WORKS

The Panel considered a presentation on how young people could be supported into work in the Borough.

The Portfolio Holder (Regeneration) and Economic Wellbeing Team Leader provided Members with an overview of 'Walsall Works' which could see the Council work with local employers to support young people into sustainable employment of at least 18 months duration to assist in tackling the problem of youth unemployment (annexed).

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

- 'Walsall Works' will pay at least the national minimum wage. This was higher than the national apprentice scheme;
- A Member suggested that the scheme should target the most deprived areas of the Borough. Creating employment opportunities for deprived areas could assist in reducing the inequalities demonstrated in the East/West divide;
- The 'Benefits Trap' was recognised as a barrier to many local people considering gaining employment.

RESOLVED:

That the 'Walsall Works' Scheme be supported and progress with its implementation be monitored by the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

144/12 BUDGET CONSULTATION FEEDBACK 2012/13

The Panel considered the report to Cabinet that reported responses to the consultation that had taken place on what local people's priorities are and how they think they should be reflected in the Council's budget.

The Lead Accountant highlighted the findings from the budget simulator exercise.

The Chair noted the low response rates and suggested that the consultation process be improved for next year.

RESOLVED:

That the budget consultation feedback 2012/13 be noted.

145/12 THIRD DRAFT REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2012/13 FOR CONSULTATION

The Panel considered the revised draft revenue and capital budget proposals as submitted to Cabinet on 14 December, 2011.

The Executive Director - Regeneration highlighted the changes to the proposed revenue budget with an investment into the joint European support for sustainable investment in city areas. He also highlighted the Capital Programme which included an investment in property and major regeneration sites.

RESOLVED:

That the draft revenue and capital budget proposals for 2012/13 be noted.

146/12 CORPORATE ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Panel considered the latest developments regarding corporate asset management.

The Head of Property Services reported on:-

- Use of Council-owned land assets to stimulate economic growth in attracting investments to the Borough;
- The impact on local micro economies of the closure of Council offices under the smarter workplaces programme;
- Opportunities for sharing office space with partners;
- Building security;
- Transfer of assets to Community Associations.

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

- Any opportunities for sharing office space with partners would be subject to the regular Council decision making process. Members requested an item at a future meeting to consider the findings from the Public Sector Property Group mapping exercise;
- The New Invention Centre was unlikely to be sold. A Member stated that it was important that the services delivered from the site, including the library, were maintained;
- A Member stated that the risk of objection to the sale of the Allen Centre was higher than 'low'. It was important that sufficient resources were allocated to economic regeneration and property;
- Vacant office space could be used as incubation space for new businesses.

RESOLVED:

That the outcome of the mapping exercise undertaken by the Public Sector Property Group, including details of the property size and location, be reported to a future meeting of the Panel.

147/12 WORK PROGRAMME 2011/12 AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the latest version of the Cabinet's Forward Plan and their Work Programme for 2011/12.

66/11 Old Square Shopping Centre

It was confirmed that the site affected was located on Digbeth near to the service yard for the former Tesco site.

68/11 Black Country Business Property Investment Programme

Members requested further information on this matter.

The Chair suggested a future item on pubs. He explained that pubs were small businesses which were often at the centre of local communities. Therefore, their potential to increase their role as community hubs by offering additional services.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (1) Members receive further information on Forward Plan item 68/11, 'Black Country Business Property Investment Programme';**
- and**
- (2) an item on pubs policy be added to the Panel's Work Programme for 2011/12.**

148/12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 6.00 p.m. on 15 March, 2012.

The meeting closed at 8.35 p.m.

Signed:

Date: