

BRIEFING NOTE

TO: Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel
DATE: 26 April 2007

RE: Draft - End of Year Review 2006/7

Purpose

To provide the panel with an overview of the major work streams undertaken during the municipal year 2006/7 and to agree any work streams to be carried over into the municipal year 2007/8.

Overview of major work streams 2006/7

The panel has considered a variety of issues from the work programme agreed at the start of the year. Key areas of work were:

The Transport Innovation Fund

The Panel received an overview of the issues arising from the Transport Innovation Fund agenda and the subsequent feasibility study and there was general agreement that there was a congestion problem, which was getting worse, and this needed to be tackled.

There then followed discussions around flexible / home working and the scope to move services out to the districts, which would help regenerate the district centres and reduce the volume of traffic concentrated on Walsall town centre. This would need a much better IT system requiring a bid within the next budget round.

There was also agreement that there needed to be a step change improvement in public transport provision before people would be happy to leave the car at home. There were also issues around park & ride and how it could be facilitated. It was suggested that it might be necessary to focus, primarily, on the predictable travel routes, like the routes to work and school.

The panel also thought that road pricing would be in place by 2015, regardless of current public opinion, so plans should be made now. This raised issues about how to change people's perceptions around transportation.

Subsequently, the views of the Panel were incorporated in a report to cabinet, 20 December.

The Healthcare Supplementary Planning Document

The panel received a draft report outlining how the council was seeking to mitigate the impact of the new development in terms of the additional pressure it would put on existing health care provision ostensibly by requiring developers to make reasonable compensation to the tPCT for any additional capacity required.

The panel broadly welcomed the report but there were concerns over how the monies raised would be distributed and spent. The panel asked that the report to cabinet include

reference to an accountability and consultation framework in order to satisfy the council and local residents that any moneys raised were spent appropriately.

This recommendation was subsequently ratified by cabinet at its meeting of 17 January 2007.

In addition, the panel has:

- Received regularly monitored performance issues.
- Considered the budget and made comments and recommendations to cabinet.
- Received presentations on; the Local Authority Business Growth Incentives (LABGI), Prospectus for Growth – The Walsall Generation Company, Evaluation and impact of past regeneration projects, the planning framework, Transitional funding for Community Wardens, Contract with BT for 3G telecoms, Walsall local accessibility action plan, LNP review of the corridors strategy and the management plans for Walsall locks conservation area.

Working Groups

The panel also constituted three working groups looking at; the proposed Leather Heritage conservation area, Walsall Market and Strategic Transportation issues..

The Leather Heritage Working Group.

This was a continuation from the previous years work stream looking at how the regeneration of the proposed conservation area could be achieved.

The meeting agreed that pursuing a conservation area for the area was no longer the preferred option with the council looking to address heritage needs through updates to the local list of historic buildings. It was explained that buildings were assessed against criteria within the UDP, to determine if they were eligible for local listing status, stressing that public consultation would include owners and occupiers of selected properties.

The landowners expressed concerns over the restrictions on regeneration these proposals would have. Members and officers reassured the landowners that they had similar aspirations for the area and were willing to work in partnership to move things forward. However, the council had a duty of care to preserve the local heritage.

It was suggested that the landowners produce a scheme before pursuing local listing status for building within the proposed leather heritage area. This proposed scheme, developed with consultation from the URC would then be taken to Martin Yardley and his team to discuss a way forward for this area.

The group finally agreed that in the event of any difficulty in finding a way forward, the working group would be re-established to deal with the issues.

The Walsall Markets Working Group

This group was constituted to review Walsall Market following deteriorating performance spanning over several years.

The group met on 5 occasions, to gather evidence from the service, the Citizen's Panel, the developers and the key stakeholders; such as the market traders. The group also visited examples of best practice in Bury and Sheffield.

The group concluded that:

- the current location of the market was a barrier to trade and its relocation could be considered subject to considerable safeguards being in place;
- the current market design was considered a magnet for anti-social behaviour
- a modern market should be safe, with appropriate parking and toilet facilities.
- the quality of market management was of great importance, regardless of who provides it;
- a modern market should be clean, diverse and be of high quality;
- a modern market should not be a barrier to retailers in and around the market or a barrier to pedestrian movement;
- a modern market should balance with the town centre and help generate foot-fall.
- the market should be constituted of high quality stalls that were either demountable or form an integral part of the street furniture when not in use;
- a modern market should be a core part of the whole town offer and of a high quality urban landscape easily accessible from the rest of the town.

At their final meeting, the group discussed all the evidence and recommended that Cabinet make funding available to engage a consultant to independently appraise draft plans for the market produced by the developers and that the Scrutiny Panel continue to engage with the developers and stakeholders to produce a 'fit for purpose' market design for Walsall. They also wanted to highlight: that the market could move, subject to safeguards; that the costs of the do-nothing option meant there was no do nothing option; the success of partnership working with the developers and stakeholders; and the need to re-invest in the quality of the public realm, including Park Street.

These recommendations were subsequently endorsed by Cabinet at its meeting of 28 February 2007.

The Strategic Transportation Working Group

Council requested that the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel investigate and develop a rail service and facilities improvement plan for the borough of Walsall, in order to inform future decisions made by the DfT, network rail and the operators, and to assist an investigation by the DfT for improved rail services and facilities.

Subsequently the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel referred the matter to this group who in turn held two meetings with key partners and stakeholders, such as Network Rail, Centro, Central Trains and the new franchise bidders to inform the establishment of a process for the production of rail service and facilities improvement plan.

These meetings have informed the development of a Rail Development Plan for the council.

Recommended work streams to be carried over into 2007/8

The following work streams have not yet been completed and it is recommended that the panel include them in their work programme for the municipal year 2007/8.

- Following the completion of the Markets review and the endorsement of the reviews recommendations, Cabinet have requested that the panel appoint an independent expert to assist in undertaking a detailed review of developer's proposals for the market and review the setting of the Market, particularly in relation to the public realm, including the review of Park Street. It is recommended, therefore, that the panel include this item in their work programme for 2007/8.
- Initial scoping of the Strategic Transportation Working Group highlighted the need for a raft of policy position statements for transportation issues in Walsall. The group has address rail during its initial meetings and it has expressed an interest in buses, car-parking, waterways and strategic corridors. It is recommended, therefore, that the panel include this item in their work programme for 2007/8.

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