

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 2 October 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)
Councillor D. Anson
Councillor B. Tweddle
Councillor I. Shires

Portfolio holders present

Councillor Andrew - Regeneration

Officers present

Mark Lavender – Head of Strategic Regeneration
Alison Jarrett – Head of Service Finance
Clive Wright – Director, Walsall Partnership
Paul Nicholson – Delivery & Development Manager
Mark Clough – Regeneration Manager – Strategy
Marie Newton – Principal Regeneration Officer
(Strategic Transportation)
Louise Powell – Regeneration Manager – Economic
Development
Craig Goodall – Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

22/08 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Ansell and Coughlan.

23/08 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

24/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

Councillor B. Tweddle declared a personal interest in item 7 'St. Matthews Quarter'.

25/08 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS

Councillor B. Tweddle asked to be listed as present on 31 July 2008.

Resolved:

That the minutes, as amended, of the meeting held on 31 July 2008, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

26/08 FORWARD PLAN

9/08 Regional Spatial Strategy

The Panel were informed the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) was currently in negotiations over housing numbers with other west midlands local authorities. Members asked to consider the report before it went to Cabinet.

38/08 Police Station

Councillor Andrew commented that this was not going to affect the regeneration of the town. Negotiations for a site included land that was not wholly owned by the Council.

73/08 Building Schools for the Future

Paul Nicholson commented that this item was more than simply building new schools. It was intended that the 'schools for the future' would involve a campus delivering wider services to the local community and had many links with the Single Regeneration Framework and the wider regeneration agenda.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. the Regional Spatial Strategy be considered by the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel before it goes to Cabinet;**

and;

- 2. a briefing note be requested to be distributed to members on the progress of Gating Orders Policy**

27/08 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Panel noted the available development opportunities.

28/08 ST MATTHEWS QUARTER

Members were informed of the progress with the delivery of the St. Matthews Quarter (STMQ) project, including progress with the temporary relocation of the market.

Paul Nicholson explained that site clearance work was currently ongoing in the town centre. The provision of electricity was expected to take longer than anticipated. Due to this delay market stalls were expected to begin being refurbished during mid October with all stalls relocated by the end of November.

With regard to the wider STMQ development it was confirmed that the developers remained committed to the project. Negotiations with two anchor tenants were currently ongoing, with a planning application now anticipated during 2009.

Members reviewed the recommendations of the Markets Working Group as set out in Appendix 1 to the report. Members supported the recommendations as set out and

agreed with the proposal to widen the remit of the Markets Working Group to the entire STMQ project.

Concern was expressed regarding the future of the Upper Digbeth area of the town centre once the market had relocated. Paul Nicholson commented that this area was being considered for alternative uses, including events and car parking, and with improved signage.

In response to a question Paul Nicholson agreed to advise the Panel outside of the meeting on the date that the first market stalls would be relocated.

Members commented that it was not desirable to leave empty market stalls installed in the town centre. Paul Nicholson commented that work was ongoing to consider how the market would be fully used throughout the week including a possible Thursday market open to young entrepreneurs. Members requested a briefing note on this initiative.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. Karen Sands will arrange for Members to look at the refurbished market stalls;**
- 2. New licence conditions should be issued to traders once they move into their new locations;**
- 3. The group will receive information on the cost of the market square cleaning contract and electricity maintenance contracts at the next meeting;**
- 4. The group will look at the feasibility of a Sunday market, following the market relocation being complete;**
- 5. Promotional activity in Walsall Pride and Team Spirit on the market relocation should take place;**
- 6. The feasibility of car parking in market square be investigated further;**
- 7. Paul Nicholson to advise the Panel on the date that the market relocation will begin;**
- 8. Paul Nicholson to prepare a briefing note for the Panel considering how the market could be fully used throughout the week including a possible market for young entrepreneurs;**
- 9. The Markets Working Group now takes on a new and wider remit and be named "St Matthews Quarter Working Group";**
- 10. Councillors D.Anson; D. Pitt; B. Twedde be appointed to the St Matthews Quarter Working Group;**
- 11. Councillor A. Underhill be invited to join the St Matthews Quarter Working Group;**

12. Councillor D. Pitt be appointed Lead Member of the St Matthews Quarter Working Group;

and;

13. The St Matthews Quarter Working Group will review the impact of the market relocation, at a meeting during the first week in December, after 4 weeks of trading and report back to the full panel.

29/08 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT – REVIEW AND REFRESH

Members considered progress towards the achievement of the targets contained within Walsall's Local Area Agreement (LAA) as well as the position with setting LAA targets going into the review and refresh process for year one.

Clive Wright explained that when the LAA was signed in June 2008 16 of the agreed indicators had no targets or baseline data. This information was required by March 2009 but should be in place before that time.

Members were informed that investigations were ongoing about the potential to add two additional indicators to the LAA around 'congestion' and 'building resilience to violent extremism'.

Councillor Andrew congratulated officers for their negotiations around national indicators 152 (People on out-of work-benefits) and 116 (number of children in poverty) (both targets are inter-related) which allowed them to renegotiate the target should redundancies recorded by Jobcentre Plus exceed 500 before June 2008. The figure was nearly 1000 by June and now stood at 1488.

30/08 DEVELOPMENT OF WORKLESSNESS TARGET ACTION PLAN

Members received a presentation showing what work was taking place to achieve national indicator 152 'the percentage of working age population who are claiming out of work benefits' as set out in the LAA. Each national indicator in the LAA had a Target Action Plan (TAP) that detailed the actions and planned actions that would be taken to meet the indicators requirements.

Louise Powell gave a presentation on what actions were being taken to achieve the national indicator.

(annexed)

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- It was noted that a significant barrier preventing people upskilling was the that attendance at a course that involved more than 16 hours a week teaching time resulted in loss of benefits. Members heard that lobbying to change this rule was taking place through the City Strategy programme.
- Community enterprise was apart of the Enterprise TAP.

- Figures for the numbers of local residents working in the black economy were provided from a national source.
- Jobs Seekers Allowance figures were updated monthly.

Mark Lavender reported that the Economic Regeneration Team were providing leadership in bringing the range of necessary partners together in order to address worklessness. The links with this TAP and Enterprise TAP were strong.

Councillor Andrew noted that when recent redundancies were announced at Amtrak, the Council's Economic Regeneration Team proactively sought a meeting with the liquidators to assist those staff members who had lost their jobs.

Resolved:

That:

1. the Worklessness Target Action Plan be reconsidered in six months time;

and;

2. the Enterprise Target Action Plan be considered at a future meeting of the Panel.

31/08 RESOURCE PLANNING 2009/10 – 2011/12

The Panel considered the resource planning document for the Regeneration Directorate which included details on service objectives, priorities and finance.

Alison Jarrett gave a presentation to Members on the resource planning document explaining key issues across the directorates teams.

(annexed)

Strategic Regeneration

This team had undergone recent changes which had seen expenditure drop.

There were currently £1.5m of budget pressures in 2009/10.

Development and Delivery

The performance of this team was heavily affected by conditions in the housing market.

If savings were required from this team then it would impact on the delivery of projects in the borough.

Planning and Building Control

This team was currently under-recovering income due to stagnation in the housing market.

Prices for land charges searches needed to be balanced against other local authorities. Walsall was currently maintaining a good market share.

Property Services

This team was originally within the remit of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Communications

This was a small team that dealt with the Council's corporate communications.

Members questioned the long-term sustainability of the New Deal programme and noted that consideration of the exit strategy for the funding stream was already programmed into its work programme.

32/08 WALSALL TO WOLVERHAMPTON RAIL SERVICE

Members considered the withdrawal of the Walsall to Wolverhampton rail link.

Mark Clough informed Members that the proposed loss of the rail link on 13 December 2008 was a major concern, particularly as it was a priority to enhance the rail service rather than reduce it. It was hoped to extend the rail service between the two towns by adding a station at Willenhall.

Investigations were currently underway by the Passenger Transport Authority to find alternative funding streams to maintain the service. £700,000 a year was required to provide an hourly service. £1m a year would deliver a half-hourly service. Also, for the next 2-3 years there is no rolling stock available, which is a major issue.

The Council was working with Centro to look at opportunities to introduce new services on the old Sutton line as well as other priorities featured in the 'Rail Service and Facilities Improvement Plan' (RSFIP). Questions were also being raised about the viability of the '5 W's' Metro line and whether resources could be channelled from this project into the Walsall to Wolverhampton rail line.

A Member argued that the proposals in the RSFIP concerned a triangular service between Walsall, Wolverhampton and Birmingham. Mark Clough reported that Network Rail felt that, until resignalling and remodelling in 2013, Wolverhampton station did not have sufficient capacity to manage through trains from Walsall. A shuttle between Walsall and Wolverhampton was Network Rail's preferred option.

In response to a question Mark Clough stated that the Walsall to Wolverhampton rail route had the potential to operate a tram-train.

It was reported that representations were going to be made to government to argue for money to fund the rail line.

Mark Clough informed Members that an investigation into the wider mass transit system for Walsall was going to commence shortly. Members requested the opportunity to have an input into the study.

Resolved:

That the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel input into the mass transit for Walsall study.

33/08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 6 November 2008.

The meeting terminated at 8.00 p.m.

Chair:

Date: