

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
29 September 2022 at 6.00pm held at Walsall Council House, Lichfield Street,
Walsall, WS1 1TW.

Committee Members

Councillor M. Follows (Chair)
Councillor B. Allen (Vice-Chair)
Councillor A. Garcha
Councillor I. Hussain
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor A. Nazir
Councillor J. Whitehouse
Councillor R. Worrall
Councillor A. Hicken

Portfolio Holders

Regeneration

Councillor M. Bird	Leader of the Council
Councillor A. Andrew	Deputy Leader and
Councillor G. Perry	Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities

Officers Present:

Simon Neilson	Executive Director, Economy, Environment and Communities
Dave Brown	Director, Place and Environment
Sian Lloyd	Democratic Services Officer

Invited Attendees:

Sarah Middleton	Chief Executive, Black Country Consortium
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10/22 Apologies

Councillor Larden submitted an apology for absence.

11/22 Substitution

Councillor Hicken substituted for Councillor Larden.

12/22 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whips.

13/22 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to consider in private session.

14/22 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2022, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

15/22 **Local Enterprise Partnership Annual Report**

The Committee received a presentation from the Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium which laid out their approach with regards to economic intelligence, highlighted key schemes in relation to green infrastructure and capital investment and the transition from Local Enterprise Partnership to future partnership support.

The Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium explained that they had a strong focus on evidence led works and therefore had an Economic Intelligence Unit which collected key data on various demographics and in various sectors. She shared several pieces of data highlighting the successes and challenges in the borough in sectors such as housing and education and emphasised the importance of utilising the evidence base to provide a direction of travel thematically and spatially. Overall she stated that the evidence for Walsall and the Black Country more broadly was in main reflective of the overall UK economy with positive growth in wages and employment but challenges in other areas such as the high levels of risks due to rising costs and energy prices in key industries in Walsall including metal manufacturing.

The five steps of the Recovery Plan were then laid out by the Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium which were backing Black Country businesses, delivering skills for today and the future, nurturing green growth, creating vibrant, safe and healthy places and mobilising devolution and public service reform. Examples were given of works undertaken in each area in which the Black Country Consortium and Local Enterprise Partnership had played a role.

Following questions from Members of the Committee the Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium explained that there were several considerations when designating living parks in terms of safety, accessibility and strategic locations but that multiple sites could be considered as part of the process. She also discussed towpath investment and how there would need to be a careful balance of usage for all those who access the towpaths such as fishers, cyclists and pedestrians. It was emphasised by both the Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium and the Executive Director for Economy, Environment and Communities that the Consortium took on an enabling role in these types of projects and provided fundamental economic intelligence.

Resolved:

That the Committee notes the presentation and its contents.

16/22 Cemetery Maintenance Report

The Director of Place and Environment presented a report in relation to the current maintenance and security arrangements in place at the eight council-run cemeteries in the borough. He explained that each site had slightly different arrangements and that the emphasis was on not intruding on the grieving process which it was understood was very sensitive and personal. The Director of Place and Environment acknowledged that grounds maintenance and security patrols took place on sites throughout the working day but road and pathway maintenance was usually reactive and memorials on graves remained the property of the owner of the exclusive right of burial and it was that owner who was responsible for ensuring that memorial was maintained in a safe condition. He updated the Committee on the progress seen in community engagement through the customer access management workstream and work with The National Federation of Cemetery Friends to establish groups of volunteers for cemeteries and developing an understanding of what types of assistance they can provide.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Resilient Communities expressed his thanks to the Bereavement Services team who, he emphasised, had worked throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and adapted quickly to the multiple changes implemented in this period. He added that it was timely to consider rules and regulations whilst still maintaining the compassionate approach and avoiding excessive rules being put in place and praised the resilient communities approach to this.

Following questions from Members of the Committee the Director of Place and Environment advised that a restructure was currently taking place within the Directorate and customary practice regarding items on graves for example would need to be encoded in policy to ensure it was adhered to universally. He welcomed Member's suggestions in relation to public consultation on the review process and confirmed that staff stationed at the Bereavement Centre would be available to the public. It was suggested by a Member of the Committee that materials in relation to Friends Groups be shared with all Members.

Resolved:

That the Committee notes the report and its contents.

17/22 Areas of focus – 2022/23

The Committee received the outstanding presentations from Cabinet Portfolio Holders on services within the remit of the Committee.

Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Resilient Communities informed the Committee of developments in his portfolio which were within the remit of the Committee and advised that he had circulated a briefing note to all Members in relation to the other aspects of his portfolio. He emphasised his priorities in relation to activities in leisure centres and libraries and We are Walsall 2040, noting that some leisure centres were almost back at pre-covid levels of income generation and libraries were playing a key role in the Walsall Connected scheme and in cost of living support as warm hubs. Regarding We Are Walsall 2040 he highlighted that consultation had taken place over the summer.

Deputy Leader and Regeneration

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration advised of works within his portfolio designed to enhance transportation and investment in the borough, highlighting works at M6 Junction 10, railway stations in progress in Darlaston, Willenhall and Aldridge and the Town Centre Masterplan. He also emphasised the Street Scene Strategy which was to be the focus of the next meeting of the Committee.

Following questions from the Committee the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration advised that a derelict sites taskforce had been launched to strategically tackle derelict land and properties with the aim of pursuing CPOs on privately-owned derelict sites.

Resolved:

That the areas of focus 2022/23 and forward plans be noted.

18/22 **Recommendation Tracker**

The Democratic Services Officer updated the Committee on the progress of the 3 completed recommendations from the last meeting of the previous municipal year and the one outstanding recommendation from the last meeting of the Committee. She advised that she had been in contact with all the lead officers concerned and requested updates on progress.

Resolved:

That the progress on recommendations from the previous meeting be noted.

19/22 **Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 20 October 2022.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated 7.40pm.

Signed:

Date: