

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent on Wednesday, 2 April 2008

Present

Councillor Brian Ward (Chair), Councillor Mohammed Matloob (Vice-Chair), Councillor Michael Barnes, Councillor Ian Mitchell, Councillor Ted Owen, Councillor Sheila Pitt and Councillor Denver Tolley

Other Attendees

Julie Brough (Democratic Services Officer), Brian Edwards (Team Manager - Passenger Transport), John Gething (Group Manager - Business Support and Investment), Nick Holdcroft (Performance and Programme Manager), Colin Hunton (Principal Economic Development Officer - Regeneration), Mandy Pattinson (Scrutiny Officer), Marie Broadhurst (Performance Manager - Regeneration and Community Services) and Julian Read (Regeneration Projects Manager - Learning and Skills)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Simmonds (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Brian, Lubinski and Wanger.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS (13/02/08, 26/02/08 AND 28/02/08)

Resolved – That the minutes of the previous meetings held on 13 February, 26 February and 28 February 2008 be agreed as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (IF ANY)

None received.

4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE PERFORMANCE REPORT

Nick Holdcroft outlined the details of economic development performance against the Priority Improvement Plan, the Local Area Agreement and Best Value Performance Indicators. He made specific reference to the City Centre Programme which was on amber status and explained that there were a number of issues to be resolved regarding the economic appraisal and options analysis requirements in order to secure appropriate external funding and that there was currently no full time City Centre Programme Manager in place. He went on to explain the progress that was being made in respect of the Business District, East-West Precinct and Public Realm projects. He commented on the need to establish a new City Centre Programme Board and hoped that a City Centre Programme Manager would be in place by June 2008.

He went on to report upon the University Quarter Programme and explained that the LSC funding submission was currently being revised for the re-development of the Stoke FE College, Stoke Campus, and a decision on the funding was now expected in July 2008. He also referred to the worklessness programme and commented that the Motivate Plus initiative had been extended to June of this year. A higher level skills graduate retention programme was being run by Finest and the North Staffs Construction Employment Centre was also progressing well. Furthermore, a Youth Build Project was also running which currently provided 12 young people with real employment opportunities.

Continuing, Nick Holdcroft went on to report upon the Local Area Agreement Performance Indicators that were relevant to this Committee. Four out of the 11 indicators were currently on track with the remaining seven indicators currently off target and five of these indicators significantly off target. The Best Value Performance Indicators relevant to this Committee showed that eight out of the 13 Best Value Performance Indicators were currently hitting their targets. The remaining five indicators were current off target, with four of these indicators significantly off target. The remaining nine Best Value Performance Indicators were reported annually.

Committee Members made the following comments:

- Councillor Barnes expressed concern over the delay of the appointment of a City Centre Programme Manager and the establishment of a Programme Board. He suggested that the Committee receive a further report which outlined the specific issues in relation to these two items.
- Councillor Ward enquired as to why there were significant delays in progressing some of the City Centre projects.

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Nick Holdcroft explained that funding applications to the various agencies were quite complex and often required an economic appraisal. He agreed that it was important for a Programme Manager to be in place as soon as possible.

- Councillor Mitchell expressed concern that the AWM funding application for retail had slipped from January 2008 to July 2009.
- Councillor Matloob queried how progress could be made when a City Centre Programme Manager was not in place.

Nick Holdcroft confirmed that the role of City Centre Programme Manager was currently being covered by Aktar Choudhury on a part-time basis.

- Councillor Owen queried why the original City Centre Steering Group had been disestablished.

Nick Holdcroft explained that the Steering Group had not been effective and therefore a Programme Board was to be established to bring a new focus and to manage the risks of the project.

- Councillor Pitt made reference to the East-West Precinct and asked what had happened to the plans that the Committee had seen a few years ago and also queried where the decision had been taken to extend the boundaries of the original scheme.
- The Committee expressed concern that the appropriate officers were not in attendance at the meeting to address the concerns being raised.
- Councillor Mitchell felt that there was not enough communication on the progress of the projects.
- Councillor Matloob made reference to the worklessness programme and believed that worklessness was a factor in some of the delays of the other projects.
- Councillor Barnes commented that sometimes job descriptions and associated duties were not always made clear and job titles were elaborated which could deter people from applying for a job they would be able to do.
- Councillor Ward queried whether the Local Area Agreement targets were realistic.

John Gething explained that the approach to the new Local Area Agreement targets was to be stretching but achievable. He indicated that in some instances, targets were being exceeded but when this target was broken down to specific areas of the City, this was not always the case.

- Councillor Barnes made reference to the number of people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and commented that it was important that the right programmes were in place to address this target. He requested a more detailed report on the work in improving the target,
- Councillor Barnes made reference to the indicators in relation to planning applications and felt that the Development Control should be reviewed as a whole including how applications were dealt with and more member involvement.

Action (i) – That a report giving more detailed information regarding the City Centre, University Quarter and what is being done to address those people not in employment, education or training (NEETS) be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee alongside the Committee’s next performance report.

Action (ii) – That the Committee expresses its disappointment that the appropriate officers were not in attendance and requests that the relevant officers attend future meetings of this Committee to answer questions on performance.

5 BURSLEM REGENERATION TEAM

Julian Read confirmed that he had been post as Interim Town Centre Manager for Burslem since February 2008. He indicated that since being in post, he had picked up the frustrations of Members regarding the regeneration of Burslem. He explained that Burslem Town Centre was in a dire situation with all retailers struggling to survive. He explained that his brief was to support the regeneration of the town centre to make it economically viable for the future. He was, therefore, focusing upon three main actions, namely the formation of a team to manage the regeneration of Burslem; re-constituting the Burslem Regeneration Company Board and the review of the Aitkins 2004 Burslem Master Plan and Urban Design Action Plan. The Burslem Regeneration Team had re-located to the Burslem School of Art in February 2008 and consisted of three team members. Public Realm Work was also to commence in May 2008 in Swan Square. He referred to the Burslem Regeneration Company Board and explained that membership had dwindled over the years and therefore they were looking to re-constitute and establish a new board with ten board members. Selection to the new board would be on the basis of individual merit, commitment to the area, and also with regard to the composition of the Regeneration Company Board overall, including a mix of skills, knowledge and professional background and attributes required. The closing date for applications was 7 April 2008 and appointments and interviews taking place week commencing 11 April 2008. In respect of the Burslem Master Plan, he proposed to bring in consultants to review and refresh the Master Plan and Urban Design Action Plan and to comment upon the actions that had not been delivered and put forward any appropriate recommendations. He hoped that this

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review would be completed by May 2008. He hoped that following the review, they could start delivering on some of the actions and bring empty buildings back into use.

Committee Members made the following comments:

- Councillor Tolley commented that there had been plenty of support given to the regeneration of Burslem but that there had been a lack of investment in the past. He queried what had happened to the scheme to bring the former Burslem Indoor Market back into use and highlighted that the Queen's Theatre was underused and felt that there was a potential for it to be used as a museum as it still retained its original features, such as tiles and government rooms.

Julian Read explained that the Queen's Theatre was a 1000 seater venue and was aware that it was not hired out to members of the public. He agreed that a way should be found to bring it back into use. He referred to the former Burslem Indoor Market and explained that a developer had been given an exclusivity agreement to come up with a scheme but had failed to do so within the agreed timescales. Therefore, an appraisal was to be undertaken to find an alternative use.

- Councillor Owen commented that retail had been lost in Burslem and felt that the live/work units were not appropriate for the town centre. He felt that it was crucial that the local people were involved in any decisions regarding Burslem and indicated that the Burslem Regeneration Company had never had local people on its board in the past. Furthermore, as a ward councillor, he had been refused to see minutes of its meetings.
- Councillor Matloob felt that there was no long-term strategy for Burslem and commented that the rents should not be too high and indicated that there were a number of buildings of architectural merit that were standing empty.
- Councillor Owen commented that Ceramica had never been supported and not been used to its full potential.
- Councillor Owen queried whether the Burslem Regeneration Company was to be given its own budget

Julian Read confirmed that he was only aware of a budget specifically for Support Officer costs. He confirmed that they had a commitment from the Regional Development Agency to regenerate Burslem which they had not had in the past.

Action – That the report be noted.

6 BUS SERVICES

Brian Edwards reported upon the progress being made against the recommendations of a task and finish group study into improving bus services which was carried out in 2007. He highlighted that some key developments included:

- Launch of a night bus network from the 1 February 2008;
- Launch of a new City-wide 'dial-a-ride' scheme from 1 April 2008;
- A new range of integrated rail and bus tickets which had been extended to include daily, weekly, monthly and annual tickets;
- New National free bus travel schemes for the over-60s;
- On-going growth of multi-operator tickets;
- Progression of plans for new City Centre bus station involving local operators.

Committee Members made the following comments:

- Councillor Tolley expressed a wish to see a state-of-the-art bus station which was under cover, provided on-time information, information desk and security. He felt strongly that there should be separation between buses and pedestrians so that once a bus was ready to leave, pedestrians were unable to get to the concourse area.

Brian Edwards confirmed that the issues raised had been included in the specification that the consultants had been asked to cost and that separating buses and the public was fundamental to the design of the new bus station. He hoped that they would be in receipt of a blueprint within the next few weeks.

Resolved – That the progress against the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group into improving bus services be noted.

7 SOCIAL ENTERPRISE PROGRESS REPORT

Colin Hunton reported upon the progress and development of the Social Enterprise Initiative and its importance in contributing to the parameters of the social, environmental and wealth creation aspects of the sub-region. He indicated that Social Enterprise North Staffordshire (SENS) had proved to be a positive instrument in offering support and guidance to the local social enterprise sector. As a result, he was due to go to the Houses of Commons with the local MP, Joan Walley, in order to highlight the work on social enterprise in North Staffordshire. He went on to refer to the recommendations that had been made in the task and finish group that looked at social enterprise and highlighted that social enterprise was good for regeneration and

brought communities together and empowered people. He referred to the recommendation to improve future procurement of goods and services and confirmed that social enterprises were directed to support agencies who could assist with their application and through the complicated procurement processes. He further confirmed that an audit was currently being undertaken on the skills in the area so that this could be forwarded to developers.

Action – That the report be noted.

8 WORK PROGRAMME: PLANNING AND PROGRESS

Mandy Pattinson provided details of the Committee's activities and progress being made with the previous actions that had been identified by the Committee.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed that the item on business space that should have come forward to this meeting be re-scheduled for a future meeting and that the meeting on the 7 May 2008 be cancelled.

The Committee noted the action taken against previous recommendations and agreed to delete the worklessness and transforming North Staffordshire items.

Action (i) – That the progress against the previous actions of the Committee be noted.

Action (ii) – That a report on Business Space be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee

Action (iii) – That the next meeting scheduled to be held on 7 May 2008 be cancelled.

9 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE SUMMARY SHEET (FOR INFORMATION)

A copy of the actions made by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee held on 25 February 2008 was submitted for information.

Action – That the Action Sheet be noted.

COUNCILLOR BRIAN WARD (CHAIR)