

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC VITALITY AND JOBS

Thursday, 29th January, 2004, at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Councillor Partridge (Chair)
Councillor Mrs Patrick (Vice Chair)
Councillors Blood, Mrs Bowkley, Mrs Cowell and Knowles together with the Assistant Director of Housing (Resources & Planning) (as Lead Officer to the Committee), the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning (as E-Champion), the Senior Assistant Director of Finance, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration), the Head of ICT Services, Mr Dugdale (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Mr Manson (Executive Directorate) and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law & Property).

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th December, 2003 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the substitution of the word "insufficiency" for the word "sufficiency" in the second line of the footnote to minute 36 (Making the Difference Programme - the work of the five Corporate Improvement Groups).

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MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Arising from consideration of the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th December, 2003, it was:-

RESOLVED

That Councillor Ms Harris replace Councillor Crumpton as a member of the ICT Policy Working Group of this Committee.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bramall, Ms Harris, Lowe, K Turner and Zarab.

44 SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor Mrs Bowkley had been appointed to serve as a substitute for Councillor Lowe for this meeting of the Committee.

45 PRINCE'S TRUST

An update on the survival rate of businesses started up in Dudley with the assistance of the Prince's Trust over the previous three years, was given by Tony Mitton of the Lye Business Centre. In reporting a survival rate of 71% over this period, which compared favourably with the rest of the Country, Mr Mitton paid tribute to the assistance provided by volunteer mentors.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and welcomed.

46 PROPOSED REVENUE BUDGET 2004/05

A joint report of the Director of the Urban Environment and the Director of Finance was submitted on the proposals of the Executive for the Revenue Budget and Council Tax for 2004/05. In introducing the report, the Senior Assistant Director of Finance explained the composition of the Provisional Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 2004/05 in the context of the Council's current financial position and amplified the information in the report relating to growth and savings, with particular reference to those issues for which the Committee had responsibility.

In the discussion, a question was asked regarding the proposed funding for certain aspects of the Borough Festival by means of increased sponsorship. In response, the Senior Assistant Director of Finance confirmed that should increased sponsorship not be forthcoming, other avenues of funding would be explored. In response to a further question regarding proposed savings on regeneration activities, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration) indicated that the monies had been required for posts aimed at securing European Finance for the Brierley Hill Regeneration Partnership and this objective had now been achieved.

In a reply to a question, the Senior Assistant Director confirmed that while the results of the consultation had been taken into account when considering overall budget proposals, there was no direct correlation between the “specific efficiency” savings proposed in the report with the consultation exercise results.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and the proposals contained therein received.

ICT STRATEGY REVIEW

A joint report of the Director of Finance, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning was submitted on the current ICT Strategy and seeking consideration of the development a revised strategy for 2004/08.

The report incorporated appendices setting out progress made on ICT strategy targets for 2003; a proposed time schedule for ICT issues over the period for 2004-08; and a paper estimating the impact ICT would make on services provided by the Council ten years into the future.

In the context of Customer Access to Services, a comment was made by one member that, while advancements in the use of information technology were to be commended, the ability of the public to utilise such facilities was sometimes slower. In response, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, as E-Champion, confirmed that it was the intention that information technology would add to the facilities available to the public, rather than replace them. In response to a further question on progress with broadband, the Head of IT Services explained the current situation.

Regarding the target on e-forms/e-bookings, the Head of IT Services explained the action being taken to meet the targets. Regarding the time schedule for ICT related activities over the period from 2004-08, the Head of IT Services amplified the nature of certain of the initiatives.

RESOLVED

That the approach being taken to the production of the new ICT Strategy for 2004/08, as indicated in the support now submitted, and the appendices thereto, be supported.

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BRIERLEY HILL AND HALESOWEN TOWN CENTRE
REGENERATION PLAN REVIEW

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted updating the Committee on the development of plans for the regeneration of Brierley Hill and Halesowen Town Centres.

RESOLVED

That the progression of the developments plans for Brierley Hill and Halesowen Town Centres, as referred to in the report now submitted, be noted and supported.

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THE WEST MIDLANDS AND BLACK COUNTRY VISITOR
ECONOMY STRATEGIES AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted updating the Committee on the development of the West Midlands and Black Country Visitor Economy Strategies, and the work undertaken by the Tourism Development Team in the Directorate for the 2003/04.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted and that the Executive be recommended that the progression of the West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy, the Black Country Visitor Economy Strategy and the emerging visitor economy action plans for the Black Country and Dudley M.B.C., continue to be supported.
- (2) That the Executive be recommended that the work of the Tourism Development Team, in assisting the diversification of the Borough's economy, continue to be supported.

- (3) That the Executive be recommended that the membership fee previously paid to Visit Heart of England, the Regional Tourist Board (£9,850.31) for 2003/04, be retained for payment of the new Service Level Agreement with their successors and that the inclusion of the payment in future budgetary provision for developing the Black Country Visitor Economy, be supported.
- (4) That the report be referred to the Economic Strategy Working Group of the Committee for detailed consideration in time for the conclusions of the consideration to be included in the penultimate draft strategy document.

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PROPOSED CORPORATE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY PRIORITIES FOR 2004/05

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted seeking consideration for the proposed corporate equality and diversity priorities for the Council in 2004/05.

In the discussion on the issue, in response to a question, Mr Manson of the Executive Directorate indicated the manner in which progress on the proportionality of disabled people and ethnic minority communities within the Council's work force were monitored. In response to a further question, Mr Manson confirmed that appointments to posts under the Council were made on the basis of the best person for the post.

In reply to a question from a member regarding a supernumerary scheme for persons with disabilities, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration) indicated that the Council were looking at various training opportunities for disabled people.

RESOLVED

That the proposed priorities for equality and diversity for 2004/05, as referred to in the report now submitted, be noted and supported.

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COUNCIL PLAN MONITORING

A report of the Lead Officer was submitted on performance on the relevant priorities and targets of the Council Plan, falling within the terms of reference of this Select Committee.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report now submitted be noted.
 - (2) That a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee clarifying the nature of the 100% target in respect of BVPI CP(GS) 4(A) and (B).
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FEEDBACK FROM WORKING GROUPS

A report of the Chair of the ICT Strategy Working Group was submitted on points arising at the meeting of the Working Group held on 20th January 2004. The report summarised the nature of the business considered at that meeting and of the Working Group on each respective matter.

The Lead Officer to the Committee then gave an oral summary of the three presentations made to the meeting of the Economic Strategy Working Group held on 27th January 2004.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report of the Chair of the ICT Strategy Working Group be received and noted.
- (2) That the oral report now given by the Lead Officer to the Committee on the activities of the Economic Strategy Working Group be received and noted.
- (3) That the Lead Officer to the Committee send details of the presentation made on New Deal and Job Centre Plus to all members of the Committee.
- (4) That arrangements be made for the presentations on New Deal and Job Centre Plus to be made across all directorates.
- (5) That a presentation on Future Skills Dudley be also made to all directorates.
- (6) That a presentation on the Innovation Centres operated by the Knowledge Centre at Wolverhampton University be made to a future meeting of the Economic Strategy Working Group.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm.

CHAIR