

## **SPECIAL MEETING OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC REGENERATION**

Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2005, at 6 p.m.  
in Committee Room 3 at the Council House, Dudley

### **PRESENT:-**

Councillor K Turner (Chairman)  
Councillor Ms Harris (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillors Banks, Body, Mrs Cowell, Jackson, Knowles, Mottram and  
C Wilson.

### **Officers**

Assistant Director of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) (as Lead  
Officer to the Committee), Head of Policy and Performance, Principal  
Regeneration Manager, Building Surveying Manager and Mrs M Johal  
(Directorate of Law & Property).

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### **MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19<sup>th</sup>  
October, 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed  
subject to an amendment to Minute No 29 by the deletion of the  
last sentence of the third paragraph and the last paragraph of  
the preamble to that minute.

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### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Ms Harris declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda  
Item No 5 (Well Being, Independence, Choice and Improvement –  
Disability and Economic Regeneration) in view of being the Chair of  
Dudley Beacon and Castle Primary Care Trust.

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### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of  
Councillors Mrs Patrick and Rogers.

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### **APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE FOR THIS MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE**

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It was reported that Councillor Banks had been appointed to serve as a substitute for Councillor Rogers for this meeting of the Committee only.

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WELL BEING, INDEPENDENCE, CHOICE AND IMPROVEMENT

DISABILITY AND ECONOMIC REGENERATION

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted on a range of local circumstances for disabled people in the light of national initiatives to improve the life chances of disabled people.

The Lead Officer to the Committee informed the Committee that the Head of Policy and Performance would present the report and that the Principal Regeneration Manager would present findings in respect of training and unemployment, followed by the Building Surveying Manager who would give an update on views from within the employees with disabilities forum.

The Head of Policy and Performance presented the report and also circulated an Appendix to the report that had been omitted.

The Principal Regeneration Manager then briefly reported on training and unemployment in Dudley and presented facts and figures for the Borough. He reported that "Worklessness", a term used by Government that captured people that were unemployed and claiming either Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support, Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disability Allowance, with the figure for Dudley at 41,335 (November 2005) out of a working age population of 221,725 within the Borough. He indicated that Dudley was always perceived as a prosperous Borough when compared to Wolverhampton or Walsall, and suffered from a lack of allocated resources compared to neighbouring Local Authorities.

The Principal Regeneration Manager then talked about Future Skills Dudley (FSD), which was part of the Directorate of the Urban Environment's Economic Regeneration Division, with an annual operating budget of £3.5 million and approximately 55 staff. FSD operate a range of training and support centres across Dudley, which supports unemployed adults (over 18's) in acquiring the skills and experience that employers were looking for. Other support services such as mentoring and helping people with health and budget problems were also offered. Each year FSD supported around 900 unemployed clients and placed approximately 500 into employment. He indicated

that there was very little provision and funding available for the 16 and 17 year olds and unless they went to College or were fortunate to get on a Modern Apprenticeship Scheme, there was no other training available for them in many areas, such as construction. This created problems as this two-year gap often led to the youngsters engaging in bad habits and when they reached 18 and enrolled at centres they found it hard to adapt.

He further reported that work was currently being pursued in an initiative in relation to the development of a set of Local Public Services Agreements (LPSA) for round two of projects, where funding was being offered for undertaking activities in the Borough. Currently there were four targets being pursued for Dudley under the theme of Economic Well Being, which included local jobs for local people and first rung learning, which could help both the under and over 18's. The Black Country Observatory produced regular information on deprivation figures, which includes the local worklessness figure per ward. The worst ward was currently Castle and Priory, with 2,580 people not in work from a total of 7,891 of working age, a rate of 32.7%.

The Principal Regeneration Manager and Head of Policy and Performance Review undertook to circulate to Members of the Committee the full facts, figures and maps referred to.

The Chairman commented that due to there not being any provision for the 16 and 17 year olds the two year gap could be disastrous and it was suggested that exhibits illustrating the issue should be placed in colleges, schools and other places where people assembled. The Head of Economic Well Being indicated that it was not just the lack of funding that was the difficulty but also that insurance and CRB issues were complicated and prohibited for the under 18's.

The Assistant Director of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) asked how the Committee could assist with supporting both the attraction of resources and the issues associated with reducing the worklessness numbers within the Borough. The Head of Policy and Review suggested that the Committee could support the submission of bids like LPSA for financial support and assist with the changing of the perception that Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council required less resources than many of our neighbours. The suggestion was supported.

During the ensuing discussion it was suggested that the Prince's Trust be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee with a view to giving a presentation. A Member also mentioned that he was a member of the St Thomas' Network project who worked with young children and he undertook to provide information on whether funding was received for 16-18 year olds.

A presentation from the Building Surveying Manager addressed the problem of identifying the actual number of people with disabilities in the Council's workforce. It built upon some personal observations from the Staff with Disabilities Forum and outlined some of the real or perceived obstacles that may prevent some people from declaring a disability that may affect their ability to carry out their normal day-to-day activities.

The Committee acknowledged that, whilst most information about people with disabilities came via the recruitment process, little was known about those who subsequently acquired a disability. It discussed the practicalities of getting better information but recognised that the Council should be clear about the reasons why the information is needed. The report also gave an illustration highlighting a technical weakness in the Corporate Redeployment Policy.

The Vice-Chairman also commented that work was being undertaken by hospitals to help patients get back into work and indicated that Local Authorities should be doing the same. It was considered that people on medication and people who suffered from other ailments should also receive the same help as those with a physical disability and flexible arrangements should be made accordingly.

The Head of Policy and Review advised that employees who were not registered as disabled but suffered other ailments or problems could speak to their Manager to discuss individual requirements.

The Lead Officer to the Committee undertook to attend the next meeting of the Staff with Disabilities Group with a view to conveying the comments made on behalf of the Committee and to report back to a future meeting. Councillor Body indicated that he would also like to be given the opportunity to attend.

The Chairman suggested that a press release, to include comments made at the meeting, should be prepared and submitted to the local media with a view to encouraging members of the public to participate in the meetings and that a "Public Forum" agenda item be included on agendas for future meetings. It was noted that this latter matter was being dealt with.

## RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report and Appendix to the report now submitted, be noted.
- (2) That a further update report be submitted to a future meeting with specific reference to adults with learning disabilities or mental health needs and employment as a significant area of development.

- (3) That a press release be prepared and submitted to the local media to include an article on the comments made by the Committee with a view to encouraging members of the public to participate in future discussions.
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GREETINGS

The Chairman wished those present, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

He also indicated that, in view of his illness during the meeting, he would be speaking to Councillor Jackson after the meeting to extend best wishes to him on behalf of the Committee.

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The meeting ended at 8.15 pm.

CHAIRMAN