

Select Committee on Economic Regeneration – 8th September 2005

Report of the Chairman to the Committee

Annual Report of the Select Committee on Economic Regeneration 2004/2005

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the annual report to the Council for the review of the 2004/05 Municipal Year.

Background

2. Article 6 of the Council's Constitution requires Select Committees to report annually to the full Council on their workings and to make recommendations for the future work programmes and associated working methods if appropriate. It was agreed through the Select Committee Chairmen that the annual report of this Select Committee should be made to the September cycle of Council.
3. In deciding its work programme for 2004/05 the Committee chose to concentrate on a manageable list of important issues to ensure that they could be properly scrutinised whilst at the same time giving the Committee some flexibility to add some additional items that arose during the course of the year.

Work Programme

4. Accordingly, the planned work programme for the Committee in 2004/05 was as follows: -
 - Brierley Hill Regeneration Partnership
 - Decline of Dudley's Manufacturing Base
 - Community Development/Community Business Development
 - Unitary Development Plans
 - Town Centres Plans
 - ICT Strategy Issues
 - Innovation and Incubation Centres
 - Visitor Economy Strategy
 - The New Deal Programme

The Committee's work in relation to some of the above and other major items considered is set out below.

Brierley Hill Regeneration Partnership

5. This was allocated to the Economic Regeneration Working Group along with the Unitary Development Plan, New Technology Centre and Diversification of the Manufacturing Base.

Presentation on CMIS (Committee Management Information System)

6. We received a presentation from the Directorate of Law and Property on CMIS, which was a system currently being piloted in Democratic Services as part of the E-Government initiative to become web-enabled by 2006. In light of the presentation it was queried whether it would be possible to include an electronic version of interests as declared by Members onto CMIS. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to investigate the issue and it has accordingly been implemented.

Select Committee on Lifelong Learning – Resolution of 6th October 2004

7. A resolution was received from the Select Committee on Lifelong Learning seeking consideration of the proportion of black and minority ethnic applicants appointed to posts under the Council, in comparison to the numbers of candidates short-listed, and having regard to the Council's targets, for posts both within the remit of the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning and of the Council generally. The matter was referred to the Equality and Diversity Working Group for investigation.

Proposed Revenue Budget 2005/06

8. During discussion on the issue it was commented that the proposals should be looked at thoroughly and particular reference was made to issues and concerns based around transport and it was suggested that greater resources should be allocated to address the transport issues. Concerns expressed by Members in relation to transport being given a higher priority were referred to the Cabinet.

ICT Strategy Issues

9. From the presentations and reports submitted to the Committee, it was noted that only one high risk priority outcome now remained, that in respect of G24: Integration of customer relationship management systems with back office activity in relation to CATS and that in respect of compliance with BVPI 157. To ensure compliance and regular monitoring it was agreed that further reports on this Outcome be submitted to future meetings of the Committee to be held in the 2005/06 Municipal Year.

Progress on Adoption of the Unitary Development Plan and Preparation of the Town Centre Masterplans and the Implications of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Order Act 2004

10. In view of the significant changes to the national, regional and local planning process, it was agreed that a further comprehensive presentation on the new planning regime should be given at a future meeting of the Committee in the 2005/06 Municipal Year.

Economic Regeneration Working Group

11. The Committee agreed to appoint the Economic Regeneration Working Group for the 2004/05 Municipal Year with the terms of reference of the former Economic Strategy Working Group and comprising membership of Councillors Mrs Cowell, Ms Harris (Chairman), Islam, Mrs Patrick, Rogers and C Wilson.

Recommendations Relating to Signposting and Business Crime

12. The Working Group referred recommendations to the Select Committee in relation to the Select Committee on Community Safety being recommended to ascertain if partnership working could be explored as an avenue to address the retention of, and attracting new businesses to sites where vandalism had occurred. The Working Group also recommended that the Select Committee on Community Safety be requested to refer the issue of business crime generally to the Jobs Theme Group for Crime and Disorder Reduction of the local strategic partnership for detailed consideration. The Committee also expressed concern in relation to publicity for business in the Borough and that a substantial amount of signposting in the Borough was out of date and referred the matter to the Select Committee on the Environment with a view to reviewing the need for signposting in the Borough to be updated and specifically signposting in King Street and Flood Street in light of a recent tragic accident.

Brierley Hill Regeneration Partnership Visit

13. On the 21st September, 2004, a number of Members from the Working Group visited the offices of the Brierley Hill Regeneration Partnership and toured the developments at Merry Hill and Brierley Hill Town Centre. From the presentation given it was clear that we were not seeing a Government agency coming into and planting a new town but the moulding of the best ideas from the private and public sectors to create the framework for the kind of town centre development that was more suited to the local environment and closely aligned to the aspirations of the local communities. Following the formal presentation, a more informal 'walkabout' took place which included visiting a number of the new residential units on the site. One of the developments consisted of flats backing onto a new car park and despite the surroundings, all the units had been sold. The new car park for the British Home Stores (BHS) offered secure parking for the flats and it was explained that, owing to the quality and high finishing standards of the car park, vandalism had been low.
14. A number of other sites were then visited, most notably at the Briars School. This site and surrounding area demonstrated that the distance from Brierley Hill Town Centre was in reality no different than the distance across the present Merry Hill Development. It was envisaged that a centrepiece walkway would link the present Merry Hill Development to the present centre of Brierley Hill. This would give access to the LIFT scheme and allow crossing of the proposed relief road through a series of well-planned crossing points. A wide range of civic provision sites were planned to respond to the further creation of 10,000 new jobs and over 1,000 new homes. It was felt on the day that this was a showcase scheme for the area which would not only have an impact on Brierley Hill but its beneficial influence would impact on the rest of the borough.

Recommendations Relating to the Use of Buses

15. The Working Group received a presentation on transport infrastructure. Reference was made to a need to give consideration to highlighting the advantages of using buses as it was felt that educating people would be the greatest challenge. Arising from the presentation, Members felt that a more general study should be carried out in identifying the reason for the decline in the elderly using buses, even though they had free bus passes. The comments made were referred to the Select Committee on the Environment with a view to incorporating them into the report on the Local Transport Plan 2.

Recommendation Concerning Innovation Centres

16. The Working Group undertook extensive research and work in relation to innovation and incubation centres throughout the 2004/05 Municipal Year. The economy in Dudley has reached a stage of development, where in order to go forward, there is a need to stimulate the number of 'added value' jobs and entrepreneurial activity that will bring in higher skills and higher incomes.
17. The Working Group tackled the question of how to raise added value and bring higher incomes into the economy by considering potential and existing models. One of the most successful of these seems to be by instigating the provision of a catalyst in the economy through an Innovation an Incubation Centre. These can stimulate innovation via encouraging the development of new business, services, products or processes and provide support for new market entry entrepreneurs as well as existing companies.
18. Research and investigation of a number of existing innovation type centres was undertaken by the Working Group. A visit was undertaken to Lye Business centre, Coventry University Technology and Techno Centre and the University of Warwick Science Park. Presentations were made on the Steinbeis Europa Zentrum model and the Black Country Innovation Study. Oxford Innovation, a company that has evolved from the Oxford Trust, gave a presentation about their work and individual members also investigated and reported on Staffordshire Business Innovation Centre, Shotton Enterprise Centres, SPARK at Wolverhampton Science Park and Barnsley Business Innovation Centre.
19. The Working Group considered the comparative success factors, such as the extent of the involvement of Higher Education Partners, business sponsorship, specialisation and location, as well as the actual services each provider offered, including business financing. The view about the preferred model was let open by the Working Group as it was felt that a bespoke centre that catered to Dudley's set of circumstances would be needed.
20. It was clear that Local Authorities had played a major role in the area, even with those Innovation Centres that might be deemed to be independent. This is a route that the Working Group concluded that Dudley MBC should follow.
21. The next steps would be to put serious resource and research into what model and services would support Dudley's economic objectives.

22. The Working Group via the Select Committee submitted recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration requesting funding be allocated for a project to be set up to define the scope and needs of an Innovation centre for Dudley, including resources for officer time and research and feasibility costs. The proposal was subsequently approved by Cabinet on 20th April, 2005.

Equality and Diversity Working Group

23. The Committee also appointed the Equality and Diversity Working Group for the 2004/05 Municipal Year with the terms of reference of the former Equal Opportunities and Disability Discrimination Working Group and comprising membership of Councillors Body, Mrs Cowell, Johnston, Mrs Patrick (Chairman), Rogers and K Turner.

Disabled Access to Buildings

24. A report in relation to the Disability Access Strategy was submitted and Members commented that the £300,000 allocated towards modification of disability access to all Council buildings was insufficient as a lot of the buildings were old and difficult to adapt. Members expressed concern in relation to the allocation, approximately £1000, which would be taken out of the £300,000 to conduct an audit of all Council buildings. In light of these concerns it was later reported that the audit survey would be funded through alternative means.

Employment Monitoring Issues

25. A presentation was received from the Head of Personnel and Support Services informing members that a new personnel and payroll system was to be introduced, making it easier to extract relevant employment data. Members referred to the need to encourage employees to disclose that they had a disability and it was further commented that work should be undertaken, in conjunction with Disability Groups, to include clearer information, for example, in application forms and on the Intranet with a view to increasing the figures.
26. The Assistant Director (Community Education Division) also reported that issues had been identified within the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning and that it had been discovered that some statistics were incomplete due to teachers being employed by schools and a breakdown in figures of their staff not always being recorded. It was reported that a new calculation system was being pursued that would help to identify concerns that had been highlighted in relation to the decrease in numbers for black and ethnic minority people at the appointment stage.
27. During the year we also considered the following principal items: -
- Annual Review of Equality and Diversity 2004
 - Equality and Diversity Annual Report for 2003/04 for Directorates of Chief Executive's and Finance, ICT and Procurement
 - Best Value Performance Indicator BVPI 157 and ODPM Priority Outcomes – Progress Reports
 - Update of the Council's Capital Strategy
 - Draft Scrutiny Protocol for Select Committees
 - Draft Protocol for Relationships Between Members and Officers of Dudley MBC

- Proposed Corporate Equality and Diversity Priorities for 2005/06
- Quarterly Corporate Performance Reports

Work Programme for 2005/06

28. At the meeting of the Select Committee held on 8th June 2005 the following Work Programme was agreed:-

- Chief Executive's Directorate Equality and Diversity Annual Report
- Annual Review of Equality and Diversity
- Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement Equality and Diversity Annual Report
- Best Value Performance Indicator BVPI 157 and ODPM Priority Outcomes – Progress Report
- Quarterly Corporate Performance Report
- Update of the Council's Capital Strategy
- Disability Access Strategy
- Update on Visits made by the Retired Mayor
- Progress on the Black Country Study
- Decline in Usage of Free Bus Passes
- Priority Outcome G24 of the ICT Strategy
- New Planning Regime
- Proposed Work Programme 2006/07
- Innovation and Incubation Centres

29. The Committee also agreed to reappoint the Economic Regeneration Working Group for the 2005/06 Municipal Year

Finance

30. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage.

Law

31. The requirement for the Committee to make an annual report to the Council is contained in Article 6 of the Constitution.

32. The relevant statutory provisions regarding the Council's Constitution are contained in Part II of the Local Government Act 2000, together with Regulations, Orders and Statutory Guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

33. The legal provisions regarding the issues referred to in paragraph 2.3 above are indicated in the reports submitted to the Committee on those issues.

Equality Impact

34. This report complies with the Council's equality and diversity policy.

Recommendation

35. It is recommended that the annual report of the Select committee on Economic Regeneration for 2004/2005, as set out above, be referred to the Council, together with any comments thereon made by the Cabinet.



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Chairman of the Select Committee on Economic Regeneration

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List of Background Papers

- Agenda and Minutes for the 2004/05 Municipal Year