

Minutes of the Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 9th July, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

Present:

Councillor D Tyler (Chair)
Councillor A Finch (Vice Chair)
Councillors S Ali, J Cowell, W Duckworth, N Gregory, C Hale, I Kettle, P Miller,
R Scott-Dow and E Taylor.

Officers:

R Sims (Assistant Director, Adult, Community and Housing Services - Housing Strategy and Private Sector), (Lead Officer to the Committee), P Coyne (Assistant Director - Economic Regeneration and Transportation), G Dean (Head of Street and Green Care), N Ford (Manager of Executive Support Team), H Martin (Head of Planning), J Scott (Principal Executive Support Officer), M Williams (Assistant Director – Environmental Management) and Mrs K Buckle (Democratic Services Officer).

1 **Welcome**

The Chair welcomed all those present to the meeting.

2 **Declarations of Interest**

No member declared an interest in any matter to be considered at this meeting.

3 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th March, 2014, be approved as a correct record and signed.

4 **Annual Scrutiny Programme 2014/15**

The Committee considered a report of the Lead Officer and Director of Corporate Resources on the items proposed and suggested for inclusion in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for detailed consideration during 2014/15.

- (a) There followed a presentation by the Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration and Transportation in relation to Economic Development including inward investment. In relation to re-investment it was noted that in view of competition from Developers and the lack of available land, that speed was of the essence in dealing with issues including the cost to assemble sites and de-contamination.

The work with Local Enterprise Partnerships was outlined and the funding available to remove some of the risks from sites in order to make them readily available.

The requirement at Black Country Level to investigate funding streams, how land supply problems were being dealt with and in effect what was being carried out well and what could be dealt with better.

Following the presentation by the Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration and Transportation, Members asked questions and made comments which were responded to by the Assistant Director as follows:-

- That information sharing with Black Country neighbours was reciprocated by them with some enquiries emerging through the Local Enterprise Partnership in order to investigate sites across the four Black Country authorities, to ascertain best options and in order to retain existing businesses within the Dudley Borough;
- The availability of larger sites of land remained a problem as these may have to be assembled in terms of the need for access roads and de-contamination and the Council continually reviewed industrial sites across the Dudley Borough, in order to work both with owners and developers to obtain funding in order to make land available for those interested parties.
- The various commercial investments in the Dudley Borough during 2014/15 were outlined including the Castle Gate Development, the possible provision of a supermarket on the Cavendish House Site, Dudley, the investment in the market place and the provision of housing on Constitution Hill and surrounding areas.
- It was noted that new investment discussions were ongoing and there was a requirement to have a balance against a better portfolio of investment land together with the need to provide sites to existing businesses in order to create economic growth and retain those businesses within the Dudley Borough.
- That there continued to be robust auditing of new business funding streams.

- Reference was made to the advertising that had taken place in relation to the investment zone at the Waterfront, Brierley Hill, detailing the space available which would provide good office space and the two year business rate freeze that was offered as an incentive with a significant campaign taking place once the sale was completed.
- The work that was required with Black Country partners in relation to regional investment inquiries and the requirement to develop expertise with partners, in order to recognise the nature of the site required and the supply need in order to know how to develop the site.

Details of the Black Country Reinvestment Fund and the funding streams available from Europe in relation to investments for local businesses were referred to together with the presentation that Members had considered last year regarding that funding. The Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration and Transportation invited Members to consider whether to invite the Black Country Society to provide a further updated presentation to the Committee.

The Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration and Transportation also referred to further ring fenced investment for the Dudley Borough and in particular the funding available for assisted jobs and the work conducted with the Department for Trade and Industry, in relation to inward investment and job creation.

Following a discussion in relation to the provision of services to businesses by Dudley Business First, the Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration and Transportation undertook to investigate the possibility of providing property and landowners in the Dudley Borough with information in relation to Dudley Business First.

The Chair suggested that in order to investigate issues and problems with investment and Agents, that a Commercial Estate Agent be invited to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration and Transportation referred to future growth in the economy and the construction training and funding offered by the new College facility in Dudley and the wish to protect and expand engineering and manufacturing in the Dudley Borough. He also referred to the Burnt Tree project that had been completed in order to provide access to motorways.

The Lead Officer undertook to provide Members with details of the population resident in Dudley Town Centre.

- (b) The Assistant Director of Environmental Management outlined the area for scrutiny of Environmental Management, Commercial Services referring to strategies for waste and highway services. He advised that there were a number of services that operated on a commercial basis including trade waste and grounds maintenance.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Management referred to the following:-

- The requirement to expand on existing services and skills and the possibility of working with partners to develop services, although it was accepted that there was legislation constraints on the services that could be provided;
- Ensuring that employment opportunities were offered and the need to ensure a more robust framework in relation to proposed business opportunities;
- The requirement to be competitive in relation to tendering for services;
- The benchmarking data that was used to rate public services against the provision of services within the private sector and that the Council was reaching the top five percent in relation to many services it offered;
- That in expanding services this could benefit local businesses especially in relation to trade waste services;
- That following comparison soft market test exercises it had become apparent that there were certain services that could not be provided efficiently and an example was referred to relating to full re-construction of a carriageway;
- That in order to work efficiently should a team of workers be deployed to a particular area commercial interests would also be addressed within that same area;
- That there were dedicated trade waste crews and loyalty to those who procured Council services for example assisting with snow clearing at schools;
- That whatever services could be provided to provide added value for the public would be targeted including services for small businesses;

Following the presentation Members made comments and suggestions in particular relating to:-

That the provision of services by neighbouring authorities should be investigated;

A request for private sector bench marking data to be provided to future meetings of the Committee during the municipal year;

Following further discussion it was agreed that in relation to the early part of the Committee cycle Economic Development including Inward Investment be scrutinised followed by Environmental Management, Commercial Services in January 2015.

In relation to witnesses, the Chair suggested that further partners be identified particularly those that would provide a better understanding in relation to the business community and environmental recycling facilities.

Resolved

- (1) That the issues suggested for scrutiny in 2014/15 as recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, and as set out in the report now submitted and expanded upon as set out above, be endorsed.
- (2) That a cross party working group be established in order to consider the items for scrutiny and conduct site visits as appropriate.

The meeting ended at 7.40 p.m.

CHAIR