

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC REGENERATION

Wednesday, 1st September, 2004, at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Councillor K Turner (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Cowell, Crumpton, Mrs Dunn, Ms Harris, Islam, Jackson, Knowles, Mrs Patrick and Rogers together with the Assistant Director of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) (as Lead Officer to the Committee), Director of Finance, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning (as Corporate E-Champion), Head of ICT Services, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration), A Humphreys (Directorate of Finance) and Mrs Johal (Directorate of Law & Property).

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1st July, 2004 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made by the following Members for the reasons indicated:

Councillor Ms Harris declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 8 insofar as it related to the Lift project in view of her being the Chairman of Dudley Beacon and Castle Primary Care Trust.

Councillor K Turner declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 8 (Update of the Council's Capital Strategy) insofar as it related to the Castle Hill Redevelopment in view of his being a trustee for Dudley Zoo.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Body and C Wilson.

SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor Crumpton had been appointed to serve as a substitute for Councillor Body and that Councillor Mrs Dunn had been appointed to serve as a substitute for Councillor C Wilson for this meeting of the Committee only.

PRESENTATION ON CMIS (COMMITTEE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM)

A presentation was made by Mr Griffiths (Democratic Services Manager) and Ms Farrier (IT/Admin Officer) both from the Directorate of Law and Property, on the Committee Management Information System.

Mr Griffiths explained that CMIS had been formed as part of the E-Government initiative to become web-enabled by 2006. The system was used by other Local Authorities and was currently being piloted by Democratic Services and it was anticipated that the system would be going live from April 2005. The intention of CMIS was to lead eventually to a reduction in paper by electronically providing agendas and minutes to Members and officers as well as allowing members of the public to access documents via the web. He reported further that ongoing training would be provided for Members and that an IT Member Seminar was being planned in the near future where practical experience could be gained. Mr Griffiths invited Members to visit the Democratic Services Unit where officers would demonstrate the system to them.

Ms Farrier then demonstrated the capabilities of the CMIS system and briefly explained how it worked.

The Chairman queried whether it would be possible for CMIS to include all interests as declared by Members at the beginning of each municipal year and, in responding, Mr Griffiths agreed to investigate the matter.

During the ensuing discussion a Member queried how planning applications were to be incorporated electronically due to the extensive maps that were appended to each application. In response, Ms Farrier advised that the Directorate of the Urban Environment were pursuing a separate system and that CMIS would probably provide an index of planning applications accompanied by a hyperlink to the relevant application on the website.

A Member commented that computers were not as widely used as they should be owing to the continuing frustration of slow systems. In response, the Head of IT Services advised that a report had been submitted to the Member ICT Policy Working Group regarding the installation of a new upgraded supply system that would result in a dramatic increase in the speed of computers.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the presentation be received and noted.
- (2) That the possibility of including all member interests onto CMIS be investigated.
- (3) That the report previously submitted to the Member ICT Policy Working Group in relation to the installation of a new upgraded supply system for Members' computers, be submitted to the next meeting of the Select Committee.

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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC REGENERATION 2003/2004

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee seeking consideration of the annual report to Council for the review of the 2003/04 municipal year was submitted.

RESOLVED

That the annual report of the Select Committee on Economic Regeneration for 2003/2004 as set out be approved and referred to the Executive and Council.

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PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMIC REGENERATION WORKING GROUP

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee seeking consideration of the proposed Work Programme for the Economic Regeneration Working Group was submitted.

RESOLVED

That the provisional work programme for the Economic Regeneration Working Group be approved.

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UPDATE OF THE COUNCIL'S CAPITAL STRATEGY

A report of the Director of Finance seeking consideration on the update of the Council's Capital Strategy was submitted.

During the ensuing discussion a Member referred to the West Midlands Local Transport Plan and requested that full consultation should take place; that the impact on communities should be thoroughly considered and that the Executive be requested to enforce a strong monitoring process. In response, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration) advised that an officer from Dudley MBC would be dedicated to the continuous monitoring of the Plan. He reported further that the Black Country Study report would be available after June next year and would include proposals for the inclusion of the transport infrastructure to be improved.

The policy on Section 106 Agreements was discussed in relation to which questions were asked on departmental responsibility and the relationship of Agreements to the Capital Strategy. In responding the Director of Finance explained that Section 106 Agreements related to planning permission for housing developments that would have a knock on effect and that developers would be obliged to provide resources that were deemed necessary in relation to the development.

A Member made reference to Private Finance Initiative Schemes and commented that it had come to light that these schemes could be sold on the open market; consequently interests could result in being vested in unreliable sources. In responding, the Director of Finance assured Members that PFI contracts operated by Dudley had robust built in conditions and could only be bought or sold with the permission of Dudley MBC.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted be noted and referred to full Council.
- (2) That a report regarding the review of Section 106 Agreements be submitted to a future meeting of the Select Committee and that the Lead Member for Economic Regeneration be requested to attend and report on the review currently being undertaken.

A joint report of the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, as Corporate E-Champion and the Director of Finance updating members with the latest information on the Council's performance against BVPI 157, which requires 100% e-enablement of all services by 1st January 2006, was submitted.

The Head of ICT Services made a short presentation informing Members of the targets to be achieved and those that had been achieved to date. He also highlighted the groups and people that were in place to ensure the delivery of electronic services and that the targets were attained by the set dates. He reported that regular progress reports and the Implementing Electronic Government statement would be submitted to future meetings of the Select Committee.

The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning referred to Appendix A and pointed out that the Government had changed the rules and consequently action would need to be taken to ensure that the figure presently shown as 93.03% of e-enabled services by 2005/06 would be increased to 100%. The figure would be adjusted as confirmation was received from Directorates on implementation by 2005/06 for the new target.

A Member commented that the reports on ICT issues that were submitted were not reader friendly documents and included vast amounts of "jargon". In responding, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning agreed that reports on these issues did include specialist terms and jargon and were not always easy to understand. He assured Members that when documents were to be accessed by the public they would be drafted, as far as possible, in simple English. He agreed to ensure that a 'jargon-buster' would be supplied.

During the ensuing discussion a Member commented that to ensure wider usage of ICT systems, clear guidance was crucial and that efforts should be steered towards combating why wider usage was not occurring. She further commented that having high quality systems in place was not of any use if the public were not accessing them. A greater effort and determination should also be targeted in the poorer neighbourhoods and strategies created to include and reach those people for wider inclusivity. In responding, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning acknowledged that people from poorer areas did not have access to Information Technology to the extent but expressed confidence that in future years ICT would become more widely used by most people. He further pointed out that the ICT facilities in local libraries were of a high quality that included Broadband for faster internet access as well as flat screen monitors and commented that the facilities were heavily used by the public.

The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, as Corporate E-Champion offered to facilitate a presentation to a future meeting of the Committee to demonstrate key issues and features in the area.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted be noted and that regular update reports be submitted to the Committee.

- (2) That a list of acronyms be appended to all future reports.
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ECONOMIC STRATEGY FOR DUDLEY BOROUGH

A verbal presentation was made by the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration) updating Members on the Economic Strategy for Dudley Borough.

The Assistant Director of the Urban Environment made reference to the continuing problem with the low level of earnings and he pointed out that Dudley was the second lowest after Walsall in the Black Country. Average earnings in Dudley were approximately £20,000 per annum compared to the national level of £24,000 - £25,000 per annum.

He reported further that with regard to progress on the Unitary Development Plan, the Inspectors Report had been published and it was anticipated that the Plan would be adopted in early 2005. In relation to the Economic Strategy he confirmed that following consultations and scrutiny the strategy had been approved with the Council.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be received and noted.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm.

CHAIRMAN