

URBAN ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday 24th March, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor Tyler (Chair)
Councillor Hale (Vice Chair)
Councillors Casey, Duckworth, Hanif, Harley, J Jones, Jordan, Kettle and Westwood

Officers

Assistant Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (Housing Strategy and Private Sector) (Lead Officer to the Committee); Head of Economic Development, Principal Executive Support Officer (Both Directorate of the Urban Environment) and the Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Corporate Resources).

38 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Sykes.

39 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBER

It was noted that Councillor Casey had been appointed as a substitute member for Councillor Sykes for this meeting of the Committee only.

40 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

41 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22nd January, 2014, be approved as a correct record and signed.

42 PUBLIC FORUM

No matters were raised under this Agenda Item.

43 SUPPORT TO LOCAL BUSINESSES – SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A report of the Lead Officer was submitted outlining recommendations for Members of the Scrutiny Committee to consider for implementation in 2014/15.

The Head of Economic Development presented the report and referred to table 1 of the report submitted which outlined the proposed recommendations in respect of the three areas' that had been scrutinised by the Scrutiny Committee and Working Group.

In response to a question raised, the Head of Economic Development agreed to provide Members with clarity in relation to recommendation 1 of Table 1 to the report submitted, as to whether the evaluation of the local economic impact in respect of the number of BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) businesses supported and whether this was businesses run by or aimed at ethnic minorities.

Members commended officers on the excellent report which was easy to understand, streamlined and detailed and the support that had been provided in relation to this item. In particular thanks were expressed to the Economic Development Manager, Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration & Transportation), Head of Economic Development and the TORCh group.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the following outcomes be recommended to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration following the scrutiny of the Support to Local Businesses:-

Area 1 – Dudley Business Loan Fund

- (1) That an evaluation of the local economic impact of the Fund on a case-by-case basis be undertaken, taking into consideration the following outputs and outcomes:
- Jobs created and safeguarded and cost per job
 - New businesses created and safeguarded
 - New businesses surviving more than 12 months
 - Number of BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) businesses supported
 - Number of women-led businesses supported
 - Private sector leverage
 - Sales figure (£) safeguarded and new sales created
 - Satisfaction with BCRS in administering the Fund
 - New contracts secured

- (2) That the decision on extending the Loan Fund be deferred until the following actions are completed:
 - Complete recommendation (1) (full evaluation)
 - Benchmark performance of the Loan Fund delivered by BCRS and similar organisations in other local authority areas; and
 - Identify and appraise external funding opportunities to extend the Loan Fund (European and local) and, where appropriate, collaborate with other Black Country local authorities in delivering a Black Country Loan Fund
- (3) That a report be submitted to the Cabinet in 2014/15 outlining the performance of the Loan Fund against the agreed targets detailed in the report presented to Cabinet in March 2012.
- (4) That the performance of the Dudley Business Loan Fund is continued to be monitored on a monthly basis (financial/performance outputs and bad debt) in line with the formal contract signed with BCRS in August 2012.

Area 2 – Business to Business

- (1) That the use of a Dudley Borough Business Directory for internal and external use to be accessed via the Dudley Business First and Council websites be implemented and promoted (internally and externally).
- (2) That better use of social media is made, such as LinkedIn, to better promote the Dudley Business First service and opportunities for grant funding directly to local businesses.
- (3) To work closely with Corporate Resources in the review of the Council's Procurement Strategy to ensure, promotion and usage of the Business Directory.
- (4) That the Black Country Bullet project (a virtual car that currently showcases 500+ automotive supplier companies) be further enhanced by including a Request for Quotation facility similar to Sell 2 Wales model. Furthermore, assess the feasibility of replicating this project across other priority sectors, including:
 - Advanced manufacturing (including advanced engineering, logistics, food and drink;
 - Building technologies/construction
 - Transport technologies (including aerospace); and
 - Environment technologies

- (5) That awareness of the Council's Forward Procurement Strategy is better promoted to local businesses via Dudley Business First.

Area 3 – Dudley Business First Initiative

- (1) That a Marketing and Communications Plan be prepared in order to raise awareness of the Dudley Business First Service core offer (in particular, provision of business funding advice and undertaking land and property searches).
- (2) That awareness of funding opportunities via the Dudley Business First website is raised, specifically for businesses or business start-ups who are:-
 - Seeking grant funding or loans **below** the £10,000 threshold;
 - Within the non-manufacturing sector (in particular, health and retails sectors; and
 - Dependents of veterans, reservists and serving Armed Forces personnel
- (3) That the search engine optimisation (SEO) of Dudley Business First is increased to ensure this is one of the top 5 websites when people are searching for business support in Dudley Borough. Furthermore, to ensure there are direct links from the Council's 'Business' pages (inc Business Rates) to the Dudley Business First website.
- (4) That the marketing material for local and Black Country-wide funding events clearly states the eligibility criteria to ensure appropriate audience is targeted and engaged.
- (5) That the existing engagement with regional universities (Aston, Birmingham and Wolverhampton) is developed to ensure local businesses, via the Dudley Business First website, are aware of the opportunities offered by universities in relation to the following three areas:
 - Consultancy, licensing and intellectual property;
 - Research and Development (R&D); and
 - Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTPs)
- (6) That the Dudley Business Investment Zone is promoted to potential tenants and develop a 'soft landing offer' which can complement business rate relief.

- (ii) That the Head of Economic Development provide clarity in relation to recommendation 1 of Table 1 to the report submitted, as to whether the evaluation of the local economic impact in respect of the number of BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) businesses supported would be for was businesses run by or aimed at ethnic minorities.
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44 CHAIR'S COMMENTS

As this was the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in the 2013/14 municipal year, the Chair expressed his thanks to the Vice-Chair, Lead Officer to the Scrutiny Committee, Scrutiny Committee Members and Officers, for the support and active role that everyone had played during the scrutiny process and recommended that the Council's Scrutiny Committees adopt the practices of this committee as a template for future meetings.

The meeting ended at 6.10 pm.

CHAIR