

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC VITALITY AND JOBS

Tuesday 9th December, 2003 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Councillor Ms. Partridge (Chair)
Councillor Mrs. Patrick (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Blood, Mrs. Cowell, Ms Harris, Lowe, Knowles, K Turner and Zarab together with the Assistant Director of Housing (Dr Sims) (as Lead Officer to the Committee), the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Mr J Woodall), Mr Arthurs (Directorate of Housing) Mr Beckett (Executive Directorate) Mr Dugdale (Directorate of the Urban Environment) and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property)

30

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21st October 2003, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No member made a Declaration of Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence from the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor Bramall.

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SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor Ms Harris was serving in place of Councillor Sparks for this meeting of the Committee.

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ORDER OF BUSINESS

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13(c), it was:-

RESOLVED

That item 6 on the Agenda for this meeting be considered before item 5.

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LOCAL AUTHORITY TENANTS - DEBT PREVENTION PROJECT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted indicating the current position on this draft project between Dudley Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Directorate of Housing.

The Project had originated from a needs identification exercise undertaken by the Dudley Community Legal Services Partnership in which it had become clear that debt advice was one of the two largest gaps in service within Dudley, the other being housing advice. Funding for the Project had been secured from the Partnership Initiative Budget of the Legal Services Commission to undertake a new piece of work, focussing on debt and homelessness prevention. The Project, which would be undertaken over two and half years, starting in January 2004, would allow trained Citizens' Advice Bureau worker to work along and train Estate Management Officers in the Directorate of Housing to enable basic budgeting, debt awareness and welfare benefits advice to be offered.

A presentation on the Project, in which its background and proposed method of operation were expanded on, including its working arrangements with vulnerable groups and "revolving door" families, was given by Mr Holden of the Citizens' Advice Bureau. Under the Project, the Citizens Advice Bureau worker would endeavour to see prospective tenants in such groups prior to the tenancy starting or within two weeks start. By the end of the project, all new tenants would be able to benefit from early intervention with basic budgeting, consumer and welfare rights advice. The Directorate of Housing had committed itself to offering all new tenants and assessment interview within 4 weeks of their entry into the tenancy by the end of the Project and for this practice to continue into the future.

Details of the Project Plan were explained by Mr Arthurs of the Directorate of Housing, who expanded on the role of the Estate Management Officers, as indicated in paragraphs 2.9 and 2.10 of the reports submitted. Mr Arthurs also summarised the nature of the computer software that would be utilised in the project.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the details of the proposed scheme, as referred to in the report now submitted and expanded upon in the presentation, be noted.
- (2) That further reports on the progress of the scheme be submitted to the Committee.
- (3) That a report setting out the full project plan be submitted to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 23rd March 2004 and that progress reports be submitted to the Committee every six months thereafter.

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MAKING THE DIFFERENCE PROGRAMME -
THE WORK OF THE FIVE CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT GROUPS

A report of the Head of Policy in the Executive Directorate was submitted, under cover of which were set out the respective Reports of the five Corporate Improvement Groups.

The Groups have been set up in consequence of the Corporate Improvement Agenda established following the Corporate Performance Assessment and MTD assessments carried out in 2002. The achievements of the respective Groups to date were noted in paragraph 2.4 of the covering report submitted.

Mr Beckett of the Executive Directorate attended the meeting to expand on the aims, objectives and work of each Group and answer questions. In this regard, he explained that the groups had been set up to enable the Council to move forward in each of the respective areas to identify where improvements were required. Stage 1 of the process was to identify best practice and to make recommendations thereon and stage 2 would be to implement the recommendations and monitor them. Mr Beckett explained that the approach being taken for the next stage was to pilot and then analyse results from stage 1 before taking further action.

In the discussion on the issue, certain members expressed concerns regarding the sufficiency of the information contained in the reports of the respective Corporate Improvement Groups to enable a decision to progress to the implementation phase to be made. The Committee also advocated that future reports submitted to the Committee should be written more plainly.

RESOLVED

- (1) That, having considered the progress made by the five Corporate Improvement Groups to date, support be given for the ongoing work into the implementation phase but that the misgivings regarding the sufficiency of the information be noted and that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee to ensure that the implementation phase is clearly identified.

(Councillor Lowe wished it to be recorded that he could not support the resolution above in the light of the sufficiency of the information provided in the report now submitted).

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DUDLEY AND STOURBRIDGE TOWN CENTRE
REGENERATION PLAN REVIEW

A report of the Directorate of the Urban Environment was submitted updating the Committee on the development of plans for the regeneration of Dudley and Stourbridge Town Centres and containing proposals full terms and reference of the proposed Dudley Town Centre Partnership.

In the discussion on this item, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Mr Woodall) and Mr Dugdale of the Directorate of the Urban Environment amplified on the resources allocated to the two town centres and on their funding. The Borough of Dudley was not situated within an Arc 9 opportunity improvement area and was therefore not eligible for European monies allocated towards deprived areas. The current position regarding Tesco's interest in establishing a superstore and the present position regarding the appointment of a Town Centre Manager for Stourbridge were reported by Mr Woodall.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted and that the progression of development plans for Dudley and Stourbridge Town Centres, as indicated in the report now submitted, be supported.
- (2) That, subject to resolution (3) below, the draft terms and reference and representation for the proposed Dudley Town Centre Partnership, as attached to the report now submitted, be recommended to the Executive for approval.
- (3) That the Dudley M.B.C. member representation comprise one member from each of the five Wards comprising the Central Dudley Area Committee, to be appointed by that Committee, together with one Conservative Member of the Select Committee on Economic Vitality and Jobs, appointed by the Committee and that the Executive be recommended accordingly.

- (4) That the Lead Member of Economic Vitality be urged to make the necessary arrangements for the post of Town Centre Manager for Stourbridge to be filled at the appropriate salary and grading level and that the necessary resources in this regard be made available therefrom.
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FEEDBACK FROM WORKING GROUPS

The Lead Officer to the Committee reported orally on feedback from the meeting of the ICT Strategy Working Group held on 18th November 2003. Some concern had been expressed regarding the meeting of targets and it had been agreed that reports would be submitted on a regular basis to monitor the situation.

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MEMBERSHIP OF ICT WORKING GROUP

RESOLVED

That Councillor Crumpton be appointed as a Member of the ICT Policy Working Group in place of Councillor Sparks.

The Meeting ended at 8.15 p.m.

CHAIR