

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 21st June, 2012

Present:- Councillor Ian Matthews – in the Chair

Councillors Cairns, Holland, Lawton, Mrs Peers, Studd and Taylor.M

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Baker, Councillor Fear and Councillor Wilkes.

3. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2012 be agreed as a correct record.

4. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR

The Council's Executive Director of Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with a verbal introduction and review of the Committee's work in the previous year by reference to the work plan. An updated version of the work plan was distributed at the meeting.

The Economic Development Strategy would remain on the work plan, with an update expected at the end of Quarter 3.

The Committee considered Local Enterprise Partnerships, which coordinate business across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire through such initiatives as Regional Growth Fund Programmes. It was difficult to keep up with developments and it could be too large a topic for scrutiny to undertake. However, a working group could be set up to scrutinise in more detail. There was a possibility that the working group could work with officers. Members questioned what other Councils were doing with regard to LEPs. Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council had previously briefed the Cabinet with their progress. The emphasis was mainly on the County and City Councils through roads, the Local Education Authority and skills. It was currently not known what was expected of Newcastle Borough Council and where the Council fitted into the equation.

Members questioned whether Newcastle's business rates would go to other areas in Staffordshire. This was still to be confirmed, but Newcastle could stand to benefit from a proportion of the business rates collected. Central Government were preparing a new model for Staffordshire with incentives to promote growth and therefore increase rateable values, which in turn would generate more income. It was stressed that the Council had a public accountability that LEPs did not as they were

private sector led and that this Council should represent the public interest. Due to the huge sums of money involved, Members felt it was important that there was a dialogue with Members with regard to LEPs.

The Borough had not been successful in obtaining an Enterprise Zone, and it was still felt that there were issues to be addressed. The emphasis was on the Council to approach the LEP with suggestions and creative ways to fund infrastructure and receive something back from Government.

The Committee resolved to set up a working group consisting of Councillor Matthews, Councillor Peers and Councillor Studd. A summary paper was requested of progress to date, and the working group would meet if required.

Broadband provision would remain on the work programme as an ongoing scrutiny topic.

It was confirmed that a report regarding HS2 would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting in July.

A report was expected towards the autumn for the proposal to jointly commission a viability assessment with Stoke-on-Trent City Council for the Community Infrastructure Levy. Members noted that caution would need to be taken with regard to CILs, so as not to deter potential businesses or developers.

The Staffordshire Strategic Property Review and Town Centre Partnerships Development and Initiative would remain on the work plan, and were on the agenda to be discussed later in the meeting.

The Asset Management Strategy had been approved and was on its way to being implemented. When the strategy was refreshed in the future it could be a significant scrutiny topic for the Committee.

An additional meeting of the Committee had been arranged for 28th June 2012 to consider Knutton Recreation Centre and the Former St Giles and St Georges school building.

The review of the Home Improvement Agency Services was expected to come to the Committee in November. This service was currently provided by Revival, but options would be reviewed including a county wide service or the Borough Council standing alone to provide the service.

RESOLVED: (a) That the information be received.

(b) That a summary paper regarding LEPs be provided to the LEP working party.

5. **WORK PLAN ITEMS**

Members were able to suggest items for inclusion on the work plan.

The question was asked if there was anything that could be done to attract new businesses to the town, or if there was any ongoing work that could be scrutinised. Members felt that short term initiatives for properties that had been empty for long periods could be beneficial, and any initiatives should attract the right kind of businesses for the town centre. Caution was advised with regard to undermining the

commercial and private sector market and potential initiatives should not undermine the business rates that were already received. Officers suggested that a softer approach could be adopted, such as making the journey to starting a business easier, which could be done through the Council website. Private landlords should also be brought on board. Members felt that any approach, whether soft or hard, should be adopted.

It was resolved that the Chair and Vice-Chair would meet with the Council's Head of Assets to discuss this further, and report back to the Committee at its next meeting.

RESOLVED: (a) That the Chair and Vice-Chair meet with the Head of Assets to discuss initiatives to attract new businesses to the town centre.

(b) That following the meeting with the Head of Assets, the Chair and Vice-Chair report back to the Committee at its next meeting.

6. **STAFFORDSHIRE STRATEGIC PROPERTY REVIEW**

The Committee considered a report regarding the Staffordshire Strategic Property Review Report and its implications for the Borough Council and local stakeholders. Staffordshire County Council had invited all District Councils across the County, along with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and other public bodies including the NHS and the Police to participate in a project to review the public sector estate. This was paid for from funding provided by the West Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership. The aim of the project was to establish comprehensive identification of the Public Sector Estate across Staffordshire and to analyse the information collected to promote the most efficient and effective use of the combined assets. Staffordshire County Council alone had £1.5 billion of property assets along with all the attendant operating costs. Through property rationalisation, Staffordshire County Council and its public sector partners in the districts, health, fire, police and others had much to gain both in terms of reduced property costs but also higher productivity and improved services that result from integrating service provision and property use.

It was felt that there was a lot of value to be unlocked through multi-agency collaboration and jointly aligned service delivery. There was a need to be less wasteful and dispose of assets where sensible to do so. Assets within Newcastle belonged mainly to the local authority rather than to other public bodies. The value of modern, thermally efficient buildings was emphasised. As were the potentially huge benefits of a 'Civic Hub'. This would involve the co-location of partners who could or do work closely with Officers already, e.g. the Police and Social Services.

It would be necessary to establish what both residents and buyers would want. It would be necessary to explore the possibilities; the question was how to do this.

As the holder of the largest public sector property portfolio in the county, Staffordshire County Council is well placed to lead the implementation of the property rationalisation programme but it is important that as many of the other public sector partners play as full a role as possible.

One of the primary aims of this review was the identification of specific rationalisation opportunities.

RESOLVED: That the information be received.

7. **NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP AND PORTAS PILOT BID**

The Committee received a report informing them of the outcome of the recent application to become a Portas pilot town and plans to resubmit for the second round and updating them on the progress of setting up a town centre partnership for Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre.

There was a one in thirty chance of Newcastle-under-Lyme winning the first round bid to be a Portas pilot town, and it was felt that the Council had done its best. The Council may not have won round one, but what participating had achieved was it had brought partners together who have agreed on initiatives etc that will help to improve the situation with town centres. Work was underway on the second round bid and it was necessary to tighten up the good ideas (of which there were many) from the first round. Members stated the Council's bid was good, but questioned whether it was too generic and perhaps the shortlisted town centres were more specific in their applications. Furthermore, it was suggested that the link between Keele University and the town centre needed to be emphasised and made more distinctive. Officers stated that Mary Portas had 28 recommendations and the shortlisted town centres may have fit more with her recommendations than Newcastle town centre did. Perhaps some of what this council was doing just did not fit with what Portas wanted. It was felt that intellectually our ideas were good; the summary points could have been sharper though.

Some members had been following the Portas Pilot project from the beginning and felt that many of the towns shown on the television looked a lot worse than Newcastle. They felt that Newcastle should be proud of its bid. Members questioned whether the Council could contact the Local Authorities who had won the first round to find out how they put their bids together. Wolverhampton City Council, who had got through the first stage of the process, had compiled a list of bullet points that councils should be considering if resubmitting their bid. One of the key elements of the pilot was for Local Authorities to share information on improving town centres. Members felt that although winning may be a long shot, the Council must give it its best shot.

Officers highlighted to members the planning permission that had been granted to Marks and Spencer to develop at Wolstanton Retail Park. As part of the conditions attached to the planning permission, Marks and Spencer must give £100,000 to the Council for town centre development, and a further £10,000 per year. The Council would receive money for town centre development one way or the other. Moreover, the Council should not get too caught up in trying to obtain the money. The work that had been done and the partnerships were good. The Council could improve the town centre without the Portas money if necessary. This council could learn from what other towns were doing and could determine what works and what doesn't.

Towns that had applied in the first round were automatically entered into the second round; there was no need to reapply. However, if a council wanted to improve their first bid they could do. The deadline for the second round bid was 30th June. Members questioned whether the second round bid could be circulated. The Council's Business Development Officer confirmed it could. The draft bid would hopefully be ready on Tuesday 26th June, with 48 hours for Members to respond.

Officers stressed the importance of developing Town Centre Partnerships between the Council and local businesses. The partnership in Newcastle town centre was developing into a collaborative relationship and the Council had been trying to cultivate a stronger relationship with local businesses. It was necessary to find the best model to suit the circumstances in Newcastle town centre. There was a range of activities taking place including the annual music festival and the 'Love Your Local Markets' event. There was a possibility that a loyalty card/voucher system could be implemented, along the lines of the one in Stafford. There should also be formal town centre management. Members felt that the steps being taken should be totally supported and communication between the Council and businesses improved.

RESOLVED: (a) That the information be received

(b) That the second round bid for the Portas Pilot Town be circulated to Members

8. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business considered.

COUNCILLOR IAN MATTHEWS
Chair