

**SELECT COMMITTEE**  
**ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND**  
**ADULT EDUCATION**

Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2011  
at 6 p.m. in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

**PRESENT:-**

Councillor Mottram (Vice Chairman) (In the Chair)  
Councillors Ali, Attwood, Barlow, Caunt, G H Davies, Evans, Ms Partridge, Mrs Turner, Mrs Westwood and J Woodall.

**Officers**

Assistant Director, Housing Strategy and Private Sector (Lead Officer to the Committee); Director of Corporate Resources, Treasurer, Assistant Directors of Human Resources and Organisational Development and Customer Services and Head of ICT Services (all Directorate of Corporate Resources); Assistant Director Culture and Leisure, Assistant Director Economic Regeneration, Head of Sport and Physical Activity, Head of Planning, Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery and Tourism Development Officer (all Directorate of the Urban Environment); Assistant Director for Libraries, Archives and Adult Education (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services), Head of Policy (Chief Executive's Directorate) and Mr J Jablonski (Directorate of Corporate Resources).

**Also in attendance**

Councillor Stanley (Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture)

together with ten members of the public.

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30      **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Cowell, Knowles and K Turner.

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31      **SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was reported that Councillors Barlow, Mrs Turner and Mrs Westwood had been appointed as substitute members for Councillors Mrs Cowell, K Turner and Knowles respectively for this meeting of the Committee only.

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32      **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with Members' Code of Conduct in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.

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33 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2010, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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34 CONSIDERATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY) REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY THE PETITIONS OFFICER

No petitions had been referred to the Committee.

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35 PUBLIC FORUM

It was noted that, apart from questions received in relation to the next Agenda item, which would be considered in conjunction with that item, there were no other issues to be raised under this Agenda item.

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36 REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY 2011/12

A joint report of the Chief Executive, Treasurer, Director of the Urban Environment and Director of Corporate Resources had been submitted on the proposed Revenue Budget Strategy for 2011/12 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2011/12 – 2013/14. The report had been submitted to this Select Committee, and would be submitted to other Select Committees, as part of the consultation on the Strategy.

Arising from a presentation given by the Treasurer on the content of the report submitted, with particular regard to paragraphs 40 to 60 setting out the implications for services covered by the Terms of Reference of this Select Committee, members asked a number of questions, in particular, relating to:-

- The closure of ageing toilet blocks, referred to in paragraph 43 of the report, and the issue of alternative provision. In response the Assistant Director Economic Regeneration undertook to arrange for a response on the points raised to be sent to Councillor Ali.
- The reference to the reduction of the number of Area Committee meetings from 5 to 3 per year, paragraph 53 of the report, and the implications of this in the light of the current Localism Bill.

The Director of Corporate Resources in response referred to the fact that the Bill was only likely to become legislation in November/December of this year and that the controlling group had established a working group to look at various issues arising from the Localism Bill including those relating to engagement with the public.

In response to the comments made some members considered that the proposals were premature given that the Bill was only to be implemented in approximately November/December. In response mention was made of the current financial position which was considered to be unprecedented giving rise to significant budgetary pressures which needed to be responded to.

- In relation to questions raised regarding income and expenditure in respect of Bereavement Services, paragraph 47 of the report submitted, the Assistant Director Culture and Leisure undertook to arrange for the information requested, contained in a decision sheet, to be sent to all members of the Committee.
- The impact on emergency planning of the efficiencies indicated in paragraph 60 of the report submitted. In response the Head of Policy (Chief Executive's Directorate) referred to the work being undertaken as to the core activities required to be done and also referred to possible arrangements and collaboration with other Black Country Authorities.
- In response to a question raised regarding further detail in respect of the staffing savings indicated in paragraphs 40 to 60 of the report submitted, following the giving of certain of the information requested, it was agreed that the details requested would be collated and sent to all members of the Committee.
- In response to a question regarding the reduction of contributions to Third Sector, paragraph 58 of the report submitted, the Head of Policy (Chief Executive's Directorate) referred to the arrangements in respect of the Dudley Council for Voluntary Service and the planned reductions in contributions made in respect of that organisation.

As indicated earlier in the meeting members of the public present wished to raise questions on the budget proposal referred to in paragraph 56 of the report submitted in relation to the Benefits Shop. A commentary on the proposal together with five specific questions had been circulated at the meeting and the specific questions referred to were:-

1. a) What consideration have Officers of the Council making these proposals given to the effect these savings will have? and
- b) What does the Committee feel will be the effect on the local economy, in terms of regeneration, in view of this potential loss of income?

2. How does the Committee feel these cuts will support their vulnerable and disadvantaged residents?
3. Where do Officers of the Council believe these residents will go for help now, particularly as the only other service offering representation is Citizens Advice Bureau and their appeals caseworker is funded by Legal Services Commission which is also withdrawing funding for welfare benefits representation?
4. Again, where do officers of the Council believe these residents will go for help if the budget proposals are agreed and the shops service is no more? And
5. Bearing in mind the above information does the Committee believe Officers of the Council have given sufficient consideration to the far-reaching ramifications of the proposed savings relating to the Benefits Shop?

The questions indicated above were referred to by the Lead Officer to the Committee and following on from this the Director of Corporate Resources informed the Committee that the decisions made in respect of the Benefits Shop had been difficult and of the efficiencies identified in paragraph 56 of the report £300,000 had been identified in respect of the Benefits Shop. He also informed the Committee that consideration had been given to two options, 1, to completely cut the service given its discretionary nature or 2, to reduce the budget for the service and seek re-provision of the service.

Option 2 was the option being put forward as it sat well with the views of the Coalition Government regarding the transfer of services to the voluntary sector.

The intention was therefore to investigate whether the service could work more closely with other providers such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and this work would be done. It was also noted that the proposed savings had been scheduled to take effect only from September of this year so that there would be time to work with staff and the voluntary sector on how best to provide the service going forward. The review to be undertaken could possibly identify parallel activity and duplication with bodies such as the Citizen Advice Bureau which could accordingly facilitate a reduction in budget. The review would also look on the services which should be focused on for example benefits take up with the hope of achieving more for less so that there was a mutual effect for both users of the service and the economy.

Arising from the comments made members asked a number of questions and in response it was noted that no guarantee could be given that arising from any re-provisioning of the service involving the voluntary sector that the economic effects, as indicated in the commentary provided would remain the same. The service would have to be refocused and it was hoped to minimise the impact of the budget reduction by the Council.

In relation as to who the other possible providers could be, apart from the Citizens Advice Bureau, these were reported as the Pension Local Service and the Department for Work and Pensions.

Arising from the comments made a member expressed his concern at the reduction in budget for the Benefits Shop especially in the light of the fact that the service had gained in reputation over the years and considered that this particular saving needed to be re-examined as this service was a front line service .

Members of the public were then given the opportunity to comment on the matter and particular points made related to:-

- The complex issues that staff at the Benefits Shop had to deal with, which related to more than benefit take-up work, and in this connection two case studies were outlined to the Committee.
- That whilst the need to make savings was appreciated it was considered that there would be a detrimental impact on Dudley's vulnerable and disadvantaged residents.
- The ability of the voluntary sector to take on the work of the Benefits Shop was queried given that some agencies referred cases to them as they could not cope and similarly the Benefits Shop was unable to cope with further referrals. Also staff in the Benefits Shop had many years experience in the work undertaken.

Arising from the points made further comments were made with particular regard to:-

- The need to ensure that any duplication in service provision between the Council and voluntary sectors was reduced whilst maintaining a quality service for the people of Dudley.
- That some in-house provision could be retained.
- That an equality impact assessment had been done which indicated that vulnerable groups would potentially be affected by the proposal and that once the review of service referred to had been completed, by September 2011, a further equality impact assessment would be undertaken.

Arising from the above comments it was considered that questions 1 and 2 above had been responded to.

In relation to the third question it was reported that the Citizens Advice Bureau had identified alternative funding and that the appeals caseworker post referred to would be retained.

In relation to the fourth question the review process outlined above was reiterated.

In respect of the fifth question whilst it was considered that this did not relate to the terms of reference of the Select Committee an appropriate recommendation could be made for further consideration.

Arising from the comments made it was considered that the future of the Benefits Shop service would be subject to the outcome of the review to be undertaken and that this could be a mix of in-house and voluntary sector provision. The overall aim though was to maximise resources so that the people of the Borough got the maximum benefit in this service area.

A request was made that the outcome of the review be referred to a future meeting of the Select Committee for consideration and this matter would be included in the next work programme of the committee.

#### RESOLVED

That the Cabinet's Revenue Budget Strategy proposals for 2011/12 and Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2011/12 – 2013/14, as set out in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted be noted and that the Cabinet be informed that there were no observations that this Select Committee wished to make on the proposals.

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#### 37 REGENERATION OF CRADLEY/WINDMILL HILL

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted responding to issues raised by members of this Committee at its meeting held in September, 2010, on the potential for a more radical approach to the regeneration of Cradley/Windmill Hill local centre.

The Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration in his presentation of the content of the report referred to a copy of a plan circulated at the meeting on which six development sites together with the indicative extent of possible highway improvements had been marked.

Arising from consideration of the content of the report it was:-

#### RESOLVED

1. a) That the progress made in delivering the Regeneration Plan be noted.
- b) That continued efforts to bring forward development sites with partner developers and land owners be supported.
- c) That the consultation that had been undertaken in respect of the Air Quality Action Plan be acknowledged; and

- d) That the actions detailed in the Air Quality Action Plan designed to improve air quality within the Borough for the future be supported.
2. That a further update report on the regeneration of Cradley/Windmill Hill be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.
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## 38 REPORT ON THE VISITOR ECONOMY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted consulting the Select Committee on the principles of the upcoming Visitor Economy Strategic Framework for Dudley in the light of recent changes to national tourism strategy and organisational infrastructure and updating the Committee on progress and achievements over the past twelve months in respect of the development of the Borough's visitor economy and future planned developments.

Arising from a presentation of the content of the report submitted members made a number of comments relating in particular to:-

- The need for greater recognition of the role of the Council's parks across the Borough.
- Greater emphasis on the Dudley Canal Network given the number of canal users operating on that network particularly from April to October who pass through the Borough and the three major canal festivals that were held. The need for appropriate notices, tidying up of sites and provision for secure moorings were also referred to.

The points made were recognised by the Tourism Development Officer who referred to the third growth area indicated in paragraph 21 of the report submitted under that heading namely – Dudley Canal Network and its supporting visiting infrastructure.

- The need for a main line rail station for Dudley to provide a stimulus for tourism was also raised. In response reference was made to discussions that were on-going on transport issues and the Assistant Director Economic Regeneration undertook to arrange for Councillor Evans to be provided with relevant information.

The need for good quality hotel provision with particular reference to Stourbridge was also raised so as to stimulate tourism and business. However it was recognised that such provision would be down to market forces.

In response to the lack of detail regarding Halesowen it was noted that Halesowen was promoted however as with other issues raised not all the activity undertaken could be included in the report submitted.

RESOLVED

1. That the Draft Strategic Framework for the Dudley Visitor Economy and the vision to develop Dudley as a quality visitor destination be supported and that the comments made at the meeting, as indicated above, be forwarded, as appropriate, for consideration by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture.
2. That the progress and achievements to date in respect of the development of the borough's visitor economy and the work of the tourism development team be noted.

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PROGRESS REPORT ON CORPORATE ICT STRATEGY 2008-13

A report of the Director of Corporate Resources was submitted on progress and next steps with the implementation of the five year Corporate ICT Strategy 2008-13.

Arising from a presentation made by the Head of ICT Services on the content of the report submitted members made a number of comments to which full responses were given.

RESOLVED

1. That the information contained in the report submitted, on the progress on the ICT Strategy for 2008-13, be noted and that the Corporate ICT Strategy be renewed in 2011-12 as a clearer view of Transformation and the formation of the Corporate Resources Directorate was formed and as new technologies emerged.
2. That the Director of Corporate Resources be requested to submit a report to the June, 2011 meeting of the Committee on a new Corporate ICT strategy for 2011-15.

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QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the performance of the Council in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of this Committee for the second quarter of 2010/11, July to September, 2010.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and extract from the report, submitted in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of this Committee for the second quarter of 2010/11, July to September, 2010, be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.10 p.m.

CHAIRMAN