

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC REGENERATION**

Thursday, 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2006, at 6 p.m.  
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

**PRESENT:-**

Councillor K Turner (Chairman)  
Councillor Ms Harris (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillors Jackson, Knowles, Mottram, Mrs Patrick, Rogers and  
Wilson

**Officers**

Assistant Director of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) (as Lead Officer to the Committee), Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration), Assistant Director (Development and Environmental Protection), Senior Assistant Director of Finance, Head of Customer Services and Programme Leader, Head of Policy, Head of ICT Services, Principal Policy and Performance Management Officer (Chief Executives Directorate), Management Support Officer (Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement), Principal Planning Officer, Planning Policy Manager (Directorate of the Urban Environment) and Mrs M Johal (Directorate of Law and Property).

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**MINUTES**

**RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2006 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.

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**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Body, Mrs Cowell and J Davies.

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**APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE FOR THIS MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE**

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It was reported that Councillor Blood had been appointed to serve as a substitute for Councillor Mrs Cowell for this meeting of the Committee only.

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### DUDLEY COUNCIL PLUS – CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATE

The Head of Customer Services and Programme Leader gave a verbal update in relation to the proposal to transfer banking services to the Council Plus Office and also about other developments regarding customer service contact.

In presenting the report, the Head of Customer Services and Programme Leader informed the Committee that from 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2006, the Council's banking hall service would move to the Dudley Council Plus customer service centre in Castle Street. This would allow customers to take advantage of longer opening hours and enable them to make payments for Council Tax, rents, business rates and other Council bills by cash, cheque or card. Customers could use the payment machines to make cash payments but staff would be available to guide customers on how to use them, if required. Letters and other communication sources had been used to inform customers of the transfer.

The Head of Customer Services and Programme Leader further reported that Dudley Council Plus was easily accessible and had been designed for vulnerable people. However, there was on-going dialogue and consultation with the disability services and the elderly to further improve provision and access.

Responding to queries from Members, the Head of Customer Services and Programme Leader confirmed that the cash machines would give change to customers who did not have exact payment. He further extended an open invitation to Members of the Committee to visit Dudley Council Plus with a view to gaining a better understanding of the concept and facilities offered.

It was suggested that the next meeting of the Committee be held at Dudley Council Plus with a view to inspecting the facilities prior to commencement of the meeting.

#### RESOLVED

That the verbal update in relation to the proposed plans to transfer banking services to the Council Plus Office and also about other developments regarding customer service contact be supported and noted.

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### EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2006/07

A report of the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement was submitted on the Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2006/07.

Arising from the presentation of the report, a Member referred to Action/Target (2) in objective 3 of the report and queried how improvements to staff awareness and services to customers were to be made and how they would be measured. It was also suggested that a performance indicator showing where improvements had taken place should be included for the future. In responding the Senior Assistant Director of Finance acknowledged that it was difficult to measure improvements but that existing arrangements included ensuring that staff accessed appropriate training programmes; that managers regularly liaised with staff and that customer surveys were being conducted on quality of services. He undertook to investigate the possibility of including a performance indicator that showed where improvements had been made.

RESOLVED

That the Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2006/07 on the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement be noted.

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DIRECTORATE'S EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2006/07

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A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on the annual Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2006/07.

RESOLVED

That the Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2006/07 on the Chief Executive's Directorate be noted.

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E-GOVERNMENT PROGRESS REPORT

A joint report of the Director of Finance and the Corporate e-Champion was submitted on the Council's position regarding the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) programme for 'Priority Services and Transformation Outcomes', and on information about the drafting of a national strategy by the Cabinet Office for transforming government with the use of technology.

During the course of the presentation of the report, the Senior Assistant Director of Finance advised that targets for completion by 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2005 had been met and that the 'good' priority outcomes were anticipated to be completed by the end of March 2006. He made particular reference to paragraphs 8-11 of the report in relation to the Government strategy that sets out how effective use of technology could transform the way public services were delivered. In reporting reported that the Government were to produce plans by April 2006 on the intentions, he suggested that the Committee might want to consider the monitoring process.

The Chairman thanked all Officers involved in achieving the required targets by the deadline and also thanked all Members of the Committee who had played a major role in applying pressure to meet the deadlines.

#### RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report and the Appendices thereto, be noted.
- (2) That further update reports be submitted to the Committee with a view to overseeing the monitoring process in relation to the Transformational Government – Enabled Through Technology Strategy.

#### NEW PLANNING REGIME

A verbal presentation was given by the Planning Policy Manager on planning policy and on the old and new planning system.

During the course of the presentation, the Planning Policy Manager, explained the differences between the old and the new planning system. Points made included that the new system contained a local development framework, which consisted of smaller, shorter and select documents and was reviewed as necessary. The old system contained the Unitary Development Plan, which was reviewed every 10 years. It was anticipated that the new system would be more effective, efficient and more responsive. The project management tool would be used as a guide to determine the next steps to identify what, how and when to do things and an annual monitoring report would be produced. It was further pointed out that the Regional Spatial Strategy would form part of the development plan for the first time.

Arising from the presentation of the report Members commented that the position and stance in relation to the Unitary Development Plan had been clear. However, concerns were expressed that relaxation could allow developers to build on greenbelt land. In responding the Planning Policy Manager stressed that an important factor of the plan was to protect greenbelt land and to ensure that land was identified and allocated for the purpose of meeting needs and characteristics of the area.

#### RESOLVED

That the verbal presentation in relation to the old and new planning system be received and noted.

#### USAGE OF BUS PASSES AND BUS PATRONAGE

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted regarding a decline in bus patronage and use of concessionary passes and summarising the current levels of bus use and the use of concessionary passes and identifying possible future changes.

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration) commented that consultation and discussions were taking place with Centro with a view to providing a quality and reliable bus network to enhance passenger travel. He also indicated that while this was a matter for the Select Committee on the Environment, there were some aspects that could be related to economic regeneration, such as implications of congestion on roads.

Arising from the presentation of the report, a Member commented that the vehicles allocated to Dudley were generally older, thus having adverse environmental consequences as a result of exhaust fumes from worn engines. Buses regularly broke down and were also noisy due to squeaky brakes. Concern was also expressed in relation to the lack of bus services after 5pm on an evening.

A Member who was also a representative of the Passenger Transport Authority informed the Committee that an intensive investigation was due to take place with a view to identifying bus patronage and take-up of concessionary fares and passes. Discussions were also currently taking place with Centro in respect of improving standards and providing a quality bus network.

In response to a query from a Member, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration) undertook to investigate whether there were figures available for take-up of concessionary passes in the Dudley Borough.

The Chairman suggested that the matter be referred to the Select Committee on Environment for investigation.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the trends in bus patronage, both concessionary and non-concessionary are noted.
- (2) That support be given to the Local Authority to continue its role of promoting the use of bus services forming a part of its wider transport objectives as set out in the West Midlands Local Transport Plan.
- (3) That support be given to the Local Authority to work with the Passenger Transport Executive (Centro) and bus operators to achieve improvements in service quality and availability to encourage modal shift to public transport.
- (4) That the issue of a decline in bus patronage and use of concessionary passes be referred to the Select Committee on the Environment for investigation.

OUTLINE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2006/07

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the outline work programme of the Committee for the 2006/07.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the following items be included as part of the Work Programme for 2006/07:-
  - Innovation, Incubation and Enterprise Centre
  - Disability Access Strategy
  - Section 106 Agreements
  - Visitor Economy in Dudley and the Council's Role
  - Update of the Council's Capital Strategy
  - Equality and Diversity Reports for the Chief Executive Directorate and Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement
  - Quarterly reports on Corporate Performance Management Regarding the Directorates of Finance, ICT and Procurement, Chief Executive and Urban Environment
  - Annual Review of Equality and Diversity 2006
  - BVPI 157– E-Government Progress Report
  - Economic Strategy
  - Employment Opportunities for Vulnerable Groups

- (2) That a Special Meeting of the Committee be held on Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2006 at 6pm at Dudley Council Plus to consider Section 106 Agreements and that the Committee meet at 5.30pm prior to commencement to view the facilities at Dudley Council Plus.
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The meeting ended at 8.15 pm.

CHAIRMAN