

Minutes of a Meeting of the Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 March 2006

Present: Councillor Mick Jones (Chair)
" Anne Forwood (Vice Chair)
" Michael Doody
" Peter Barnes
" Eithne Goode
" Pat Henry
" Richard Hyde
" Frank McCarney
" Philip Morris-Jones
" John Ross
" Ian Smith

Also Present: Councillor Chris Saint (Portfolio holder for Economic Development)

Officers: Bill Basra, Corporate Review Team
Katherine Grasby, Senior Solicitor, Performance and Development Directorate
Janet Fortune, Environment and Economic Directorate.
Jean Hardwick, Principal Committee Administrator, Chief Executive's Dept.
Leigh Hunt, Business Support Officer- ICT, PTES
Roy Shearing, Social and Economic Regeneration, PTES.
John Scouller, Head of Social and Economic Regeneration, Environment and Economy Directorate.
David S Williams, County Economic Development Officer, PTES.

1. General

(1) Apologies.

None.

(2) Members' Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

(a) Declarations of personal, non prejudicial interest were received from Members by virtue of them serving as district/borough councillor as follows –

Stratford-on-Avon District Council – Councillor Peter Barnes

Warwick District Council – Councillors Michael Doody and Eithne Goode

Nuneaton and Bedworth District Council –Councillors Pat Henry and John Ross

- (b) Councillor Richard Hyde declared a personal interest in agenda item 4, The Changing Structures for the Delivery of Business Support Services in Warwickshire, because he was a Member of Advantage West Midlands and Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership.

(3) (a) Minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 26 January 2006

Resolved that the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2006 be agreed as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.

(b) Matters Arising

(i) Minute 1 (3) (b) Visit to the Frank Whittle Centre

The Chair reported that a date had not yet been fixed for the Committee's visit to the Frank Whittle Centre because the opening had been delayed.

(ii) Minute 4 Making the 2012 Games Work for Warwickshire – Bursaries for Young People

The Chair said that he had not spoken with Councillors Chris Saint and Izzi Seccombe about the above issue but would do so shortly.

(iii) Minute 5 (a) Future Agenda item – Support for failing businesses

Councillor Phillip Morris-Jones suggested that a future item for discussion should be an investigation into why so many businesses failed and what support could be given to avert closures. The Chair undertook to consider this suggestion further.

2. Public Question Time

None.

3. Regeneration Initiatives – Outputs Assessment

Janet Fortune circulated a briefing noted which updated the Committee about the current range of strategic regeneration initiatives, promoted through Advantage West Midlands and the European Structural Fund Programme, and the Council's response to these opportunities. She proposed engaging the Committee in future work by means of workshop sessions. (briefing note attached).

A Member suggested that there was a need to provide training to improve the skills of existing machine operators to enable them to operate computerised equipment rather than employers recruiting new employees.

Resolved that the Committee –

- (1) commends and welcomes the progress of the projects outlined in the briefing note;
- (2) thanks Janet Fortune for her presentation.

4. The Changing Structures for the Delivery of Business Support Services in Warwickshire.

Members considered the report of the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy and which outlined the Council's role in facilitating the delivery of support services to businesses that complement those of partners. The services were designed to improve the performances, survival and competitiveness of local Small and Medium sized enterprises. The report outlined the services and changes taking place in the delivery of Business Link services by Advantage West Midlands.

Roy Shearing (presentation material attached) –

- outlined the regionalisation of Business Link Service that would take effect as from April 2007 (short listed tenders to be submitted by 16 March 2006 and evaluation for AWM Board by 25 April 2006);
- gave a brief overview of the current Business Support provision and the organisations that worked in partnership with the County Council

Discussion followed during which Members commended the service provided by the Business Support Unit. Roy Shearing and David S. Williams then answered questions on the impact of the regionalisation of the Business Link Service, which they expected would -

- provide a better service;
- provide better value for money;
- regionalise expertise and services;
- meet basic local needs;
- be provided at neutral cost to the County Council.

With regard to the business support currently provided Roy Shearing confirmed that the Single Regeneration Budget 5 year programme for Vital Villages ended in March 2005 but the County and Districts had continued to provide funding support to Warwickshire Rural Community Council to keep a rural officer in the field to ensure ongoing support to village shops.

Councillor Chris Saint welcomed the proposals and was encouraged by the multiplicity of funding that had been identified. With regard to Members' concern about Warwickshire competing with Birmingham for funding he advised that the West Midlands Regional Assembly and AWM would govern how funding was distributed. The County Council would, however, have a say in steering the regional strategy.

Members highlighted the need to address the skills shortages and to work closely with partners and education providers over the next few years to drive the change forward. The proposals put forward by AWM were welcomed.

Resolved that the Committee –

- (1) notes the range of services delivered in support of businesses in Warwickshire and endorses the approach adopted to the development and delivery of support services set out in this paper;
- (2) endorses the Council's approach to providing and/or facilitating local services to local businesses to complement and enhance those available from partners to improve the performance, survival and competitiveness of local Small and Medium sized enterprises.
- (3) thanks the officers for their continued hard work in delivering the support services to businesses in Warwickshire.

5. Procurement Policy – Concordat for Local Business

Leigh Hunt presented the report of the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy.

In March 2005 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) issued the Small Business Friendly Concordat Good Practice Guidance, which gave best practice procurement guidance for both Local Authorities and suppliers. Warwickshire County Council had been working beyond these guidelines for sometime, and Members were asked to endorse the Concordat.

Members commended the Procurement Team and Economic Development Group on its work and the County Council being awarded the West Midland ICT Cluster Award for Best Public Sector Procurer in recognition of the success of this project.

Resolved that the Committee endorses the report and recommends the adoption of the Small Business Friendly Concordat Good Practice Guide by Cabinet.

6. Provisional Items for Future Meetings and Forward Plan Items Relevant to the Work of this Committee

(a) Provisional Items for Future Meetings

Members noted the table setting out provisional items for future meetings and it was agreed that –

- (a) under potential future items, the “knowledge economy/local futures network” will be included in the “Skills Theme” event scheduled for the Committee’s 16 May 2006;
- (b) the “City Regions/Warwickshire in the SE debate” will be scheduled for the 12 September 2006 meeting.

(b) Forward Plan

Members noted the Forward Plan items relevant to the work of this Committee as follows:

Cabinet – 4 May 2006

Minerals and Waste Development Framework

7. Any Other Items

None.

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Chair of the Committee

The Committee rose at 4:15 p.m.