

## Minutes of a Meeting of the Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 November 2006

Present: " Peter Barnes  
" Ken Browne  
" Michael Doody  
" Ann Forwood (Vice Chair in the Chair)(in the absence of the Chair)  
" Eithne Goode  
" Pat Henry  
" Richard Hyde  
" Philip Morris-Jones  
" John Ross  
" Ian Smith

Officers: Sue Ashley, Regeneration Manager, Environment and Economy Directorate  
Jean Hardwick, Principal Committee Administrator, Performance and Development Directorate.  
Paul Seamer, Research Officer, Environment and Economy Directorate.  
John Scouller, Head of Skills, Tourism and Economy, Environment and Economy Directorate.  
Paul Williams, Scrutiny Officer, Performance and Development Directorate.

### 1. General

#### (1) Apologies.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mick Jones (Chair).

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

(1) Declarations of personal, non prejudicial interests, were received from Members by virtue of them serving as district/borough councillors as follows –

Warwick District Council – Councillors Michael Doody

Nuneaton and Bedworth District Council – Councillors Ann Forwood, Pat Henry and John Ross

Rugby Borough Council – Councillor Philip Morris-Jones

- (2) Councillor Richard Hyde declared a personal interest in item 6. “ 2007/08 to 2009/10 Spending Proposals of the Environment and Economy Directorate” as a Member of the Board of Advantage West Midlands.

### **(3) Minutes**

#### **(a) Minutes**

Resolved that the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2006 be agreed as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.

#### **(b) Matters Arising**

None

### **2. Public Question Time**

None

### **3. Town Centres Update**

Sue Ashley updated the Committee on the progress of town centre development across Warwickshire and Business Improvement District Scheme Applications (BIDS) (presentation material circulated).

In reply to questions Sue Ashley explained that –

- (1) all businesses, not just retailers, contributed to BID schemes. In Rugby retailers represented just 34% of partners' contributions.
- (2) the Rugby scheme had enabled the town centre to become a much improved, cleaner and safer area than it had been previously.
- (3) the services provided through BID schemes were in addition to those provided by the district/borough councils.
- (4) BID scheme applications could apply to villages and to industrial estates, for example Bayton Road industrial estate. Districts that had more than one centre could also benefit from the scheme, for example, Warwick, Leamington and Kenilworth but each centre would need to be dealt with separately.

During discussion a Member supported and welcomed the BID schemes.

The Chair thanked Sue Ashley for her presentation.

### **4. Environment and Economy Directorate – Half-Year Performance Report.**

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Environment and Economy, which presented the latest performance update with respect to promoting economic regeneration within Warwickshire.

In reply to questions John Scouller explained that:

- (1) the 22% of people of working age not in employment included students, unpaid carers and those who had retired early. The national average of people in employment was 80% (the actual for Warwickshire being 78%).
- (2) the vat indicator was not a perfect indicator in that it showed new businesses but did not show those that had closed down e.g. Peugeot. The figures did, however, show that Warwickshire was performing better than the national average.
- (3) the construction costs of phase 3 of the Centenary Business Centre were higher than the budget allocation and negotiations were ongoing to reduce this sum by £186,000 – on a projected total budget of £5m, which would be resolved either through the budget process or by negotiations with AWM.
- (4) Current funding for the HUB was being phased out but a bid for further funding to support Phase II for a Training Centre was underway.

Resolved that the Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- (a) note the performance report submitted by Environment and Economy Directorate Service for the half-year 2005/06.
- (b) Endorse any proposed remedial actions.

## **5. Corporate Business Plan Target Review**

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director for Environment and Economy, which detailed the targets set by Environment and Economy Directorate within the Corporate Business Plan 2006/9 regarding Economy and Enterprise medium term priorities.

John Scouller reported new information received relating to new vat registrations for 2004/5, page 4 of the report, which were 53 and changes to the percentage growth in VAT registered business stocks as follows:

2003/04 - +1.8%  
2004/05 - +1.7%  
2005/06 - +1.6%

Taking into account these new figures he proposed that the target for 2006/7 of +1.0% was too modest and that 1.5% was more appropriate targets for the next three years.

During discussion the following comments were noted:

- (1) The improved targets for VAT registered business stocks were welcomed.

- (2) Paul Seamer was thanked for the clarity of his explanation about why the VAT targets had changed.

Resolved that the Committee notes the targets within the Corporate Business Plan 2006/9.

## **6. 2007/08 to 2009/10 Spending Proposals of the Environment and Economy Directorate.**

John Scouller presented the report of the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy, which detailed the 2007/8 to 2009/10 revenue and capital spending proposals of the Environment and Economy Directorate and sought the Committee's views on both the spending proposals and the funding options proposed. He highlighted the main spending proposals that related to the remit of this Committee, as follows:

- (1) Centenary Business Centre Phase 3 funding shortfall for the third phase.
- (2) Stoneleigh Park Biofutures Centre and World of Rugby Football attraction.

In reply to questions John Scouller explained why the Elliott Park Innovation Centre (EPIC) was one-thirds empty. He explained that the original decision was to build in two phases, however, Government advice at that time was to build and complete the building in one stage (at a cost of £6.8m) because of the likelihood that funding would not be available for a second phase. In an attempt to address the issue of vacant spaces he was currently discussing with Advantage West Midlands the possibility of relaxing the criteria for letting the building.

Discussion followed during which Members commented that they would wish to support the continuation of innovative businesses occupying the EPIC building and enquired what efforts were being made to publicise and promote its use. In reply John Scouller said that Coventry University was linked to the EPIC to promote learning business enterprise activity.

Members questioned what other marketing techniques were being used to publicise the EPIC and how the University was judged on its effectiveness. It was proposed that representatives from the University should be invited to attend a future meeting to inform Members what methods were used to promote the EPIC.

Resolved that the Committee:

- (1) note the 2007/8 to 2009/10 spending and consequential funding proposals identified by the Environment and Economy Directorate.
- (2) ask for a detailed report on the EPIC, to include its innovative successes, and invite representatives of the University to attend to advise on its work in promoting use of the building.

**7. 2006/07 Efficiency Savings Environment and Economy Directorate**

Resolved, having considered the report of the Strategic Director of Environment and Economy Directorate, to note the progress made by the Environment and Economy Directorate in delivering the 2006/07 efficiency savings target.

**8. Future Work Programme and Forward Plan Items Relevant to the Work of this Committee.**

**(a) Provisional Items for Future Meeting**

The Committee agreed revisions to the future work programme as follows:

**19 December 2006**

Peugeot Update (Oral)  
HUB – Full Grant Evaluation  
Compliments and Complaints

**30 January 2007**

Education Business Partnership  
Draft European Strategy (Invite all Members to attend).

(Note since the meeting the Chair has asked that these items be deferred to the next meeting and that they be replaced by the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy Review)

**27 March 2007**

Annual opportunity to scrutinise the Council’s role in the delivery of skills development component of the Local Area Agreement

**(b) Forward Plan**

Members noted the Forward Plan items relevant to the work of the Committee.

**9. Any other Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

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Chair of the Committee

The Committee rose at 3:40 p.m.