



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2007 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Farmer – Chair
Councillor Garrity – Liberal Democrat Spokesperson
Councillor Kitterick – Labour Spokesperson
Councillor Porter – Conservative Spokesperson

Councillor Clair
Councillor Hunt (for Cllr Saleh)

Councillor Hall (for Cllr Bhatti)

* * * * *

101. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have in the business on the agenda and/or declare that Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applied to them.

Councillor Hunt declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of Item 8, "City-wide Construction Project Update", Item 9, "Job Service Partnership," and Item 10, "Barker Review of Land Use Planning," as he was a Board Member of East Midlands Development Agency.

102. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bhatti and Saleh.

103. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair requested that he be provided with an update on actions arising from previous meetings.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development and Planning Committee held on 18 January 2007 be confirmed as a correct record.

104. PETITIONS

The Town Clerk reported that no petitions had been received.

105. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS, STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Town Clerk reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received.

106. UPDATE - TACKLING THE EMPLOYMENT GAP AMONG ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS

The Service Director, Regeneration, Highways and Transportation submitted a report which updated the Committee on the progress that had been made since the paper "Tackling the Employment Gap Among Ethnic Minority Groups" was presented to the Leicester Economic Action Partnership (LEAP) in May 2006.

Kishor Tailor, Chief Executive, Leicester Shire Economic Partnership, was present at the meeting to answer Members' questions.

Members asked about whether the City had capacity to deliver the initiatives mentioned in the report and how a lack of educational attainment and the acquisition of skills were to be addressed. Officers stated that certain projects were already being delivered and that future externally funded projects would further increase capacity to deliver on the initiatives in the report. The lack of educational attainment was being addressed by the Job Service Partnership, as individuals benefited from client-centred intervention which identified their needs and signposted them to relevant training providers. It was also anticipated that there would be more input from employers into the work of funding agencies so that appropriate skills training would be offered.

Members queried whether there were any powers to enforce local employers to take on people from within the city. They also asked how employers could be encouraged to take on people with a variety of perceived barriers such as language, ethnicity, gender or lone parents, as they could be a potential hidden skills base. Members also asked if provision was being made to assist people to learn English. Officers explained that the Government's stance on recruiting certain disadvantaged people and making employee numbers more representative was to encourage employers to voluntarily support this, and was therefore not enforceable, hence the recommendations in the report which were devised to systematically address this.

Discussion took place concerning problems employers had recruiting people with sufficient interpersonal skills and it was reported that work was being done with schools to build essential skills into the curriculum.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report.

107. GENDER PROFILE OF LEICESTER'S LABOUR MARKET

The Service Director, Regeneration, Highways and Transportation, submitted a report which introduced three research reports, "Working Below Potential –

Women in Part Time Work,” Ethnic Minority Women and Access to the Labour Market,” and “Career Development for Women in Local Authorities.”

Maureen Milgram-Forrest, Chair of the Leicester Learning Skills Council (LSC) was present to answer questions from Members.

Members asked whether there was capacity within women’s organisations to deliver the programmes outlined in the report and concern was expressed that these projects could be hindered by the Council’s property policies. Officers explained that the Council had signed up to the Local Area Agreement and that all departments were committed to its objectives, including supporting socially excluded women.

Members discussed how existing culture could be changed. It was explained that women wanted the opportunity to work to their potential and that there was a need for an overall strategy to achieve this. The Council’s achievements within its own workforce were acknowledged and discussion took place as to how to improve this further.

Members asked what could be done to encourage women who were hindered in working by family situations and it was suggested that this could be addressed by making best use of part-time or flexible hours or by providing training and support through voluntary organisations. Members also discussed ways in which overseas qualifications could be recognised.

Members expressed concern that homeworking was not mentioned in the reports, that there was little mention of child care, and that it appeared that voluntary organisations were not providing the facilities which the Council expected. Officers explained that homeworking presented concerns of isolation and poor pay and was therefore currently not recommended. Officers also acknowledged that the voluntary sector was vital for provision of facilities such as child care and it was noted that the Leicester Partnership had decided to invest in this.

Discussion took place concerning adult learning, as it was noted that the majority of the LSC’ s budget was targeted at young people. It was explained that there should be a partnership between the Council, LSC and Job Centre Plus to ensure relevant training was delivered.

Members felt that the issue required more in-depth consideration and agreed to consider it more fully at a future meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the reports and that they be re-submitted to a future meeting of the Committee for further consideration.

108. CITYWIDE CONSTRUCTION PROJECT UPDATE NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2006

The Service Director for Regeneration, Highways and Transportation submitted a report which updated the Committee regarding the Leicester Citywide Construction Project and highlighted future project activities.

Members expressed disappointment that representatives from Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual and Black and Minority Ethnic groups had not been invited to the discussion as requested at a previous meeting.

Members asked for detail about the proportion of employees on the projects who lived within the City and whether a significant amount of local trainees were being taken on for the BSF programme. Officers reported that 32% of people working on the Shires development were local, but information was unavailable for BSF. Members further requested that clarification be sought on figures regarding employees on the Shires Development; that officers keep monitoring the BSF project to ensure local labour was used and that the figures for local labour on the Godstow Walk and former Charles Street Police Station be provided. They also requested input on the issue from Leicester College and Stephenson College regarding training in the construction industry.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Committee note the report.
- 2) That a further report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee, and that representatives be invited to the meeting as per Members' previous request.

109. JOB SERVICE PARTNERSHIP

The Service Director, Regeneration, Highways and Transportation, submitted a report which provided an update on the Job Service Partnership and highlighted progress made with the Council's corporate and departmental HR services.

Members stated that they were very pleased with progress and congratulated officers for their work. They noted that the majority of line managers supported the scheme and asked for details of areas of the Council where this was not the case. Members suggested that the potential of offering work experience placements through Leicester's twinning arrangements could be investigated. They also asked for a breakdown of places offered to date as part of the work experience pilot scheme to be circulated to Members of the Committee and that the findings of the scheme be submitted to the Committee after 31 May 2007.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report and that a further report be submitted to the Committee at a future meeting.

110. BARKER REVIEW OF LAND USE PLANNING

The Corporate Director of Regeneration and Culture submitted a report

summarising and setting out the City Council's draft comments on Kate Barker's final report and recommendations for Land Use Planning.

Members thanked officers for the quality of the report and the hard work which had been put into producing it. They also endorsed the comments made in the report.

Concern was raised about the potential for more out-of-town shopping developments as Kate Barker's report recommended removal of the current requirement for assessments of need for major retail developments.

It was suggested that city boundaries could be reassessed to allow better planning of urban growth areas and facilitate better planning of large projects such as park and ride schemes. It was felt that current boundaries did not reflect current and future planning activity.

There was support for pre-planning application discussions. However, a shortage of planners and resources, and pressures to determine planning applications speedily had to be considered. Discussion took place on how pre-application discussions should be funded and asked that this be taken into account. Members also felt that developers of large projects should be required to carry out these discussions as well as public consultations and that an agreement to do this could be accompanied by a shorter application period as a "trade-off."

Members objected to the potential for major infrastructure projects, that were often controversial, to bypass local decision-making as they felt that such projects should require the support of residents. They also expressed concern about powers being transferred to regional planning bodies/assemblies, except for projects of regional strategic significance where it was felt that it was important to have wider input into these decisions.

Members stated that there should be provision for conditions to be proposed and agreed by the Local Planning Authority and placed on an application following an appeal, as currently these could be lost following the inspectorate's decision.

Members asked that local shopping areas be better promoted and that the importance of transport be considered in planning decisions.

The opportunity to reassess what did/didn't need planning permission was welcomed, as were proposals to make the planning system more simple and efficient.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Chair and Spokespersons of the Committee send a letter, containing comments made in the report and at the meeting, to the Department for Communities and Local Government, East Midlands Development Agency and the Regional Assembly.

- 2) That the Committee refer the report to Cabinet for their consideration and comments.

111. LEICESTER SOUTH AREA PROFILE, SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Service Director, Regeneration, Highways and Transportation, submitted a report which addressed a request from the Aylestone, Eyres Monsell and Freeman Area Committee where residents raised disappointment at the lack of funding available for Eyres Monsell and Aylestone.

Officers pointed out an error in the conclusions of the report, stating that it should have read that there was derelict land ripe for regeneration, not housing.

Members stated that Aylestone Meadows could be a huge resource for the city if it were to be turned into an eco park. The potential of funding this through a lottery bid was discussed. Concern was raised about the comments about schools in the area, as it did not mention that there were some highly-performing schools. They also expressed concern that Eyres Monsell had pockets of deprivation, but was not recognised as an area of deprivation.

Members asked that the issue be brought back to the Committee when it had been considered by the Area Committee, along with that Committee's comments.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report and that the issue be resubmitted to a future meeting, following its consideration at the Area Committee.

112. EU STRUCTURAL AND COHESION FUND PROGRAMME 2007-2013

The Service Director, Regeneration, Highways and Transportation, submitted a report which noted that the UK Government announced a further 9.6 billion euro of funding under the new EU Structural and Cohesion Fund Programme 2007-2013. Consultation was now underway for European Structural Fund and European Regional Development Fund Programmes to determine how the money should be spent in the region.

Members stated that the programme had the potential to be very beneficial for Leicester. They stated that there was a need for lobbying to start as soon as possible. Officers stated that they were waiting for direction from the EU and that they hoped the original timescale would be extended due to this delay. In order to maximise chances of being successful, it was important to have a range of projects prepared that could be up and running straight away, as these were likely to be prioritised if spending could happen immediately. It was also recommended that separate urban development priorities be promoted in order to address centres of deprivation. Members stressed the need for the

correct person to be appointed to the Programme Monitoring Committee, who could sufficiently promote the needs of Leicester.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report.

113. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive submitted a report which considered the position of the Committee's Annual Work Programme.

It was noted that there were several outstanding issues and there was not another meeting of the Committee scheduled this municipal year. Members agreed to hold a special meeting to discuss the Performing Arts Centre Business Plan and that any other issues should be dealt with informally.

Members agreed that the site visit arranged for 12 March would go ahead, but that the rest of the schedule should be revised. It was suggested that other councillors could also be invited to attend these visits.

RESOLVED:

That a meeting of the Committee be scheduled for 15 March 2007 to discuss the Performing Arts Centre Business Plan and that any further outstanding items should be dealt with informally where necessary.

114. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.25pm.

