

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ACCESS TO EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 15 JUNE 2009 AT 4.00 P.M.

IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT:
Councillors

Mawle, D. L. (Chairman)

Dixon, D. I. Williams, Mrs. P.
Thomas, D.

(Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Burnett, (Vice-Chairman) M. R. Green and M. J. Holder)

1. Minutes

The Chairman reported that the issue of educational improvement plans for schools would continue to be considered by the Access to Education, Skills and Employment Policy Development Committee. A meeting had been held with the Head Teacher of Cannock Chase High School and a meeting that had been postponed with the Head Teacher at Hagley Park High School would be rearranged. Blake Valley Technology College had contacted Officers and a meeting would also be held with their Head Teacher. Councillor Mrs. P. Williams intimated that she would also attend the meetings as Chairman of Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration informed the Committee that information would be provided to relevant businesses with regard to small business rate relief in late July early August 2009. It was explained that a further Government initiative was to be carried out and information relating to that would also be sent out at that time. Information was also being provided to residents on actions to reduce the impacts of the recession. Members requested that information on rules relating to small business rate relief be provided to them and also whether eligible businesses could have their applications backdated. The Principal Economic Development Officer undertook to investigate these issues.

Regarding other potential work programme issues from the previous Committee:

- Members requested that the Council's Workforce Development Strategy be circulated virtually to them for comments.
- It was explained that Gazeley Properties had been requested that when an end user for the warehouse at Rugeley was known, a meeting be held to discuss what was being undertaken to employ locally and that this issue would be included on the Committee's work programme.

- It was noted that Cabinet would receive the previous Committee's recommendations from its work during 2008-09 on 25 June 2009.

It was reported that the Portfolio Leader and the Local Strategic Partnership Board have progressed the actions in respect of the recession considered by the previous Committee in May. The Local Strategic Partnership Executive Board had agreed that funding of £10,000 would be made available to provide guidance through a special publication to residents and businesses.

The recommendations of the Access to Skills, Economic Development and Enterprise Policy Development Committee had been reported verbally by the Portfolio Leader to Cabinet who had intimated that the action taken to quickly produce a special publication under the LSP and information on Small Business Rate Relief would be endorsed.

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager updated the Committee on the procedure for agreeing and approving Minutes. It was explained that meetings of Policy Development Committees would be held on a quarterly basis. In exceptional circumstances, the Chairman, in consultation with the Chief Executive (or anyone duly authorised by him) could convene additional meeting(s).

The proposals for the agreeing and approval of PDC minutes sought to address the potential for an unacceptable delay arising in minutes being approved under current arrangements, given that PDCs would ordinarily meet quarterly. The Committee was informed that draft Minutes would in future be emailed to Members of the Committee within 7 working days of the meeting for comments/amendments. Members would then confirm their amendments (if any) within 10 working days. Should significant amendments be proposed, the Chairman would meet with the appropriate Lead Officer and Committee Officer to consider and confirm the amendments proposed. Once finalised, the minutes would be deemed as 'Agreed Minutes' as opposed to 'Approved Minutes' and would again be circulated to Members of the Committee. The Minutes would still be included on the agenda for the following Committee meeting for approval, when they would then be deemed 'Approved Minutes'. Should a Cabinet meeting be scheduled before the next meeting of the Policy Development Committee, the Agreed Minutes would be presented to Cabinet for them to note and to enable recommendations to be considered.

The arrangements and in particular the timetable, which would be circulated to Members within the next week, would be kept under review and changes made as deemed appropriate and necessary.

Members requested that when Minutes were forwarded to them with changes, that track changes be used to highlight what alterations had been made. The Legal and Democratic Services Manager confirmed that this would be done.

AGREED:

That:-

- (A) Information be provided to the Policy Development Committee on rules relating to small business rate relief and also whether eligible businesses could have their applications for small business rate relief backdated.
- (B) The Council's Workforce Development Strategy be circulated virtually to the Committee for comments.

- (C) When an end user of the Gazeley Properties' warehouse at Rugeley has been confirmed, a meeting be held to discuss the prospects of local people being employed.
- (D) The Minutes of the meeting of the Access to Skills, Economic Development and Enterprise Development Committee held on 7 May, 2009 be approved as a correct record.

2. Presentation on the role and remit of the Access to Education, Skills & Employment Policy Development Committee.

The Committee received a presentation from the Legal and Democratic Services Manager on the role and remit of Policy Development Committees.

It was explained that issues of capacity for Members and Officers had been raised and it was considered that a more focused approach should be taken by Policy Development Committees to deliver improved outcomes.

Policy Development Committees had been aligned with LAA blocks. The Committees would be guided by a more robust framework, established by the PDC Terms of Reference and the Performance Management Framework. Such an approach required PDCs to focus their efforts on key areas of concern highlighted from performance data (provided quarterly) and which detailed those targets that the Council was failing to meet. PDCs should explore and consider proposals/options to tackle and overcome such failures with recommendations being made to Cabinet or Scrutiny Committee as considered appropriate. The principal function of PDCs was to performance manage PDPs and examine how failing targets could be improved, particularly through policy development. To assist PDCs with their role, it had the choice of inviting external partners to attend meetings where it was considered that a more co-ordinated approach was required.

It was explained that documents would be sent out earlier than the five clear days before Policy Development Committee meetings in order that Members would have more time in which to digest the information.

A Member raised concern that action items flagged up as red should be addressed by Officers before the Policy Development Committee considered the issues or, at least, would have reasons why it had not met its target.

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager explained that the Policy Development Committees' Lead Officers would be aware of 'red flag' issues being scrutinised by Scrutiny Committee and would focus the PDCs on other matters. The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained that the performance indicators were made up of both county and local indicators and many for this Committee would be challenging because of the economic circumstances. The Policy Development Committee may consider that the planned actions were not appropriate to impact on the indicators and would have the opportunity to consider changes in approach or policy.

3. Presentation on Performance Management Framework

The Committee received a presentation from the Performance Manager on the Performance Management Framework.

It was explained that the Council's Corporate Plan setting out the Council's priorities for the next three years, had been approved by Council at their meeting on 29 April 2009. Six Priority Delivery Plans (PDPs) had been developed as follows:-

- Children and Young People and Families
- Healthier Communities, Housing and Older People
- Access to Education, Skills and Employment
- Safe, Strong and Cohesive Communities
- Environmental Sustainability; and

- Corporate Improvement

The principles and guidance on how Policy Development Committees would be performance managed were contained within the framework to ensure that actions and targets were delivered in accordance with specified timescales.

All PDPs would be reported every six weeks to DMT updating them on the current position with respect to the delivery of actions and performance indicators. The PDPs would then be reported quarterly with more comprehensive information to DMT, Scrutiny and Policy Development Committees. Progress would be reported using the traffic light assessment method for actions, PIs and risk actions. Exception reports would be completed with details of what actions were being taken to address matters when red and amber indicators were shown, the main focus being on the red indicators.

4. Presentation on the Committee's Priority Delivery Plan

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Planning & Regeneration on the Access to Education, Skills and Employment Delivery Plan.

It was explained that actions had been identified to meet the challenges facing the economy of the District, most notably the impact of the recession on Cannock Chase Businesses and residents were facing difficult times at present and short and longer term proposals were being developed to tackle these issues. A report from the Local Government Association which had looked at the impacts of the recession, recognised that the growth of unemployment in Cannock had had risen by 190% between April 2008 and 2009, the second highest in the country. The main reasons for this lay in the impact of the recession on the high level of employment in the manufacturing and engineering industry and the construction trade. The economy was not diversified enough to withstand the current situation and the workforce was not as skilled as it needed to be. A major focus of the Council and its partners was to improve local education and workforce skills as a means of underpinning recovery from future recessions. The 'Local Jobs for Local People' priority of the Council recognised the need to equip local people with the skills and qualifications to compete for jobs both within and outside the district. The success of schools was a major issue and additional vocational training was required, together with work experience to get students more work ready. A number of initiatives would be developed to target 'hot spot' wards with a high benefit dependency which had a strong correlation with those young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

It was considered that not enough people were employed in tourism, given the existence of the AONB in the District, and that new business growth needed to be improved, with appropriate support and guidance being provided. The Council was working with InStaffs, local landowners

and developers to secure inward investment in key employment sites, particularly those which would diversify the local economy (for example in the business and professional services sector) and contribute to sustainable growth.

Work was ongoing with the private sector to develop town centre regeneration schemes and Cannock Chase was being promoted as a visitor destination through the Staffordshire Destination Management Partnership.

Members expressed concern that developers were building small houses or apartments rather than aspirational housing to attract professional workers. The Head of Planning and Regeneration confirmed that this was a key area of change for the District. It had been identified in the Priority Delivery Plan and was worthy of further debate.

The possibility of investing in technology to drive diversification in business and professional services, for example through providing a Science Park was discussed,. However, this would be difficult for the District because Science Parks were normally situated near to a University and needed considerable funding and backing from organisations such as AWM. This would require a change in regional policy for Cannock Chase to benefit and, at least over the short term, is unlikely to happen. This issue of how the Council could stimulate diversification of the economy by attracting investment from technology companies and office schemes should be considered further.

CHAIRMAN