

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ACCESS TO EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER, 2009 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT: Councillors

Mawle, D.L. (Chairman)

Burnett, J.	Holder, M.J.
Davies, D.N.	Thomas, D.
Dixon, D.I.	Williams, Mrs. P.
Green, M.R.	

(An apology for absence was received from Councillor G. Burnett (Vice-Chairman)).

5. Minutes

Arising from Minute 1, page 1, paragraph 1, Mr. B. Phillips, Head of Planning and Regeneration reported that both the Chairman and the Scrutiny Committee Chairman, Councillor Mrs. P. Williams would be attending a meeting with the Head Teacher of Blake Valley Technology College tomorrow, and a further meeting had been arranged with the Head Teacher of Hagley Park Sports College on 21 September, 2009 in respect of the educational improvement plans for both schools. A request would be made by the Chairman for a copy of Blake's Action Plan, and the outcomes of both meetings would be reported at the next Committee meeting together with a copy of the Action Plan.

Arising from Minute 2, page 1, paragraph 2, the Head of Planning and Regeneration reported that a promotional campaign had been launched in respect of small business rate relief. He also reported that the Committee's request for a Workforce Development Strategy had not yet progressed however discussions on timescales would be taking place with the Council's HR department.

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on held on 15 June, 2009 be approved as a correct record.

6. 2009/2010 Quarter 1 Performance and Finance Report

Consideration was given to the Report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Enclosure 4.1 – 4.6 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

The Head of Planning and Regeneration presented the Report. He advised that there were currently 5 Amber indicators which highlighted the problems in the District with the recession. However, he stated that there were a number of initiatives the Council were involved in, such as the future jobs fund which the Council had been successful to secure in conjunction with other Local Authorities. The funding would help create jobs over the next 6 months and it was hoped this would have a short-term impact.

A Member raised concern that although there were problems in the District caused through the recession, the classification system used for the performance indicators could be misleading. He referred to Indicator NI 117, 16-18 year olds (NEETs) and stated that an Amber classification would be more appropriate given that up to date figures from Connexions had not yet been received.

Members of the Committee discussed the classification system used and were of the opinion that if no up to date information was available to support the performance indicator, then it should be left blank.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration agreed to review the performance report scoring for consistency and robustness, for example, in Challenge 3 infrastructures the College would find it difficult to identify capital to secure modern further education; therefore in future the indicator would be classified as either Amber or Red.

AGREED:

- (A) That the performance outturn for Quarter 1 as detailed at Annex 1, be noted.
- (B) That the exception reports, detailed at Annex 2, which describes the actions taken and actions proposed to be taken by Lead Officers for any action or performance indicator classified as Red or Amber, be noted.
- (C) That the financial outturn for Quarter 1 as detailed at Annex 3, be noted.

7. Response to Recession

The Head of Planning and Regeneration reported that a mailshot was circulated in June to all residents in the District regarding small business rate relief, together with a follow-up.

Mrs. D. Harris, Principal Economic Development Officer reported that following the mailshots a number of eligible businesses were identified for rate relief and information packs forwarded to them on 14 August, 2009. She stated that 21 business applications were received between August and September to a value of approximately £12k in comparison to 24 applications through the normal process. She reported on the promotion of the Government's initiative to allow businesses to defer rate increases and stated that 169 applications had been received, however there was no benchmark to compare it to.

The Principal Economic Development Officer stated that a further advice and guidance publication would be sent out to partner organisations in the next few weeks.

Members were keen to know if small businesses were offered the rate relief information packs when they were finding that they were having difficulties financially. The Principal Economic

Development Officer stated that she would endeavour to provide the information for Members of the Committee given that she did not have it at this time.

A Member was keen to know what the period of deferment was. The Principal Economic Development Officer stated that businesses could apply at any point up to 31 March 2010, and could defer 3% of their yearly rates bill and would be expected to pay back half of the amount each year.

The Principal Economic Development Officer reported on a number of schemes to help try and alleviate the recession in the District. The schemes included:-

- 1-1 advice clinics with Business Link
- Success in securing funding for the future job fund bid – jobs to start from October 2009 to March 2010
- Success in securing £3k retail initiative in Rugeley
- In conjunction with Staffordshire County Council a bid for £1.4 million (with the County) to engage hard to reach people e.g., unemployed, benefit claimants through a 'community buddies project'
- Job fair to be held by the PCT at the Civic Centre on 30 September, 2009
- Joint recession event in planning with South Staffs and Moorlands Borough Councils to target businesses

A Member was keen to know if those employed through the future job fund on a temporary basis would be helped in securing permanent employment, and also asked the type of work they would be undertaking. The Head of Planning and Regeneration stated that a young person 18-24 would be offered a temporary job at the minimum wage or bottom of the pay scale. The job would be provided in conjunction with a training package which would be intended to give the person further confidence and skills. The training package would include assistance with job searches and the Council would provide assistance for the person in applying for internal vacancies provided they met the necessary criteria.

The Principal Economic Development Officer added that the Council's Contractors would be asked to employ a number of people in the fields of painting and decorating, landscaping, leisure and projects within the countryside.

A Member raised concern and asked if there would be a requirement for those that were going to be employed through the funding to live in the District. The Head of Planning and Regeneration stated that the Council's aim was to offer jobs to those in the area however the details of the scheme were still in development and he would need to liaise with Job Centre Plus on this issue. He also added that as part of the scheme older unemployed people could be provided with the opportunity of securing temporary employment if they were a resident within the unemployment hot spots.

Concern was raised by a Member that if permanent employment was offered as a result of a temporary job a young person with no experience could be offered the job, whereas if an older person who had undertaken a similar position who had more or substantial experience may lose out on the opportunity.

A Member raised concern that some people could lose out on the opportunity of one of the temporary employment opportunities due to the fact that not everyone unemployed in the

District received their benefits through Cannock Job Centre. The Principal Economic Development Officer stated that this would be clarified with Job Centre Plus. It was stated also that there was a mechanism to refer local people onto the scheme provided they were eligible, irrespective of 'sign on' location.

Members also discussed the financial incentive of approximately £2K which was offered to businesses for employing an unemployed person who was currently claiming benefits and queried if the Council were using this scheme.

8. Recommendations of the Access to Skills, Economic development & Enterprise Policy Development Committee for 2008/09

Members referred to the recommendations to Cabinet and wished to continue to focus on the lack of academic achievement in respect of GCSE's within schools. It was stated that this issue needed to be emphasised when being reported given that it was both a major and important factor. Significant in this as a concern for the Committee were the progression fall off in achievement between KS2 and KS3/KS4.

CHAIRMAN