

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ACCESS TO SKILLS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND
ENTERPRISE POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MONDAY, 2 MARCH, 2009 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT: Councillors

Yates, Ms. W. (Chairman)

Davies, D. N.

Grocott, M.R.

Dixon, D.I.

Williams, Mrs. P.

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

20. Minutes

Mr. Glenn Watson, Economic Development Manager, explained that as previously reported, Mr. Richard Worth, District Strategic Improvement Manager for Cannock Chase from Staffordshire County Council's Education Department had attended a meeting of the Performance & Partnerships Scrutiny Sub-Committee in November 2008. The Sub-Committee had requested a copy of the Improvement Plan, however, it had subsequently been established that this did not exist, but that Business Plans had been formulated. The Scrutiny Sub-Committee at their meeting in January 2009 had requested that Councillor Robert Simpson from Staffordshire County Council, be invited to attend a future meeting. It had been ascertained from recent meetings with Education Officers that improvement strategies had been formulated for individual schools. The Policy Development Committee would be updated on any progress on this matter.

With regard to the public transport issue to employment sites previously discussed, the County had been informed that the Policy Development Committee had found the response inadequate. The Chairman and Mr. Watson would continue to pursue this issue.

It was reported that Cabinet had Resolved to withdraw Cannock Chase Council from membership of the Alliance. The Legal Section was investigating whether 12 months notice would be required to be given under the Alliance's new constitution.

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 January, 2009 be approved as a correct record, subject to the word 'been' being replaced with the word 'being' in the second paragraph on page 18 of the Minutes.

21. The Connexions Service in the Chase District

The Committee received a presentation from Ms. Kim Price, District Manager (Cannock and Rugeley), Connexions, Staffordshire.

It was explained that Connexions provided a service for all 13 to 19 year olds and any young person with a statement of Special Educational Needs up to the age of 25. Impartial free information, advice and guidance were provided to local high schools, colleges and Connexions Centres. The aim was to help young people achieve their goals and overcome any barriers to education, training and employment. Free internet access was available to assist with job searching and gathering information.

Advice was provided on:-

- Housing
- Family and personal relationships
- Money and benefits
- Bullying and self confidence
- Health
- Leisure and free time
- The Law
- Personal interests
- Applying for jobs
- Going to College
- Training Opportunities
- Volunteering and self development

Connexions worked closely with other agencies, including:-

- Youth Service
- Youth Offending Team
- Pregnancy Advisory Service
- Mancap
- T3 (Drug and Alcohol Awareness)
- Relate
- MIND
- CAB (Debt Counselling)
- Job Centre
- Training Providers

Personal Advisers were located in the 15 Centres in Staffordshire. Local Centres being situated at Cannock and Rugeley. Personal Advisers also visited High Schools, Colleges, Youth and Community Centres and other places where young people met.

It was reported that in October 2008, with respect to Year 11 leavers from High Schools in Staffordshire 82% stayed on at school or College, 12% went into employment or training and 5% were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and 1% Other (may have left the district). For the same year in Cannock Chase 78% stayed on at school or College, 15% were in employment or training and 4% NEET, 3% Other.

Important in the Connexions approach is a 'June guarantee' to identify NEET school leavers and a 'September guarantee' to offer all those still NEET a learning option.

Connexions took the lead for the LAA NI 117 target and sought to achieve a reduction in the number of young people classed as NEET in Cannock Chase, focusing on certain hotspot Wards (Cannock South; Cannock East; Cannock North and Brereton & Ravenhill). Young people who were NEET were case loaded to staff within Connexion Centres to endeavour to get them into employment, education or training. An apprenticeship website was being developed. An Adult Programme was also delivered by Connexions Staffordshire, the aim of which was to get Adults into education or employment.

Given the high figures locally for students going into vocational training/employment options, concern was raised with respect to the number of students who were leaving the training/employment prior to completion. It was explained that procedures were in place in an effort to address this situation. It was requested that Ms. Price provide figures for the following years when students had entered further education, training and employment in order that the numbers may be assessed relating to those who had 'dropped out'. Members also asked if information on how Cannock Chase compared with other authorities in Staffordshire could be made available.

The Head of Planning & Regeneration asked how the Council could provide further help to Connexions. For example was more funding required to deliver improvements in the 'hot spot' wards. Ms. Price focused on the Training Opportunity and Provider Events (TOP's) for young people for which venues needed to be booked. It was requested that the Ballroom at the Civic Centre be made available if possible on the required date, but that no charge be made to Connexions for this.

It was considered that due to the impact of the recession, getting young people into work would be more difficult and with redundancies being made, figures would continue to rise in the foreseeable future. Young people who had been made redundant, were being encouraged to retrain, go back into education, in order to develop skills and obtain further qualifications.

AGREED:

- (A) That figures be made available relating to the numbers of those 'dropping out' of further education, employment and training in subsequent years, including specifics for those dropping out of employment and training.
- (B) That information be supplied on how Cannock Chase compared with other authorities in Staffordshire in getting young people into employment, education or training.
- (C) That the possibility of the Ballroom at the Civic Centre being made available for Training and Opportunity and Provider Events at no charge to Connexions be investigated.

22. Local Jobs for Local People – The Council's Role

The Committee received a presentation from Mrs. Jan Turner, the Council's Training Officer.

It was explained that the Council provided the following work experience options:-

- Schools - work experience 1 week
- Schools – 1 day a week
- College – 1 day a week
- College – up to 5 days as part of NVQ.

Students were keen to attend the Depot to gain work experience with respect to craft work. Human Resources had visited schools to advise pupils with respect to filling in job application forms and had carried out interviews with them in order for them to gain experience. In previous years Youth Trainees had been employed which had proven to be successful. It was explained that due to budgetary constraints and work pressures, employees may not be able to undertake the training of work experience people.

It had been intended for teachers to visit the Council in order for them to gain experience, but this had not taken place, although interest had again been raised.

The main age ranges for employees at the Council were between 40-49 and 50-59. It was therefore considered essential that younger employees be trained in order to fill the potential skills gaps when older employees retired.

Craft apprenticeships were being developed at the Depot and the provision of apprenticeships in other areas was being explored. Those services that had experienced recruitment difficulties included, Aerobics, Planning, Environmental Health, Swimming Instructors, Street Wardens, Property Services and the Chauffeur.

Mrs. Turner explained that the Council was developing a Workforce Development Strategy and she was undertaking research with respect to this matter. The Committee noted that this Strategy should consider cementing the work experience and other initiatives by which the Council encourages the employment and upskilling of local people, together with the skills required by the Council and the opportunities for employment are promoted/ marketed to the local area.

The Policy Development Committee requested that a graph of length of service of employees be provided.

AGREED:

- (A) That the Policy Development Committee have an opportunity to comment on the initiatives in the Workforce Development Strategy for the Council to encourage the employment of upskilling of local people.
- (B) That the Council's Training Officer provide the Policy Development Committee with a graph showing employees' length of service.

23. Impacts of the Economic Downturn

Mr. Glenn Watson explained that the impact of the recession on Cannock Chase would be included on future agendas of the Committee with more detailed information provided.

In January 2008, 2% (1,208) of the population in Cannock Chase were unemployed; in September 2008 it had risen to 2.6% (1,569) and in January 2009 to 4.4% (2,583). Figures relating to young people, those aged 24 and under, were reported as 445 in January 2008, 610 in September 2008 and 865 in January 2009.

The proposed closure of the Fox's biscuit factory at Uttoxeter would have an impact on unemployment figures as residents in Cannock Chase were presently employed there.

It was reported that it would be difficult to access information relating to when small business made redundancies and short time working. From information gained from press releases it appeared that in Cannock Chase for every one job there would be five residents applying for it. In other areas this was more in the region of seven or eight residents. It was explained that this unofficial data would be clarified.

Concern was raised regarding the charges on void premises when those of a certain size had been vacant for more than three months and that businesses may not be aware of what help was available.

It was explained that the Council's website would have links to sites providing information to businesses and guidance to those at risk of being made redundant. A copy of a document 'Advice and Guidance for Employers and their Workforce during the Economic Downturn' was circulated at the meeting which listed organisations that provided support services. A website www.supportwm.co.uk had been established to signpost businesses to support available in the West Midlands.

A Worklessness Action Group had also been established made up of a number of organisations to endeavour to get people back into work. Funding had been successfully sought to enable the continued use of the Jobs Bus in Cannock Chase, as the County Council had withdrawn this service.

In terms of pressure on the retailing sector, It was reported that shops such as Woolworths, Adams, Walter Smiths, Firkins, the Barbeque shop had closed.

An Economic Bulletin due to be prepared by Staffordshire County Council, would be circulated to the Policy Development Committee within the next few weeks which would contain data relating to unemployment figures. Any subsequent editions would also be circulated.

Members requested that they be provided with periodic unemployment comparison figures and information relating to how Cannock Chase compared with other similar areas. It was also requested that information be provided relating to timescales in which Cannock Chase Council undertook to pay their suppliers and rates support available to businesses.

AGREED:

- (A) That periodic unemployment figures and information relating to how Cannock Chase compared with other similar areas be provided to the Committee.
- (B) That an Economic Bulletin due to be prepared by Staffordshire County Council, be circulated to the Policy Development Committee within the next few weeks containing

data relating to unemployment figures and that any subsequent editions also be circulated.

- (C) That information be provided to the Policy Development Committee on suppliers payment timescales and rates support.

24. Development of a Work Programme 2008/09

Discussion took place on the 2008-09 Work Programme (Enclosure 7.1 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

It was considered that in view of the workload an additional meeting of the Committee would be arranged at which recommendations to Cabinet would be considered.

The Committee requested that Bruce Topley, or his representative, from Gazeley Properties, be invited to attend the Committee to discuss the Section 106 requirement to employ local contractors and workforce. It was also considered that the end occupier of the unit should be invited to attend a future meeting.

AGREED:

That:-

- (A) An additional meeting of the Committee be arranged and that Mr. Bruce Topley, or his representative, from Gazeley Properties, be invited to attend.
- (B) The end occupier of the unit at G Park, Rugeley be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee.
- (C) At the additional meeting of the Committee consideration be given to submitting recommendations to Cabinet.

CHAIRMAN