

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
ACCESS TO SKILLS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND
ENTERPRISE POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, 7 MAY, 2009 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT: Councillors

Burnett, G. (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)

Davies, D. N.

Dixon, D.I.

Grocott, M.R.

Holder, M. J.

Thomas, D.

(Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms. W. Yates (Chairman) M P. Freeman and Mrs. P. Williams).

25. Minutes

Mr. Bob Phillips, Head of Planning and Regeneration, reported that the Chairman of the Policy Development Committee and the Chairman of Scrutiny Committee were to meet with representatives of Staffordshire County Council to discuss concerns raised regarding educational improvement plans for local schools. It had subsequently been arranged for the Members to meet with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors of three secondary schools. The Head of Planning and Regeneration reported that the Committee would be advised of the outcome of the meetings.

With regard to the public transport issue to employment sites previously discussed, the Principal Economic Development Officer and the Chairman had met recently with Officers from the County Council. The meeting was successful with commitments being given for greater collaboration from the County Council regarding service changes and S.106 opportunities.

It was reported that notice had been served to withdraw Cannock Chase Council from membership of the Alliance in accordance with their constitution requirements.

Information provided by Connexions relating to the numbers of those 'dropping out' of further education, employment and training after one year was circulated to the Committee. The figures related to the year 2006/07 which was the latest information available. It was noted that Cannock Chase Council had the highest drop out rate after one year compared with other Districts in Staffordshire. Comparatively Cannock Chase had the highest increase after one year of those entering jobs with no structured training.

As requested by Connexions the Ballroom had been made available to them at no charge and a Training Opportunity and Provider event recently held there had proven to be very successful with over 200 people attending, including adults. Connexions had thanked the Council for their support. The Committee considered that the Council should offer the use of the Ballroom as and when necessary basis.

As requested by the Committee, copies of the Staffordshire Economic Bulletin had been circulated to them.

It was reported that the Council had previously had a policy which aimed to pay suppliers within 30 days. In response to the current economic situation the Council had this week changed this policy to aim to make payment within 10 days of receipt of an invoice.

With regard to business rates support, it was reported that, while the rules were complex, in general small business rate relief (SBRR) could only be applied to where only one property was occupied and the rateable value was £15,000 or below. However it was explained that those who qualified had to apply for the reduction, it was not automatically given. An exercise to promote the discounted rates available to businesses had been undertaken in 2007. Of the 3,100 businesses in the area 855 were in receipt of small business rate relief to date.

The Committee considered that SBRR would be a worthwhile benefit which could be provided at little cost to the Council and that a further promotion should be undertaken. The Head of Planning and Regeneration reported that further information on the SBRR rules would be provided to the Committee.

It was reported that with respect to the Council's Workforce Development Strategy the comments of the Committee would be taken into account through a separate consultation process in due course. The Committee was keen to comment with respect to identifying measures to improve work experience and address skill shortages both in the workplace and the local community.

As requested by Committee, a graph showing the number of Cannock Chase Council employees and their number of years service was circulated at the meeting. It was reported that the median length of service was 10.5 years.

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 March, 2009 be approved as a correct record.

26. Local Jobs for Local People – The Developers Role

The Committee received a presentation from Bruce Topley, Development Director at Gazeley Properties.

It was explained that Gazeley Properties was part of a portfolio owned by Economic Zones World (EZW). The company specialised in distribution and industrial buildings and had developed 6 million square metres of land to date. The warehouse at Rugeley was 700,000 square feet plus offices, yards and parking for HGVs. The design was flexible and could be divided if needed, although it was preferred that it would be leased as one unit.

Gazeley Properties had worked with its construction partner GSE to carry out development of the site. GSE publicised the construction opportunity via its website, prior to appointing suppliers and awarding contracts. GSE requested that its subcontractors bidding for contracts demonstrate how they would employ locally and use local suppliers. It was reported that at least 70% of those applying and subsequently awarded work were local companies, including:-

- Site canteen – from Burton
- Site Engineer – Rugeley
- Lift supplier – Rugeley
- Road sweepers/scaffolding/skips – within 8 miles
- Stuart Flooring – Tamworth
- FSG Security – Rugeley
- FK Roofing – Lichfield and Stafford
- Whiting Landscape – Cannock/Wednesbury/Shrewsbury
- J P Douglas – Nuneaton/Coventry
- WT Parker – Burton on Trent
- Roger Bullivant – Burton on Trent
- Independent Stabilisation Company – local
- Fortel – local
- Jack Moody – Shareshill

Gazeley had and still was raising the profile of the development. As part of the marketing process, a brochure had been printed for potential occupiers. Advantage West Midlands had issued a press release pre and post completion. Banners and Boards had been erected advertising the site and Gazeley U.K. was developing a virtual tour for its website. On site launches had taken place with the Regional Minister attending which had raised the profile. Regional features had appeared in Logistics Manager and on its web site, together with the Estates Gazette. Mail shots had been sent to the top 1,000 warehouse occupiers and a Customer Information Pack had been prepared.

Talks were underway with potential customers and signs were encouraging. A user friendly draft lease had been drawn up for the building in order that legal processes could be completed as quickly as possible when an occupier wanted the site.

Mr Topley considered that the warehouse, as with most modern businesses, would be part automated, rather than fully automated due to the warehouse's limited height, and that job prospects would be good. However this would be dependent on the end user occupier. Rugeley had been chosen due to its central location and labour availability.

It was requested that when Gazeley Properties negotiations were completed with an end occupier identified that they contact the Council as early as possible in order that appropriate recruitment and training could be undertaken to enable local people to be in a good position to access the new jobs. It was reported that the company had a good relationship with InStaffs.

The Committee enquired whether the Company's construction partner was obligated to employ local subcontractors. Mr. Topley advised that preference for local sub-contractors stopped short of an obligation, but was nevertheless shown to be successful. Mr Topley agreed to contact GSE to see whether the contractual wording used for suppliers could be shared with the Committee. It was considered a good example of where a company had proactively sourced locally and this could be shared with others in terms of good working

practice. The emphasis being that those attempting to employ locally were more likely to be awarded contracts.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Topley for his presentation to the Committee.

27. Impacts of the Economic Downturn

Consideration was given to the briefing note of the Head of Planning & Regeneration – Update on Activity to Combat the Recession (Enclosure 5.1 – 5.4). It was reported that there was an error on Annex 1, in the overall summary, bullet point eight, should read that ‘some statistics on Leisure Services suggest income and usage figures are performing well (anecdotal)’ rather than ‘not performing well’.

The Committee considered and gave their endorsement to the actions as outlined in section 4 ‘Key Actions’ of the note being recommended to Cabinet. The Committee raised concerns on the need to act quickly and expressed concern regarding any delays, which could be incurred through the Council’s reporting procedures. The Access to Skills, Economic Development & Enterprise Portfolio Leader agreed to raise the Committee’s concerns at the Cabinet meeting on 14 May 2009.

On the question of which organisation was best placed to coordinate the response to the recession, the Committee considered that the Local Strategic Partnership Board (LSP) had the right partners ‘around the table’ and should take the lead. However, the Committee was concerned that any partnership response must be effective and it was agreed that the Council should support the LSP to ensure that the partnership response was both appropriate and timely.

Concern was raised with respect to those wanting to start up their own business and if they would know where to go for guidance. It was explained that Business Enterprise support were contracted by Business Link to support those wanting to do this and people should be encouraged to contact them. The Committee considered that services like this should be fully promoted in order that the public were aware of this opportunity and that the Business Link site should have links to other sites where information was provided on this issue. It was considered to help sign post people in the right direction that the Council, together with other partners, preferably through the LSP, should produce marketing material to help publicise the help, advice and support available to both residents and businesses in the District. .

28. Recommendations to Cabinet

Consideration was given to the Report – Recommendations to Cabinet – Matters to be Considered (Enclosure 6.1 – 6.7).

The Committee considered that in addition to the recommendations listed in the Briefing Note, that Cabinet be recommended:-

- (A) That the experience of Gazeley Properties development in Rugeley should be used to encourage developers to use local contractors and to encourage the end users of schemes to agree recruitment and training packages aimed at employing local people.

- (B) To endorse the 'Key Actions' of the Briefing Note 'Activity to Combat the Recession' and to encourage the Local Strategic Partnership Board to take early action to co-ordinate a partners response to the recession, including issuing additional information, advice and guidance to residents and businesses.

AGREED:

That a report containing the recommendations of the Policy Development Committee be presented to Cabinet for consideration

CHAIRMAN