

Cannock Chase Council
Minutes of the Meeting of the
Economic Recovery Scrutiny Committee
Held on Wednesday 15 September 2021 at 4:00pm
in the Civic Centre, Cannock

Part 1

Present: Councillors:

Thompson, Mrs. S.L. (Chairman)

Kraujalis, J.T. (Vice-Chairman)

Frew, C.L.

Startin, P.D.

Haden, Mrs. P.K.

Wilkinson, Ms. C.L.

Johnson, T.B.

Witton, P.T.

Lyons, N.

Also in attendance by invitation of the Chairman:

Councillor P. Hewitt (Cabinet Member for Innovation and High Streets) for agenda item 5 – Car Park Payback Initiative

7. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms. A.J. Dunnett, Mrs. H. Sutton and Mrs. L.J. Wilson.

8. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations

No declarations of interests in additions to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members Interests were made.

9. Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 June, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

10. Quarter 1 PDP and Recovery Performance Information

Consideration was given to the Quarter 1 PDP and Recovery Performance Information for Supporting Economic Recovery (Item 4.1 – 4.15 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

The Head of Economic Prosperity and Head of Housing and Partnerships led Members through the information outlining some of the projects/actions achieved in Quarter 1 and also made reference to the Direction of Travel Indicators.

A Member expressed concern at the high vacancy rates in Cannock town centre and queried whether the street markets were affecting trade. The Head of Economic Prosperity commented that the high vacancy rates were a key concern; town centres were declining pre-pandemic and continued to do so. However, it was considered that the street markets brought footfall into the town centre.

The Member raised further concern with respect to anti-social behaviour/drug activity and lack of police presence in the town centre. The Head of Housing and Partnerships acknowledged the concerns and commented that CCTV was installed, and the Community Safety Team were aware of the issues. However, this did not fall within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee noted that unemployment rates continued to decline and acknowledged the processes that had been put in place to assist in bringing jobs into the area. The Head of Economic Prosperity commented that work would continue in this respect to help people get into employment. The situation would be reviewed over the coming months as the furlough scheme was due to end in September.

Members noted that the housing development at the Hawks Green Depot site was due to be completed in March 2022. They were advised that the properties had all been sold off-plan within weeks of being advertised. Members acknowledged the good news that the Council properties had been handed over.

The Head of Housing and Partnerships commented that the viability study that would inform affordable housing requirements in the Local Plan would soon be available. The Affordable Housing Scrutiny Review that was agreed at the previous Scrutiny Committee would then be able to meet. A nomination for a Chairman of this Working Group from the Members who had been appointed was sought. It was agreed that Councillor J. Kraujalis be appointed as Chairman of the Affordable Housing Scrutiny Review Working Group.

Resolved:

- (A) That the Quarter 1 PDP and Recovery Performance information be noted.
- (B) That Councillor J. Kraujalis be appointed as Chairman of the Affordable Housing Scrutiny Review Working Group.

11. Car Park Payback Initiative

Consideration was given to the Briefing Note of the Head of Economic Prosperity (5.1 – 5.8 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

Councillor P. Hewitt, Cabinet Member for Innovation and High Streets was in attendance for this item at the invitation of the Chairman.

The Head of Economic Prosperity took Members through the Briefing Note which provided a summary of how the car park payback pilot initiative operating in Cannock and Rugeley town centres had performed to date. He referred Members to the options for consideration as detailed in paragraph 3.15 of the Briefing Note.

Members were asked to comment on the options or suggest other options for consideration by Cabinet.

Members were advised that, although the pilot had been well received by local traders, the data did not indicate that the initiative had generated additional footfall. Consideration should also be given to the considerable amount of resource required to administer and monitor the scheme. Based on the available data, the pilot did not appear to offer good value for money.

The Chairman invited Councillor Hewitt to speak. He advised Members that this Briefing Note had been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration prior to going back to Cabinet. He considered that the Committee should have the opportunity to feed into the process and provide their views on what should happen.

Members welcomed the pilot which was aimed at helping businesses recover from the pandemic. A Member sought further information regarding the costs of administering the scheme and questioned which businesses had done well from the pilot. The Head of Economic Prosperity confirmed that further information in respect of costs and which businesses which had done well could be made available. Following a suggestion from another Member, he added that the data could be assessed to determine if the businesses had done better on market days.

Members considered that Cabinet on 14 October should be asked to consider the option to extend the pilot by 1 month and, based on the outcome of the data, to consider extending it until Christmas. This would assist businesses in the run up to the Christmas period.

Councillor Hewitt thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their feedback on the pilot and for allowing it to be considered by the Committee at short notice.

Resolved:

That the following be recommended to Cabinet:

- (A) That, the additional information and data in respect of the costs of administering the scheme and which businesses had done well from the pilot, including whether the businesses had done better on market days, be made available to Cabinet.
- (B) That Cabinet consider extending the Car Park Payback Initiative pilot by 1 month and, based on the outcome of the data, to consider extending the pilot until Christmas.

12. Economic Recovery Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021-22 - update

Scrutiny Review - Local Plan Consultation Working Group

The Chairman invited Councillor T. Johnson who had been appointed as Chairman of the Scrutiny Review to look at the Local Plan Consultation, to provide Members with an update on the review.

Councillor Johnson provided the Committee with a detailed update on the work of the Group. He explained that the Working Group had held their first meeting on 7 September and had received a presentation from officers in respect of the consultation undertaken with regards to the Local Plan. Members had made good progress and several suggestions to improve consultation had been proposed. Members of the Working Group had been asked to consider any further ideas or suggestions to improve consultation so that these could be incorporated into the next stage of the Local Plan consultation. These ideas would be discussed at the next meeting of the Working Group, a date had yet to be arranged.

Scrutiny Review - Affordable Housing Working Group

The Chairman commented that this review had been discussed earlier in the meeting and a Chairman of the Working Group had been appointed.

The meeting closed at 5:05pm.

CHAIRMAN