

Cannock Chase Council
Minutes of the Meeting of the
Economic Recovery Scrutiny Committee
Held on Wednesday 30 March 2022 at 6:00pm
in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Cannock

Part 1

Present: Councillors:

Thompson, Mrs. S.L. (Chairman)

Kraujalis, J.T. (Vice-Chairman)

Frew, C.L.

Lyons, N.

Haden, Mrs. P.K.

Sutton, Mrs. H.M.

Johnson, T.B.

Wilson, Mrs. L.J.

Also in attendance:

Councillor P. Hewitt, Innovation and High Streets Portfolio Leader (for the Car Parking Pilot Scheme and Presentation on the Levelling Up Fund).

19. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Dunnett, P.D. Startin and the Head of Housing and Partnerships.

20. 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 addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members Interests were made.

21. Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2021 be approved as a correct record.

22. Quarter 3 PDP and Recovery Performance Information

Consideration was given to the Quarter 3 PDP and Recovery Performance Information for Supporting Economic Recovery (Item 4.1 – 4.18 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

The Head of Economic Prosperity led Members through the information outlining some of the projects and actions achieved in Quarter 3.

A Member sought further information about the delay in progressing the Aelfgar Development Scheme. The Head of Economic Prosperity advised that he would ask the

Head of Housing and Partnerships to provide the Member with an update on the reasons for the delay.

The Chairman referred to the significant number of empty shops in Rugeley town centre and asked if there was any specific reason for this. The Head of Economic Prosperity commented that town centres generally were struggling, and this had been made worse by the pandemic with several businesses ceasing to trade. Consideration would need to be given to how town centres should evolve and re-purpose to provide a different offer in the future. The Levelling Up Fund would provide the money to improve Cannock town centre, and similar funding opportunities would continue to be sought for the other town centres.

A Member referred to comments on social media about the high rental rates for town centre retail units and commented that the public were not aware that most units were owned by Private Sector Landlords and the Council was unable to control the rents charged. The Head of Economic Prosperity confirmed that the Council owned very few town centre retail units and reiterated how important it was for town centres to provide less retail and consider alternative uses, such as residential and leisure.

Another Member referred to the slower than anticipated take up for courses offered at the new Digital Skills Academy and asked what courses would be offered and what business were being targeted. The Head of Economic Prosperity agreed to circulate this information to the Committee following the meeting.

With the permission of the Chairman, the Innovation and High Streets Portfolio Leader spoke on this matter. He commented that it was a challenging time for town centres UK wide. He considered all three town centres had something to offer to attract people and when events were held, these were usually well attended. The delivery of the Levelling Up Fund would assist Cannock, but the Council would continue to seek further funding opportunities to improve all town centres in the District. He reiterated the need to look at offering alternative uses in the town centres in the future.

The Head of Economic Prosperity then referred Members to the performance indicators and commented that unemployment rates continued to reduce post Covid. The Council would continue to work with partners to create jobs and attract businesses to the area.

He added that the town centre vacancy rates continued to remain high in all three town centres. These would be monitored, and the Council would continue to seek further funding opportunities.

The number of Planning applications received had increased which had led to a significant uplift in work. In addition, there had been an increase in enforcement cases. This meant that some capacity issues had arisen.

Resolved:

- (A) That the Quarter 3 PDP and Recovery Performance information be noted.
- (B) That the Head of Economic Prosperity circulate further information to Members on the courses available at the Digital Skills Academy and what business would be targeted.

23. Affordable Housing Delivery Scrutiny Review - Update

The Head of Economic Prosperity advised that the Committee had agreed to undertake a review of Affordable Housing Delivery during this year. However, the viability report had been delayed and there was not sufficient time to undertake a thorough review this year. He therefore suggested that this review be deferred until next year and it would be included in the 2022/23 Work Programme along with other possible review options.

The Committee supported the suggestion for the Affordable Housing Delivery Scrutiny Review to be deferred until next year.

24. Car Parking Pilot Scheme

Consideration was given to the Briefing Note of the Head of Economic Prosperity (Item 6.1 to 6.6).

The Head of Economic Prosperity led Members through the Briefing Note that provided feedback on how the extended car park initiative / payback initiative had performed and operated across Cannock and Rugeley town centres during 1 November 2021 to 30 January 2022.

The Chairman advised that Councillor P.E. Woodhead had been invited to the meeting for this item but was unwell and therefore unable to attend.

The Committee noted the Briefing Note.

24. Economic Recovery Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021-22 – update

The Head of Economic Prosperity explained that the Work Programme of the Committee for 2021-22 had already been discussed during the meeting.

The Chairman and Members of the Committee wished to thank all officers for their hard work in providing the Committee with the reports and information for the meetings held during the municipal year.

25. Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

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26. Levelling Up Fund

The Head of Economic Prosperity provided Members with a presentation on the Levelling up Fund, which gave them an overview of the project and the latest position. Members were reminded of the confidential nature of the information presented.

He added that during 2022/23 the role of the Committee in the project would be discussed further as part of the Work Programme. Further updates would be provided at each meeting in the confidential part of the agenda.

Following the presentation, Members were offered the opportunity of asking questions and making comments.

Members thanked the Officer for the overview and considered the project provided a great opportunity for the town centre. The importance of the Committee being involved in the process and to scrutinise the progress of the project was noted. The Committee also considered that all political parties should be involved in the process to track the delivery of the project and ensure timescales were achieved.

The meeting closed at 7:07pm.

Chairman