

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE & LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Economic Development, Culture & Leisure Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 11 September 2014 at 6.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Julie Swan (in the Chair)

Councillors Simon Boshier
Ben Dowling
Hannah Hockaday
Matthew Winnington

22. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

No apologies for absence had been received for this meeting.

23. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of members' interests.

24. Minutes of Previous Meeting - 26 June 2014 (AI 3)

The minutes of the EDCL Panel meeting of 26 June were agreed as a correct record.

As a matter arising it was reported that following discussion at the Scrutiny Management Panel on 4 July the EDCL Panel's previous report 'Pathways into work for young people' had been taken to a special meeting of the Cabinet on 14 August where it had been accepted, unamended, for implementation.

25. Community Ownership Unit Portsmouth (COUP) Update (AI 4)

James Sandy presented his report which set out a co-ordination of responses and the projects that were being explored by the "virtual team" who were working to gauge interest in community ownership ideas through networking events. These had included talks in February and March by the Lord Speaker, Baroness D'Souza who had a background in the voluntary sector and by Giles Piercy who had run a large-scale social enterprise in London. The intention was now to move to a networking event once a quarter, whilst maintaining on-going interest through the online blog. The report also set out the involvement of officers in other related projects such as Fratton Big Local and We Big Local in Wecock Farm. A community benefit review had been requested by the previous Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Sport (CLS) regarding Hilsea Lido which would be reported back to the new Cabinet Member for CLS in the autumn.

Discussion took place regarding the **Love Your Street** (Cities of Service/ Portsmouth Together) initiative for which funding had been allocated to look at the impact of volunteering locally, for which Portsmouth City Council would concentrate on environmental and small-scale physical projects eg herb garden projects which would encourage to build links within communities.

The **Cities of Service** service plan (for which the contact officer is Brian Bracher) was due to be launched the following week. Members of the panel were interested in how this initiative would be promoted. It was felt it should not just be through the website as not everyone had access to this and it was reported that they would be targeting the streets through door knocking and leaflets and the involvement of councillors was discussed.

For Love Your Street there was an aim to get a mix of residential areas and the project should be useful in helping to reinvigorate the neighbourhood forums through existing ones and hopefully to encourage new ones in other areas. Panel members felt that the councillors would know people in their areas who would be keen to get involved in such community projects and should put forward names for James to make contact with. Other suggestions were that Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators and the community wardens would know of those active in the communities, be keen to volunteer and be involved; other areas to be targeted could be through libraries, community centres and primary schools where people are already undertaking voluntary roles. It was hoped that therefore new people would come forward.

James reported that the roll-out would start in October with two or three wards initially and the ward councillors there would be consulted beforehand.

The COUP team were also looking at interest related to potential support for community ownership of asset projects by community groups at the Brewery House, Hambrook Street and South Parade Pier on the seafront. James Sandy would be reporting back periodically to the EDCL Panel regarding the COUP work and was thanked for attending to give this update.

26. New Review Topic - Revitalising local high streets and secondary shopping areas in the city (AI 5)

The panel had received the draft scoping document and recent press articles on the subject of revitalising High Streets. The chair would be attending the DCLG conference in London on 18 September "The Future of UK High Streets: Driving Local Growth and Regeneration" and would report back to the panel.

Claire Upton-Brown, the City Development Manager attended to speak mainly regarding the planning context of this review topic, and how PCC tried to protect retail. Within the Portsmouth Plan there were identified shopping centres in a hierarchy which was the following

The City Centre - Southsea - the Districts - then the retail offers outside of the policy

Challenges: The smaller retail offers provide a useful community service and are used by many as a top-up to major shopping and the danger to these had been highlighted during discussion of the Tesco application at Milton recently. The government allows changes of use without the need for planning permission which weakens the local government position on retaining retail units. As seen with the Tesco application there were challenges to the smaller shops with big users coming in and there was already a decreased demand due to the rise of internet sales. There is evidence of decline at Fratton. The questions were how to support a vast array of retail offers in the city and how to make attractive environment, such as the encouragement of cafes and coffee shops in the daytime and give consideration to the evening environment in these areas.

During the panel's discussion of the issues that they were aware of the following arose:

- Longstanding empty units (as evidenced by the Co-op and golf shop in Drayton and Farlington) impacted on the environment of the shopping area and footfall would drop significantly (Councillor Boshier reported that they had struggled to get a Christmas tree at Drayton the last year).
- There was a need to encourage people back into the areas through the provision of community facilities such as libraries and mobile libraries which attract customers.
- There was the issue of parking charges and bus services with the right routes to get people to the local centres. With regard to the car park it was noted that Cosham High Street the car parking clamping had caused problems to the top Cosham High Street with regard to the library bus in Drayton and Farlington this was possibly at the wrong location.
- There was a lack of a PCC information points throughout the city; these would be useful for buying tickets of big events (e.g. as Festival of the Sea) rather than people having to come into the centre of the city.
- The lack of the right bus services affected the retail centres and could isolate communities as seen in Allaway Avenue.

The panel members felt it would be useful to have data regarding empty units in the shopping areas such Drayton and Farlington, Highland Road and see how statistics compared with similar neighbouring local authorities.

Discussion took place about where there was success in filling units such as Milton shops where it was thriving as there was a good range of shops, a post office and a renowned butcher. Whereas in Drayton and Farlington the post office had closed which had been a focal point and had made the more elderly population want to go out to the local shops.

The difference between the thriving Albert Road and the neighbouring Highland Road which had lots of empty units it was noticeable. Members were keen to find out more about the Shopping Festival and Sherlock Trail which would encourage people to go further extending their trips. There was a

need to encourage walking to the local centres also not just driving to superstores.

Markets/events: The panel members would like further discussion with the appropriate officers on the possibility of pop-up themed markets across the city. The farmers' markets were seen as attractive and there was the demand to these in more centres. Members would be interested in exploring the possibility of seasonal events in the retail centres. Councillor Swan reported that Portsmouth Football Club had been asked to have a presence in Allaway Avenue.

Members requested more information on:

- The rates for empty properties
- Access to the retail centres/ transportation links
- parking in the shopping areas and how they were covered by parking zones/tickets for parking
- The costs involved in setting up mini markets.
- The demographics of the local areas of the secondary shopping areas so that events could be tailored to the local needs.

It was also asked if the mobile library bus could be used for events such as a Christmas grotto. It was felt that major events took place in the south of the city whereas there was only one major event in the north being the fireworks display.

Future witnesses - these should include:

- the Albert Road Traders' Association for them to explain how they have been successful and the Cosham Traders' Association to see how these were set up as if they could give support to new TAs in other areas.
- The representative from the **libraries** would also be invited to talk about the possibilities for and the siting of the mobile library and if in Drayton and Farlington the vacant Co-op would be a suitable site.

Scoping Document

The members examined the draft scoping document which they approved, subject to amendment during the course of the review, and taking on board some of the suggestions made regarding witnesses at this meeting.

Discussion took place about what the review could achieve and Councillor Winnington as the previous chair stressed that the recommendations needed to be implemented and reviewed as seen with the COUP update which had been as a result of the work of the previous EDCL Panel review.

The meeting concluded at 7.30 pm.

Councillor Julie Swan
Chair