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## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE AND LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES of the meeting of the Economic Development, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 20 July 2023 at 12.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

### Present

Councillor Russell Simpson (in the Chair)

Councillors John Smith  
Yinka Adeniran  
Peter Candlish  
Leo Madden  
Emily Strudwick

#### 5. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

#### 6. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 7. Minutes of Previous Meeting (AI 3)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

#### 8. Consideration of Scrutiny Topics (AI 4)

The EDCL Scrutiny Panel members discussed and considered topics for the forthcoming municipal year.

##### Town Centres and High Streets - Economic Development.

Panel members considered the scrutiny of Portsmouth's town centres and high streets and the gaining of evidence from officers and local high street businesses, both large and small, in order to compile a report on how they could be better supported in the long term. It had been noted that there were a number of commercial units owned by Portsmouth City Council (PCC), that, in some cases, haven't been let out for years. This would have resulted in a loss of revenue for the council and the loss of opportunity to support the local economy.

This applied all over the city, not just in Commercial Road and Palmerston Road.

It was noted that a number of retail premises are private sector owned and it may be that very little could be done to influence this part of the high street. PCC, however, could focus on their own properties with consideration of what

is owned by PCC, what is being done with these properties and what can be done with the properties.

The review could take evidence from private landlords, if possible, but with the main focus on putting PCC's 'own house' in order to make sure the commercial properties are being utilised efficiently and are leading the way - ensuring revenue is not lost.

The officers in attendance, were not from the property service, but confidently stated that the property officers would be able to compile a report on properties on the high street where PCC have a limited ownership. Officers noted the future regeneration of Commercial Road North. They also made note of the few projects being done in the Cascades area, with the occupancy in the Cascades Centre relatively strong compared to national averages. They also noted that officers have attempted to engage with the landlords of empty properties with limited responses as many are investment properties, often held by pension funds and they seem content to leave them empty.

Panel members considered the report being separated into two sections, one dealing with properties the council owns and then a separate general high street section. The report would need to consider the massive change in shopping habits and what that means for the bricks and mortar shops. Consideration should be given to what can be done to influence in a positive way, to look at the direction of travel and what PCC can do as a city to influence in order to best equip our high streets for the future.

#### Culture in the North of the City - a balance

A second topic that was considered was the possible lack of culture in the north of the city. A report could be compiled, spanning the last ten years, on what cultural events had taken place in the north of the city, what had worked, what hadn't and why it hadn't. The topic could consider the balance of cultural events within the city as a whole. Cinema provision could be examined due to the lack of cinemas in the north of the city which previously were part of the high streets. It was noted that some creatives were starting to look at Hilsea with public art projects. This was a positive trend moving upwards and consideration could be given as to how better to support this trend.

The main thrust of the topic would be in relation to Economic Development, rather than just culture and this would feed into the high street issue as spaces within the high streets are now used for cultural elements as well as retail. Consideration of using the spaces differently over the next five years, due to the ongoing trend to shop online, leading to more empty buildings. It would be an element PCC could influence and steer.

Panel members considered they did not want to make the scrutiny a north - south divide but a consideration of the city as a whole. They noted the character of the south of the city is different to the north of the city due to the geographical elements such as the seafront. Equally, the north of the city has its own unique geographical features. Trying to make them the same would not be workable as they are geographically different.

A decision was made to scrutinise the town centres and high streets to establish what may be done to improve them, including dealing with empty properties and consideration of any cultural aspects. The integration of cultural activities, both through the council or sponsored through the council could be included. It would encompass the city as a whole and would include all properties including commercial enterprises. The topic could then be narrowed down through the drawing up of the scoping document.

**Action - Officers to request the commercial property team provide a report of how many properties the council hold on the high streets and how many of these properties are vacant, how long they have been vacant for, the rental income values of each of those properties and how much has been lost over the months or years and the reasons why.**

**Action - the scrutiny topic to be agreed at the forthcoming Scrutiny Management Panel.**

**9. Date of next meeting (AI 5)**

A meeting would be convened in September (date to be confirmed) allowing enough time for officers to bring reports forward for the panel to consider and for a draft scoping document to be compiled.

It was agreed for regular monthly meetings to be convened through to the end of the municipal year.

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Councillor Russell Simpson  
Chair

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