

**Economic Development, Culture & Leisure Panel - informal meeting**  
**Friday 29 September 2023 at 11 am, Executive Meeting Room**

Present

Councillors Russell Simpson (Chair), John Smith (Vice-Chair), Yinka Adeniran, Peter Candlish, Leo Madden, Emily Strudwick

Councillor George Madgwick - observer

Becky Alexander - Places & Markets Manager  
James Daly - Culture Development & Projects Officer  
Jane Lamer - Head of Economic Growth & Skills  
Claire Looney - Commissioning & Partnerships Manager  
Claire Watkins - Business Development & Projects Manager  
Isla - intern with Claire Watkins

Cllr Madgwick was attending as an observer as at the next Full Council there would be a request for him to replace Cllr Strudwick on the panel.

Cllr Candlish referred to the email he sent the panel on 18 September and the officers' report. He asked where the panel wanted to go and what exactly they wanted to narrow down. If PCC did not own many of the properties that would not be a very productive line of enquiry. The report showed the nature of the high street was changing towards health, wellbeing, and socialising but residents (in his experience) wanted to fight against the tide, for example, the closure of large department stores. He was interested if the report reflected long or short-term trends. Claire Watkins said the data came from the Arts Council England so was based on national not Portsmouth trends. Jane Lamer said Covid had escalated what was already happening and compared with other cities Portsmouth's footfall was quite good.

Cllr Candlish made three points:

- PCC had to understand residents' views and needs while seeing what was commercially viable.
- The panel could step back to see how different high streets in Portsmouth fight back, for example, Palmerston Road seemed to be in a transition stage compared with Fratton Road, or the panel could compare Portsmouth with another city.
- Perhaps the high street needs defining - what is it? Where is it in Portsmouth? It was not just Commercial Road but other areas like Highland Road. Perhaps areas threatened by change could be mapped.

Cllr Simpson said it could be a good opportunity to look at high streets holistically and speak to residents. Will the topic be impactful? Will it be useful? High streets in Portsmouth were all different, for example, Cosham felt more like a market.

Cllr Candlish asked if there was an economic development map. Jane Lamer said there was significant work taking place with high streets with support from a national consultant. Other areas as well as Commercial Road were recognised as important, including in the Local Plan; there would be a map. Then there were very specific projects like the Bridge Centre. Extensive reports and considerable documentation

were available because of the Local Plan but it might be possible to provide summaries or share a draft. The Hednor (?) report looked at employment space. She acknowledged the panel did not want to step on officers' toes but they welcomed a challenge. Becky Alexander's role was to look at how PCC worked with businesses. A new market strategy was coming soon.

Cllr Simpson had met Stephen Baily about high streets and mentioned the busking spots in Chichester. There was only one in the north of Portsmouth but there could be more, for example, by McDonalds. The panel could look at cultural opportunities in the high street. Claire Looney noted there had been much focus on libraries though that was not a direct comparison with shops. PCC not owning properties was an issue as it limited the council's influence. She mentioned an art shop in Cosham that ran workshops but had closed as it was not viable. There was a balance between business rates and running a successful shop. Cllr Simpson mentioned buildings being empty due to high rates, including the KwikSave on Stubbington Avenue whose landlord lived on Guernsey. Perhaps landlords could be brought together in a forum.

Cllr Smith thought the report showed good work but it was not all joined up; sometimes work was done in isolation. It needed pulling together to show people where they could go. There was no golden bullet to resolving the high street's problems. Some shops or events were niche and not available to all. The look and feel of the high street needed to change. He was interested in the principles behind the purchase of Fratton Bridge. Artists etc could help regenerate run-down areas.

Jane Lamer agreed with the viewpoint so they were revisiting the economic development strategy this year, for example, Small Business Saturday. Claire Looney mentioned Let's Create in the former Dorothy Perkins shop for Christmas and other possible pop-up shops in the Cascades. It was difficult to find space in Cosham. Oliver Willcocks (Senior Project Manager, Property Development) could talk to the panel. It was about providing spaces for businesses to move and grow. Economic Development worked with the Federation of Small Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce; it always welcomed new ideas. The Island event in June and the Food Festival in July were good but what else could they do? Island was soft launched with the Festival. More sector integration was needed, especially with SMEs and start-ups; the latter started OK but had problems around year three.

Cllr Simpson asked if there was room for a roadmap or business forum. The panel could consider the issue from a different angle but without stepping on officers' toes. Jane Lamer mentioned how to keep businesses going in areas like Drayton or prevent disruption in areas like Cosham where a lot of regeneration was happening. It would take the team about two weeks to compile a summary of reports (which were quite big); the team was very small with limited resources.

Cllr Madgwick suggested the panel could make a recommendation for a compulsory purchase order on KwikSave. Private and PCC properties could be kept separate. He mentioned a PCC-owned property that had been empty for three years but PCC had refused an offer of £30,000 per annum rent which was better than nothing. A property on Allaway Avenue had been empty for four years and when someone was interested asbestos was discovered; why was it not found earlier?

Cllr Simpson thanked him for the suggestion but said it was better to focus on one topic at a time. [He distributed an audit report - single page - that the panel had seen at a previous item]. He was happy with Cllr Smith's suggestion. The chosen subject should add value and not duplicate other work; the panel needed to agree the principles and framework of their approach. He was not sure if the 26 October meeting would be formal to sign off the scoping document; he said more data was needed before agreeing the scoping document.

The meeting ended at 11.45 am.