

LOCAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY PANEL

15 March 2007

Attendance:

Councillors:

Cooper (Chairman) (P)

Anthony (P)
Goodall (P)
Godfrey (P)
Love
Macmillan (P)
Maynard (P)

Pearce (P)
Rees (P)
Spender (P)
Stephens (P)
Verney (P)

Deputy Members:

Councillor Cook (Standing Deputy for Councillor Love)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Beckett (Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism)
Councillor Stallard (Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Sport)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Love.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 January 2007 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

4. **PRESENTATION BY TRISH KERNAN, UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER, ON "CREATIVE WINCHESTER."**

(Oral Report)

The Panel welcomed to the meeting Ms Kernan (Business Development Manager, University of Winchester) who gave a presentation on the University's involvement in encouraging Creative Winchester.

In summary, she explained that the University worked in partnership with the Council on Café Culture (at both Winchester and with Test Valley Borough Council at The Lights, Andover), the Business Centre, the Hat Fair, Art and Mind, the English Centre proposals and for the Pumping Station, Garnier Road as a possible creative industry workspace. The University also worked with the Council and other partners on the HEP (Hampshire Economic Partnership) Creative Industry Task Group (which assessed the contribution of creative industries to the economy and identified what support was needed to aid its development), Wired Wessex and eHampshire.

The University had also recently renovated the Masters' Lodge building which was formerly part of West Downs School. The building was now used, in part, to provide free accommodation space to new businesses linked to the University and creative industries. In addition to the use of the facilities at the Lodge, the University also offered these new businesses a grant of up to £5,000 and mentoring support. Of the 13 businesses helped since its introduction in July 2005, 12 were still in operation.

Further to this, Ms Kernan explained that, in addition to the Stripe Theatre and the new University Centre, there was a gallery in the West Downs Centre that exhibited work by Wessex based artists. The University also ran theatre projects with Winchester Prison and "boot camps" for students of creative courses throughout the region.

Following her presentation, the Panel welcomed the initiatives undertaken by the University and asked Ms Kernan a number of questions. She explained that the University's motivation in supporting Creative Winchester was to help graduates stay in Winchester, as it considered that a thriving, creative town had long term benefits for the University.

In reference to the proposals for the English Centre at the Woolstaplers Hall, Councillor Beckett spoke in support of the initiative and explained that the University had funded a feasibility scheme. However, a Member advised that the new museum should be able to demonstrate clear links to its location to attract a sustainable number of visitors.

In relation to the proposed use of the Garnier Road Pumping Station as a location for creative industries, the Director of Development advised that whilst the Council were currently undertaking a feasibility study, the facility would not require future funding from the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the points raised in the presentation and discussion be noted.

5. **REVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN**
(Report LE42 refers)

A Member raised concerns regarding the completion of the Yew Tree Drive link road at Whiteley and the Panel agreed to request a report on this issue for a future meeting. In response to a question, the Director agreed to investigate the possibility of installing Wi-Fi network to the Meadowside Leisure Centre at Whiteley.

The Panel welcomed the Winchester Business Improvement District (BID) and Councillor Beckett explained the Council's promotion of the scheme was limited by Government statute but that, within this, it would do all it could to encourage the BID.

Members also noted that the success of Conference Winchester meant that it no longer required financial support from the Council. The Director added that most conferences were no longer residential, but that there was nevertheless a lack of medium priced hotel beds in the area.

Members discussed the need for the plan to have influence on all parts of the District, including rural areas in relation to farm diversification, as well as encouraging trade in the town centre. In relation to this latter point, the Panel noted the importance of events held at the Cathedral and requested that a representative of the Cathedral be invited to a future meeting. The Panel also commented on the role of the University in the local economy.

The Panel noted that there was some slippage against the progress of the Plan and, in noting its wider importance to the District and the Council, recommended that Cabinet consider allocating additional resources, perhaps from the LABGI grant, to ensure that Plan's actions were completed.

RESOLVED:

1. That, in noting the wider benefits for the District that stem from a successful economy, Cabinet be recommended to consider additional funding for the Economic Development Action Plan from the LABGI grant.

2. That the Panel acknowledges that the Economic Action Plan was only in its first year of delivery and looks forward to its future development.

3. That a report be presented to a future meeting of the Panel on issues of access for businesses based at Whiteley.

6. **BUSINESS PLANS 2007/08 ONWARDS**
(Report LE43 refers)

The Panel noted that the detailed Business Plans were due to be approved by the relevant Portfolio Holders.

Members asked detailed questions in relation to Appendix 2 – Extracts from the draft Business Plans and discussed where customers for the proposed Bar End Sports facility were likely to come from, together with funding issues related to the Town Account.

The Panel noted that the actions had not been prioritised in the Report and that a capital plan for works at the Meadowside Leisure Centre had been agreed by Cabinet. The Panel also raised concern with regard to the falling visitor numbers to the Council's museums and noted the programme of planned improvements.

In response to concerns raised about the falling occupancy rates at the Guildhall, Councillor Stallard suggested that this may have been related to problems regarding the previous catering contract, which had subsequently been improved.

The Panel agreed that it should consider plans to mediate the effects of the Silver Hill development to the local economy.

RESOLVED:

1. That, having regard to the Council's agreed Corporate Policies on a High Quality Environment and on an Efficient and Effective Council, the Panel recommends to the Portfolio Holders no changes to the Business Plan extracts as set out in Appendix 2 of Report LE43.

2. That future performance monitoring reports include information relating to progress with the Discovery Centre in Jewry Street, Winchester.

7. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**
(Report PS275 refers)

The Panel agreed that, in the next Municipal Year, the Local Economy Scrutiny Panel consider holding a review of the Council's relationship with the farming community and the Creative Economy Sector.

The Panel also agreed that, following the last meeting of the Museums Service Informal Scrutiny Review Group (to be held on 26 March 2007), its report would be ratified by the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Panel, subject to any further comments by Members, prior to its submission to Cabinet.

In addition, the Panel agreed to invite a representative from the Cathedral to a future meeting and asked for a report on the steps being taken to mitigate against the possible disruption of the Silver Hill development.

The Panel had also requested a report on issues of access for businesses based at Whiteley at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Work Programme, as set out on the reverse of the agenda (as extracted from Report PS275) and amended above be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 9.00pm

Chairman