



# Enterprise and Business Scrutiny Panel

Minutes – 19 November 2013

## Attendance

### Members of the Panel

Cllr John Rowley (chair)  
Cllr Harbans Singh Bagri  
Cllr Phil Bateman  
Cllr Ian Brookfield  
Cllr Mrs Mills  
Cllr Neville Patten  
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman  
Cllr Martin Waite  
Cllr Jonathon Yardley  
Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz  
Cllr Malcolm Gwinnett

### Other Councillors

Cllr John Reynolds (item 6)  
Cllr Elias Mattu (item 6)

### Staff

Keith Ireland	Strategic Directory Delivery
Tim Johnson	Strategic Director Education and Enterprise
Mark Taylor	Assistant Director Finance
Nick Edwards	Assistant Director Regeneration
Keren Jones	Assistant Director - Partnerships, Economy and Culture
Robert Thorley	Interim Finance Manager
Kevin Moore	Commercial Development Manager
Steve Woodward	Head of Service Public Realm
Heather Clarke	Head of Strategic Projects and Funding
Denise Ecclestone	Parking Services Manager
Alan Johnson	Planned Maintenance Manager
Deb Breedon	Scrutiny Officer
Matthew Vins	Graduate Management Trainee

## Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Payal Bedi.

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*      *Title*

### MEETING BUSINESS ITEMS

2. **Declarations of interest**

Cllr Gwinnett declared a non-pecuniary interest in regard to item 6, saving proposal 0152, due to past business involvement in the area.

Cllr Gwinnett declared a non-pecuniary interest in regard to item 9 as he had been involved in discussions concerning the Sunbeam factory prior to its sale.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting (24 September 2013)**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

5. **Scrutiny Work Programme 2013/14**

Matt Vins presented a report in regard to the Work Programme for Enterprise and Business Scrutiny Panel. He explained the report would be updated regularly to reflect priority items and topics members wished to consider at following meetings.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted.
2. That the work programme is reviewed each meeting to respond to emerging issues and highlight priority items for future agendas.

## **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

6. **Budget Saving Proposals**

Mark Taylor presented a report on the proposed budget savings proposals which had a particular focus on the Enterprise and Business Scrutiny Panel. He explained the full report contained additional savings proposals, but these had been sent to the relevant Scrutiny Panel depending on their remit.

Cllr Brookfield asked for clarification in regard to the savings proposal concerning the West Midlands Integrated Transport Levy (Corp02). He asked where the figures originated from and asked if the rate would change.

Mark Taylor explained the figures came through Centro and would be subject to year on year changes and evaluation. He expressed they were in discussions with Centro Colleagues in regard to the figures for the following year.

Cllr Yardley enquired if the demographic and demand pressures were decreasing in regard to savings proposal PD – E&E01.

Nick Edwards explained the levels were set during the peak development year 2008/09 and as a result of the wider state of the economy, the figures were unrealistic. As a result they were giving up resources now to compensate for a loss of income and further indicated some of the savings

would come from a reduction in service and administrative posts.

Cllr Mills raised concerns in regard to the efficiency savings proposed, most notably the changes to the gritting service (0166) and highways maintenance (0172). She hoped that the effects did not harm businesses and enterprise in the city.

Cllr Reynolds explained the Council had undertaken a route optimisation exercise in regard to its gritting service and as a result had managed to achieve savings without affecting service. He further indicated that the same amount of streets would be gritted, however this could now be completed with nine instead of ten machines. He also explained that one post would be lost during the restructure of the service.

Steve Woodward highlighted the proposal suggested prolonging the period of changing highways lights from three to six years and reassured Councillors that main routes would be made a priority. He suggested that lanterns along many routes needed to be updated to more energy efficient, with a switch to using LED bulbs. He confirmed there would be a loss of four posts, however he noted these would be back office staff so the levels of service would not be affected.

In response to praise from Councillors regarding the existing gritting service provided by the Council, Steve Woodward confirmed that 62% of the network, the same as previous years, would continue to be gritted. He explained the capacity to grit would be the same, however it was acknowledged that the levels of service could suffer if there was a prolonged cold spell. He confirmed the service relied on customer enquiries to replenish gritting bins, however in prolonged cold weather these would be automatically replenished.

A discussion took place in regard to the parking services review (0182). Cllr Rowley suggested Councillors should pay for parking in the Civic Centre rear car park while Cllr Siarkiewicz suggested that parking should be made free across the city centre to encourage growth.

Cllr Patten enquired if charges were raised, would it deter people from visiting the city, while decreasing the charges may reduce the Council's initial income, but benefit the city as a whole.

In response to Councillor queries, Steve Woodward explained car parking opening hours would correspond more accurately with demand, and charges would apply after key work hours. He further indicated the flexibility in regard to car park opening hours would also be influenced by attractions and events held in the city centre and at the civic hall.

Cllr Mills enquired how the savings figures from the income generation review in Education and Enterprise (0160) has been derived.

Tim Johnson explained that this savings delivery is scheduled for 2018/19 and they would be developing proposals to achieve this figure.

Cllr Gwinnet raised concerns about the proposed savings in regard to highways maintenance (0037).

Keith Ireland acknowledged this savings proposal would result in a drop in service, however he hoped that savings achieved through efficiency and the introduction of new ways of working could help lessen the reduction in service.

A discussion took place regarding the shopmobility savings proposal (0169). Councillors praised the schemes introduction and its functionality, noting the benefit the city gained as a result of the service, They expressed concern about the wider ramifications to business and revenue in the city centre if it was cut.

Cllr Bateman suggested a cost analysis needed to be completed to determine the potential benefits businesses felt as a result of the service. He argued that WV1 and the Wulfrun Centre should be providing the service, as opposed to the Council and suggested a lack of publicity had allowed the service to be overlooked.

Cllr Rowley asked what the Council was doing to raise commercial support, and enquired what models other cities followed to provide the service. He suggested some research and dialogue needed to be conducted to determine the financial benefits to the centre and to gain support from the private sector. In response to concerns raised, Cllr Reynolds explained the difficulties in gaining commercial support from WV1 and the Wulfrun centre. He noted that the Council was one of the few authorities in the country that offered the service, as opposed to the shopping centre. He acknowledged if no progress was made by 2016/17 the Council would be faced with a very difficult decision.

Steve Woodward noted savings of nearly £60,000 had already been achieved over the four previous years, however the £30,000 cost to lease the premises was a real burden. He hoped that this could be offset by support from the Wulfrun Centre or from businesses that gained from the service.

In response to concerns raised regarding the review of bedding plants across the city (0177), Cllr Reynolds acknowledged there would be a reduction in spring and summer bedding which would inevitably affect the numbers of colourful plants in the city.

Steve Woodward indicated that bedding plants and floral arrangements were only a small section of the awards on offer for the Britain in Bloom competition. He noted the current scheme needed to be reduced to high maintenance costs, but key locations such as parks and open spaces would be prioritised for resources.

Cllr Gwinnett expressed concern in regard to the Ranger Serview Review (0176). He explained the loss of three posts would result in parks being left open overnight, leading to increased crime and anti-social behaviour. In response, Cllr Reynolds agreed that parks needed to be closed at night to limit crime, however the proposal was put forward for consideration and feedback and was open for comment. He noted that a potential merge with the neighbourhood watch service would help retain the service for less cost, as previously the crematorium staff had been merged with the park ranger service. He further indicated this would save money through efficiency

Cllr Gwinnett sought further details in regard to the reduction in the Christmas budget (0193).

Steve Woodward explained the number of decorations would decrease by 25% and outlying streets would lose their decorations to focus on bringing more into the city centre, but there would continue to be lights in Bilston, Wednesbury and Tettenhall.

Cllr Sweetman enquired what benefits the lights bring to businesses in the city, and if they could help pay for the cost of providing them. Keren Jones explained they were bidding for money to help boost businesses in the city centre, and noted this could generate approximately £3 million.

Cllr Waite expressed concern regarding capacity issues following reductions in staffing and the missed opportunities that could be a result of this. Tim Johnson explained the team would be prioritising activities and responding to businesses and investment would be the top priority. He explained work would be undertaken to analyse what services have the biggest impact and respond accordingly.

Cllr Gwinnett asked for more information concerning the Bilston Craft Gallery (0151) savings proposals.

Cllr Mattu explained over the next two years, various models and reviews would be explored. He indicated if no external sources of funding were found, there would be a loss of 4.2 equivalent posts and the service would be delivered by casual staff. Following suggestions from Cllr Sweetman, Cllr Mattu explained JLR already provided money to various events across the city and the Council could not rely on JLR or the voluntary sector due to funding cuts.

Keren Jones explained a lot of the cost is from maintaining the building. She indicated work being undertaken at a Black Country level to secure funding for the creative industries, and noted they would continue to work with partners to explore options and attempt to secure funding.

Cllr Gwinnett asked for more information about the city events programme savings proposals (0152) and expressed concern that the city was going backwards.

Cllr Mattu explained that the significant cuts faced by the Council could no longer be achieved through efficiency savings. He explained the proposals looked at a potential cut of 40% from city events, however they were exploring alternative ways to bring people in from outside the city to provide events.

Cllr Bateman accepted that the level of cuts would bring about a reduction in service, and noted that the cuts had been thrown onto the Council in the summer leaving little room to explore alternative options. He sought assurance that any services that would be cut, work would be undertaken to analyse the long term consequences.

Keith Ireland explained the focus would look at the savings proposals for 2014/15 and that the necessary work to develop cost analysis would be undertaken alongside equality impact assessments to determine how different communities would be affected by the cuts. He noted this was a five year programme of cuts and hoped that various proposals could be removed during that period.

Resolved:

1. That the above observations be reported to Scrutiny Board and Cabinet.

## INFORMATION ITEMS

### 7. **Black Country Bids**

Heather Clark presented a report exploring some of the current Black Country bidding opportunities and key funding opportunities from the EU and the regional development fund. The Black Country LEP are looking to finalise the Black Country European Investment strategy by the end of January 2014. Tim Johnson suggested the major focus of the work was to gain access to resources which currently flow through the Local Enterprise Partnership as opposed to the Council. The city needed to maximise the drawdown of funding for programs. In response to Cllr Sweetmans comments regarding symbiosis between the Black Country bids and derelict sites in the city report, he outlined the Council's progress to identify potential sites and attract the right grants to support the program.

Resolved:

1. That the approach being taken on strategic priorities for the development of investment strategies and future bidding opportunities be endorsed.
2. That an update is provided to the panel on a quarterly basis and this is reflected in the Enterprise and Business Work Programme.

## EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

### 8. **Exclusion of press and public**

[To pass the following resolution:

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information on the grounds shown below.]

<i>Item No.</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Applicable Paragraph</i>
9	Regenerating contaminated sites and Empty Buildings	3

## Part 2 – exempt items, closed to the press and public

### 9. **Regenerating contaminated sites and Empty Buildings**

Kevin Moore presented a report that explored bringing forward development on the 20 largest vacant sites in the city. He explained an update will be provided in February to inform members of progress. He confirmed that since the report had been completed, the Sunbeam factory had been sold and the Council is working with the developer to renovate the site into a mixed residential complex.

Cllr Bateman agreed the vast majority of sites were particularly hard to sell to potential investors because of contamination and access issues. He enquired

if it was possible to change the usage of certain sites, notable the crane foundry near the railways station, allowing for a park or open space to be provided.

Tim Johnson agreed sites were being examined to offer alternative functions, especially when they had numerous barriers to developments. He explained that sites along key gateways to the city, notably the railway corridor, were being explored and focused on to try and develop them. He suggested the use of Council assets to provide investment opportunities to unlock sites could be a way to begin the process. He explained the Council was looking at taking a more aggressive approach in regard to attracting developers and acknowledged a conversation with the Government needed to be undertaken to analyse current regulations imposed on the sites.

Resolved:

1. That the update report be noted.
2. That a more detailed report is presented to the panel in February 2014.