

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

ECONOMY, SKILLS & TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE –

PUBLIC MEETING

**10.30AM hours on 30th January 2019, Committee Room 2, Council House –
Action Notes**

Present:

Councillor Tahir Ali (Chair)

Councillors Fred Grindrod, Simon Morrall, Julien Pritchard, Lou Robson and Ken Wood

Also Present:

Kathryn James, Assistant Director, Property

Richard Cowell, Assistant Director, Development

Baseema Begum, Research & Policy Officer

Rose Kiely, Group Overview & Scrutiny Manager

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chairman advised the meeting to note that members of the press/public may record and take photographs.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3. APOLOGIES

Councillors John Clancy and Phil Davis.

4. ECONOMY AND SKILLS ACTION NOTES

The Committee agreed the action notes for the meetings held on the 5th December 2018 and 7th January 2019.

5. BCC LAND AND PROPERTY STRATEGY

(See document No. 1)

Kathryn James confirmed that the request made from Cllr Robson at the last meeting on open data for her ward would be sent to her by the end of the week. She further stated that further requests on open data per ward would need to be individual requests made by Councillors due to the amount of work involved and suggested that a session with Councillors may be more appropriate which would allow Members to see the sort of information that Property Services holds.

Cllr Ali suggested that it would be helpful for individual Cllrs to make this request where required due to the volume of work involved.

During further discussion with Members on this item the following points were made:

- The Council does invest in properties outside the city's boundaries and consideration needs to be given to the risks involved and the impact on the Council. As part of the Land and Property Strategy that was approved at Cabinet in November 2018 approval was given to create an investment strategy and this will go to a future Cabinet meeting for approval. The Council will be seeking external advice on the options available to achieve best value in the investments made.
- There is a notification process for Councillors on Council properties in their wards that are planned to be disposed of. Furthermore ward Members are consulted on any properties that are to be sold outside of set procedures. Their feedback is included in any reports that receive final approval.
- The Council's asset stock is currently being re-categorised into more market-norm categories. Benchmarking of assets will then be done. An assessment of the assets will be done to conclude what needs investing in and what should be disposed of to minimise risk to the Council. This work will also enable the Council's commercial portfolio to become better balanced.
- The Council maintains control of city centre assets and these are let on long ground leases. This helps to control redevelopment in this key area. Other assets are determined on a case by case basis as to whether these are strategic or not and a judgement is then made. There are lessons for the Council to learn on communication with businesses and residents on this.
- The impact of Brexit also needs to be considered on the property market and an assessment of risk. So far the Council's position this year is similar to last year unless there is a 'no deal' Brexit. A period of uncertainty does affect markets. The Council are not over exposed at the moment as it does not hold a lot of a specific type of asset for example retail.
- Industrial estates let out and managed by the Council are often let on 'easy in, easy out' short-term lease. These are usually 3 years to encourage use and this does sometimes mean a number of different occupiers. There is a clause to break the lease at 6 months.
- The Council does need to be mindful of which businesses can co-exist to minimise tensions. However with less estate in the future there is the option for the Council to be more proactive rather than reactive in this going forward.

- Communication with those occupying Council buildings and assets could be improved to ensure they are aware of changes to the area taking into account areas of heritage or other specific circumstances and impact of those changes on the wider environment and businesses.

RESOLVED:-

1. A copy of the Hall Green North assets requested by Cllr Robson at the previous meeting is sent by the end of the week.
2. The open data list of assets outside of the city boundary is provided to the Committee.

6. INCLUSIVE GROWTH: LOCAL CENTRES, ECONOMIC ZONES AND THE URBAN CENTRES FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION

(See document No. 2)

Richard Cowell stated the key points from his report circulated with the agenda making reference to the initiatives within the Birmingham Development Plan that are being led by the Council's Economy Directorate who are working with a number of partners to deliver activity to promote inclusive growth in line with expected population growth.

During discussion with the Committee the following points were made:

- Skills, jobs and employment and up-skilling opportunities should be made available to local people in areas of regeneration especially taking place in their community. It is important to clarify the actual number of jobs and apprenticeships being created and who is taking these opportunities as it is important that local people have the chance to take these up. Members noted that this was echoed by the youth unemployment figures in Birmingham that are highest in all of the core cities. It was therefore key that barriers to local residents getting is identified especially those in deprived communities in every ward.
- It was noted that the collection of data is a key issue as this is collated from a range of partners and from different sources so not easily identifiable where and who might access employment opportunities. A range of initiatives are in place, how those are being delivered and how people are being connected to those opportunities needs to be investigated further with partners including skills providers, the West Midlands Combined Authority and the LEP.
- The Birmingham Scholarship programme that was put in place 5 years ago should be seen as a beacon to other local authorities and is moving forward very slowly.
- Potential effects of Brexit and the impact on businesses in the city centre especially as currently the City Council does not have the financial resource to invest in retail at the moment. Also important to note is the impact of the Clean Air Zone (CAZ) that will be introduced in 2020 on city centre businesses and how this interlinks with the Council vision on proposals for economic growth. It is also important to note the impact on manufacturing businesses based around the ring-road.

- The CAZ will affect those travelling in and out of the city centre for work and the impact on affordable housing being built especially as people may be reluctant to live where there are additional charges.
- Additionally CAZ key components in the Birmingham Development Plan and Big City Plan note the need to invest in public transport and other modes of travel including walking and cycling. There are however a number of mitigations and exemptions in place for businesses for different types of vehicles.
- The city centre Enterprise Zone was a national initiative and this has been expanded to take in the HS2 station and the Digbeth area. The city centre focus is of primary importance because of its economic impact and as stated in the Birmingham Development Plan.
- Concerns about retailing and supporting local centres and those outside of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the city centre in terms of supporting businesses and traders to become resilient. Members noted the importance of the long term future of high streets and noted the possibility of support from the Future High Street fund if the Council puts a proposal forward that is approved by Government.
- In addition it was noted that the Council's Big City Plan does note the changing use of retail demand and the spending pattern of shoppers and the Plan notes the need to focus on the leisure and cultural offer.
- The issue of accessibility was raised in terms of how areas around the city are supported. It was noted that with limited resources the Council must use these in a targeted and measured way. It is also important to empower local communities on proposals to improve their local areas and identifying where barriers are so that these can be tackled. It was stated that the Urban Centres Framework consultation is starting to look at this.
- Clarification was provided also on the target on providing affordable housing in the city. The Council has set a target of 35% within the Birmingham Development Plan and is maximising provision to meet that target with a variety of options to suit residents both in the city centre and throughout the wider city. Currently 24% of the set target has been achieved to date. The Council is also working with the private sector on delivery of this.

RESOLVED:-

1. Richard Cowell to provide a copy of the presentation that was referred to during the meeting to be circulated to Members.
2. Access to employment and jobs – further information to be shared.
3. Building Birmingham programme statistics to be circulated.
4. An email is sent on behalf of the Chair, Cllr Ali to Cllr Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills & Culture to request the re-instatement of monthly unemployment figures by ward and quarterly youth unemployment figures by the new ward boundaries to Members starting from March 2019.

7. WEST MIDLANDS LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION FUND

The Chair decided to postpone this discussion until the February meeting to allow Councillor Clancy who has some specific input with regards to shaping the meeting in March.

8. WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMY AND SKILLS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2018/19

(See document No. 3)

Cllr Ken Wood raised the topic of the impact of the Clean Air Zone on businesses in the City. Already noted on the work programme, Cllr Wood requested that the Committee moves forward with looking at this issue in greater depth by undertaking an inquiry. The Chair confirmed that he would raise this at the next Co-Ordinating Committee meeting to ensure that the work is scheduled into the timetable for reports to City Council.

Cllr Ali confirmed that he would also circulate dates for the first informal meeting of the working group on 'Careers Advice in Schools'.

RESOLVED:-

1. The discussion item on the West Midlands Local Government Pension Fund is added to the agenda for the February meeting.
2. Cllr Jayne Francis is invited to the Committee's April meeting to discuss issues relating to up-skilling and job opportunities for local people.

9. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL-IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

None.

10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

11. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

Agreed.

RESOLVED:-

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting finished at 12:08 hours.