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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 APRIL 2013

PRESENT

Councillors B. Shaw (in the Chair), M. Cordingley, C. Candish, R. Chilton, Mrs. P. Dixon, A. Duffield, S. Adshead, J.R. Reilly, D. Higgins, R. Bowker, D. Western and J. Lloyd (ex officio Member of the Committee).

In attendance

Democratic Services Manager (P. Forrester)
Corporate Director, Economic Growth and Prosperity (H. Jones) (item 33)
Growth and Business Development Manager (M. Ledson) (item 33)
Senior Democratic Services Officer (J.M.J. Maloney).

Also Present

Councillor M. Hyman (item 33).

APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence were received.

31. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meetings held on 6th February and 21st March 2013 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

33. TOWN CENTRES - UPDATE ON ACTIVITY, ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE AND FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Executive Member for Economic Growth and Prosperity, with supporting officers, was in attendance to introduce a report setting out details of activities taking place, and planned, within the town centre areas across the borough.

The Executive Member and officers described ongoing workstreams in a range of key areas, including: tackling vacant units; environmental works; promotional and engagement activities; funding issues; strategies, plans and monitoring; specific Council support for town centres; engagement with local businesses, and local markets. In discussion the Executive Member drew attention to some of the broader factors within the economy and the local commercial environment which had contributed to the challenges facing the borough's town centres, setting out how the Council's approach was intended to mitigate these and contribute to a more sustainable future.

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An opportunity was provided for Members to comment and to raise queries. These included: the need to refresh town centre partnerships in some cases, and the allocation of the Council's resources to support them; the scope for levels of parking charges to benefit local businesses in terms of footfall; the need for town centre master-planning to take account of the appropriate balance, given changing patterns of activity, between retail units and other social / leisure / residential uses; the importance of transportation issues; mechanisms to assess objectively the success of interventions; and the potential role for local councillors.

Members noted that the levels of business rates had the potential to have a significant impact on the fortunes of local business, and that this was a widespread issue, particularly in northern town centres. The Committee was advised that the Leader of the Council currently undertook a lead role on this issue for the Greater Manchester authorities, which had recently made representations on the matter to the relevant Government minister. It was also noted that the Council was aiming to develop a closer relationship with local agents and landlords to promote, where practicable, an appropriate quality and mix of retail and business developments within town centres.

Following a lengthy discussion, the Chairman thanked the Executive Member and officers for their attendance and the information which they had supplied, indicating that the Committee would look forward in due course to future progress updates.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the report, and the responses by the Executive Member to questions, be noted.
- (2) That the Committee, as part of its ongoing work programme, receive further progress updates on town centre activities in due course.

34. REPORT OF TOPIC GROUP B: DOORSTEP CRIME

On behalf of the topic group, its Chairman, Councillor Chilton, introduced a draft report setting out details of activities, findings and recommendations arising from the group's review of Doorstep Crime, and conveyed his thanks to the members and stakeholders who had participated in the review. Members reviewed and welcomed the report, noting that some further information on the Trusted Trader scheme was awaited. The finalised report would be circulated to all Members of the Committee and referred to the Executive.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the content of the draft report be noted and welcomed.
- (2) That the finalised report be circulated to all Members of the Committee and referred to the Executive.

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35. UPDATE FROM TOPIC GROUP CHAIRMEN

Further to Councillor Chilton's report on Doorstep Crime (Minute 34 above refers), Councillor Reilly briefed the Committee on his topic group's study on the Development of a Community Asset Framework. As previously reported to the Committee, difficulties were still being experienced in securing the comprehensive schedule of relevant assets which represented key information for the project. Efforts were ongoing with relevant Members and officers to secure the information which the group required; and, given the potential significance of the issues involved, it was hoped that prompt progress would henceforward be possible.

RESOLVED: That the content of the update reports be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8.15 pm

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