

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: **WEDNESDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2014**

REPORT BY: **ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FACILITATOR**

SUBJECT: **FEEDBACK FROM WORKSHOP ON CHANGING TIMES: HELPING FLINTSHIRE'S TOWN CENTRES ADAPT TO A CHANGING WORLD**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To feedback to Members of the Committee on the Changing Times: Helping Flintshire's Town Centres adapt to a changing world workshop held on the 14th of July.

1.02 To consider the outcomes from the workshop and make recommendations to Cabinet.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee received a report in January to consider how the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee could assist in the rejuvenation of town centres and High Streets.

2.02 It was agreed that a workshop would be held involving a range of stakeholders including all Members of the Council, officers from relevant Flintshire County Council departments, Town Council representatives, Town Centre Managers, Landlords and Business representatives.

2.03 A workshop was held at Theatr Clwyd on the 14th of July with over 45 delegates in attendance representing a range of stakeholders. Presentations were given by representatives of the Centre for Regeneration Excellence Wales, Towns Alive and Flintshire Economic Development department.

2.04 Following the presentations, delegates formed into three discussion groups to consider what the top 5 priorities the Council and its partners should focus on in the next 3 years to revitalise town centres and high streets.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 The feedback received from each group was recorded and the key messages are listed below. The full feedback is attached at Appendix 1.

3.02 Group 1

- To re-vitalise Town/Centres and High Streets responsive planning and implementation and joined up thinking is required.
- Need to get the 'right mix' of uses in the towns (retail, restaurants, etc)
- The Council needs to speed up processes and have better two way communication with other stakeholders.
- The Council needs to foster a 'can do' attitude – very negative experiences expressed by delegates with regard to timescales, etc.
- Resources for Town Partnerships – e.g. facilitators.

Group 2

- Inter-disciplinary Groups at the Council – so departments work together more effectively to deliver a joined up approach in town centres. Planning, schools, transport, regeneration – all Council services.
- Improve engagement with local businesses (how?)
- Business Rates – National charities receive a reduction. Delegates suggested giving it to local independents instead.
- Towns as destinations – not just retail. Don't pull public services out of Town Centres.
- Communication / engagement / involving community – more focused and targeted.

Group 3

- Residential Users – need to assemble land for larger units e.g. offices
- Greater local ownership including Business Improvement Districts where appropriate.
- Communication – especially business
- More involved planning – more proactive / land assembly – link in with developments – promote development – regeneration strategy/land assembly
- Local Development Plan – clear development briefs for sites
- Resources and decision making powers need to match vision
- Better promotion of County and better destination management, especially cycling – A55 Signage
- Promote healthy living and link to Town Centres.

3.03 Following analysis of the feedback from the group discussions, there are clear messages emerging which have been summarised for consideration by the committee.

1. The need for joined up thinking within the authority with a cultural shift from 'need to know' to 'need to share' between departments internally and stakeholders. Inter disciplinary groups within the authority may act as enablers.

2. The need to speed up decision making in-house to avoid the drawn out cumbersome and lengthy processes which appear to be stifling progress in enabling Town Centre revival to move forward in some instances.

3. Town Centres need to have a balanced offer described as 'the right mix' of retail, restaurants/cafés, services, night time economy, etc with suitable transport, parking, public conveniences, and a balance of business and charity shops. This may offer greater potential for town centres to be marketed as tourism destinations. Signposting to Town Centres from major routes etc was also considered to be extremely important and further cooperation from other agencies to achieve this needed to be secured.

4. Communication between the Council and stakeholders needs developing both within and outside the Council. Community engagement needs to be focused and targeted. Consideration should be given to how resources can be made available to appoint facilitators for town centre partnerships in order to facilitate progress in raising local interest and ownership of town centre revival.

5. The need for a more active and structured approach to town centre revival and land management was considered important in order to secure long term sustainable town centres and high streets.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 That the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider the comments in 3.03 and agree what recommendations should be made to Cabinet.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None arising directly from this report.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

None arising directly from this report.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

None arising directly from this report

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

None arising directly from this report.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

None arising directly from this report.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

Publication of this report constitutes consultation.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

Publication of this report constitutes consultation.

12.00 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Feedback - Changing Times Workshop

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Town Centres, High Streets & Retail areas report to Environment
Overview & Scrutiny 22 January 2014.

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