

## **Economy Scrutiny Committee – District Centres Subgroup**

### **Minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2016**

#### **Present:**

Councillor Bridges – in the Chair  
Councillors Farrell, Hacking, Richards and Simcock

Councillor Priest, Deputy Leader

Professor Cathy Parker, Institute of Place Management, Manchester Metropolitan University

#### **Apologies:**

Councillors Karney and Shilton Godwin

### **ESC/OSG/16/01                      Overview of Trends Affecting Centres**

The Subgroup welcomed Professor Cathy Parker from the Institute of Place Management at Manchester Metropolitan University. Professor Parker delivered a presentation which provided an overview of a research project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, looking at centre change. She reported that 201 factors had been identified which impacted on a centre's success and that, after considering the degree of control centres had over the factors and their impact on success, 25 priorities that could improve vitality and viability had been identified. She also provided an overview of the different types of centres – “comparison shopping towns”, such as the city centre, which had a wide range of retail choice and attracted visitors from a large catchment area, “speciality towns”, which offered something unique and attracted visitors as well as serving the local community, and “convenience/community towns”. She informed members that most centres fell into this third category, which offered a convenient mix of goods and services for the local community and that, for these, it was important to understand the local catchment area. She informed members that this research would be used in a new project (funded by Innovate – the Government's innovation agency) working with retailers, the retail property sector and other stakeholders, focusing on collaborative action and helping centres to develop their collective offer.

A member commented that the majority of Manchester's district centres would be classified as “convenience/community towns”. The Strategic Director (Strategic Development) advised members that areas such as Rusholme, Longsight and Cheetham could be considered within the ‘speciality town’ category as they provided goods to Asian communities which were not widely available elsewhere.

Members discussed the location of district centres, in relation to the city centre and areas of residential growth, and competition from centres outside of Manchester, such as Altrincham and Bury. A member suggested that the Subgroup consider a site visit, for example, to Altrincham.

The Deputy Leader reported that district centres were disproportionately located in the south of the city, with north Manchester having a limited retail and night-time economy offer. He advised members that this impacted on the housing market as people wanted to live in areas with local shops and services. The Strategic Director (Strategic Development) reported that the local housing market also impacted on the retail offer within the area, particularly if the area had a high concentration of student housing. Professor Parker advised that members should consider areas which had a high footfall but no district centre and that this could include looking at the retail offer around public transport hubs.

In response to a member's question, the Planning and Infrastructure Manager reported that 'district centre' was a planning term used within the Council for larger centres. However, he advised that the terminology and definitions currently used were not fixed and that members could consider whether these terms were useful.

A member emphasised the importance of understanding the local area, its activity hours and the differences between its daytime, night-time and weekend economy. He requested data on the different areas of Manchester and suggested that external witnesses including representatives from traders' groups, be invited to a future meeting. The Chair advised that this would be considered further under the next item, when the Subgroup would review the work programme.

A member shared his experience of making changes to a district centre and some of the issues it had created, including stakeholders having different priorities. Professor Parker emphasised the importance of involving stakeholders and sharing information with them from an early stage and having leadership and a clear vision for each centre.

Members discussed the impact of a high density of takeaways, betting shops and Rent To Own shops on areas and what action could be taken to influence the types of shops within a centre. Professor Parker informed members that it was difficult to control the retail offer to such a degree as the market had to be responsive to what people wanted and property owners' priority was obtaining a reliable rental income from their premises. However, she advised members that landlords could be persuaded by a strong vision for a district centre, which used evidence from elsewhere to demonstrate the financial benefits of improving the centre's offer. Members agreed to consider this issue further at a future meeting.

Members discussed the role of the Council in district centres. A member advised that Council intervention was needed in some areas but that in others too much intervention could be damaging and the Council should provide support to local leaders. The Chair reported that the Council owned buildings and land in some district centres, for example, libraries and parks and that these contributed to the diverse offer of the area. Professor Parker informed members that many of the factors which affected the success of a district centre were not specifically related to the retail offer. She reported that the location of other buildings and services was important as, for example, people did top-up shopping after or before visiting the library or the health centre. She emphasised the importance of understanding local behaviours as well as the demographics of the area and having a retail offer which fitted in with this. She reported that further data was available on this and that having

this information enabled traders to provide a retail offer which met local needs. Professor Parker also informed the Subgroup about the more interventionist approach taken in Sandwell, to ensure communities had access to important services, where the health authority and trading association had opened greengrocers' shops in areas where fresh produce had not been available.

### **Decision**

To thank Professor Parker for her presentation

### **ESC/OSG/16/02                      Terms of Reference and Work Programme**

Members reviewed the Subgroup's Terms of Reference and work programme.

The Chair reported that the Subgroup's second meeting would focus on gaining an understanding of the strategic context and evidence on district centres in Manchester. He requested that this include information on the current location of district centres, the demographics of the areas they served and consideration of how the Council wanted the centres to develop in future. He also requested the current district centres strategy and information on the work undertaken by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) on the Greater Manchester Town Centre Project.

The Subgroup discussed the guests they might want to invite to future meetings. Members suggested representatives from traders' associations, Manchester Markets and private markets, such as the Makers Market, and the owners of a district centre, such as Openshaw or Wythenshawe. The Chair recommended that the external guests be invited to the third meeting and that the Subgroup decide at its second meeting who to invite.

A member suggested that the Subgroup consider the impact of changes to business rates on retailers. Another member reported that this would be considered at a future meeting of Economy Scrutiny Committee so it was agreed that the full scrutiny committee consider this, with any issues of relevance then being considered by the Subgroup at a later date.

The Strategic Director (Strategic Development) informed members that discussions were currently taking place with the owners of Chorlton and Wythenshawe District Centres on their development and recommended that the District Centres Subgroup consider the proposed framework for these centres prior to its submission to the Executive. Members requested that the Strategic Director (Strategic Development) keep the Subgroup informed, through the Committee Support Officer, of the timescale for the proposed framework, with a view to the Subgroup considering this at its second meeting, if it would be available by then.

### **Decision**

To agree the Terms of Reference and work programme, subject to the above amendments.