

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 2 -RETAIL EXPERIENCE

Thursday, 5 July 2012

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Matthew Lynch (Chair), Councillor Suresh Patel (Vice Chair) Councillors Tony Ansell, Sally Beardsworth, Elizabeth Gowen, Dennis Meredith, and Danielle Stone

CO-OPTED MEMBER: Sheridan New Former Manager, Grosvenor Centre

Officers Derrick Simpson Town Centre Manager
 Tracy Tiff Scrutiny Officer
 Joanne Birkin Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting was received from Marion Goodman, Head of Customer and Cultural Services.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2012 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. DEPUTATIONS/ PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

5. TOWN CENTRE CHALLENGE EVENT

The Panel considered a briefing note and feedback from the three Councillors who attended a Seminar hosted by Skillsmart Retail on the Town Centre Challenge.

The main points of the discussion were as follows: -

- Smartskill is a skills council for the retail industry. Their aim is to increase investment in skills, set industry standards and promote and enhance the retail sector and therefore to improve sustainable and professional retail development.
- Members were very impressed at the results achieved by Skillsmart. Key factors were encouraging work in partnership, getting the right people around the table and promoting training and apprenticeships within retail industry.

- Overall the success is very much based on the strength of partners i.e. the local BID's and strength of apprenticeship schemes. The aim is to improve the standard of retailing and anything that improves standards will be seen positively by potential customers.
- They had also teamed up with Independent retailers throughout the country to make 4th July Independent retailers day, encouraging people to buy something from an independent retailer on that day and promote diversity and shopping choice.
- Panel Members were very impressed with the Stratford shopping centre, which was clean and bright, had a good food court and a dedicated entertainment area, shops were all major retailers with large shopping frontages.
- Members felt that there were positive lessons that could be learnt from Stratford's experience in attempting to improve their retail experience. However, the Olympics had probably provided the catalyst for the investment, creating a unique set of investment circumstances.
- Skillsmart have also worked with the University of Northampton in creating a university degree course in retail.
- It was felt that it would be useful for Skillsmart to make a presentation to the Panel. It was suggested that as the timetable for the meetings was already quite full they should be asked to come before a meeting and make a presentation. It was also suggested that as they do a lot of work with local BID's they should also be asked to attend.

AGREED

1. That the Scrutiny Officer approach Skillsmart and ask them to attend a briefing session prior to one of the Panel meetings.
2. The information from the Seminar hosted by Skillsmart Retail be used to inform the Panel's evidence base.

6. CORE QUESTIONS- EXPERT ADVISORS

The Panel considered the draft core questions to be put to the key witnesses. The main points of discussion were as follows: -

- Members felt that if there were any consumer groups in Northampton they should be included in the list of witness to receive the core questions.
- Members considered that it was very important to centre the questions around working in partnership and include a question about how the witnesses would like the Town Centre to look in the future. There is a lot of work going on in individual areas, which is not necessarily joined up and there needs to be more of an emphasis in getting people to bring people into the town from the wealthier suburbs.

- Several members suggested that there should be more emphasis on special events and the role that they can play in bringing people into the town centre. For example there could have been an event based around the Olympic torch encouraging people to stay in the town centre longer.
- Members felt that there should also be an attempt to have more of a tie in with schools, for example have schools festivals and encourage them to create displays/provide entertainment in the town centre. It was pointed out that curriculums are very busy and there does need to be a lot of forward planning to include these events in the school programme.
- Members of the Panel will be attending the various different forums to ask the core questions, but the Youth Forum will be asking a short series of questions as a survey at one of their events. Within that survey it was agreed that it would be a good idea to include a question of online shopping habits.

AGREED: -

1. The core questions, as attached as Appendix A be sent to the witnesses.
2. The Scrutiny Officer to approach the national consumer groups to establish whether there are any local groups and if appropriate send them the core questions.

7. UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON

The Panel were informed that University of Northampton was not able to attend the meeting.

AGREED:- That the Scrutiny Officer send the core questions to the University and request a written response to be considered by the Panel at a future meeting.

The meeting concluded at 7:10 pm