



Lewes District Council

Scrutiny Call-in Panel

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Call-in Panel** held in the **Ditchling Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Friday, 3 March 2017** at 1:06pm

Present:

Councillor P Gardiner (Chair on Election)

Councillors S Adeniji and N Enever

Officers Present:

O Dixon, Solicitor

J Norman, Committee Officer

P Sharp, EZ Newhaven Programme Manager

M Woodford, Head of Regeneration and Investment

Minutes

1 Election of Chair of the Scrutiny Call-in Panel

Resolved:

- 1.1** That Councillor Gardiner be elected Chair of the Scrutiny Call-in Panel for the duration of this meeting.

2 Draft Executive Decision taken by Executive Member - Application for LDC Business Rates Discount Scheme

The Panel considered Report No 49/17 in order to consider the call-in of the Draft Executive Decision to utilise the Business Rates Discount Scheme to award 100% business rates relief to Bright-Tech Investments Ltd. for a period of twelve months, as detailed in Appendix C on pages 19 to 22 of the Report.

Action

The Chair highlighted Appendix D on pages 21 to 22 of the Report, which listed the reasons for which the draft decision of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Andy Smith, was called in by the Committee for consideration.

The Panel queried the criteria for assessment of business rates relief and how many applications the Council had received since the Business Rates Discount Scheme (BRDS) was approved.

The Head of Regeneration and Investment explained that the BRDS had been approved in September 2014 and, since the implementation of the scheme, the Council had received three applications, two of which were approved and one which was denied. He further explained that Bright-Tech Investments Ltd. was the largest private sector employer in the District, and that the purpose of the BRDS was not to help businesses that were struggling, but rather companies that wanted to grow and invest in the District.

The EZ Newhaven Programme Manager brought the Committee's attention to Appendix B on page 11 of the Report which detailed the key assessment criteria for applicants of the BRDS. The Committee noted that

The Panel queried whether the BRDS was widely advertised. The Head of Regeneration and Investment explained that although it tended not to be widely advertised, Locate East Sussex (LES) was the main body used by the Council to advertise the BRDS. Information on the BRDS is also available on the Council's website.

The Panel referred to paragraph 2 on page 22 of the Report which highlighted that there was no information as to how Bright-Tech Investments Ltd. would be environmentally sustainable within the District. The Head of Regeneration and Investment agreed that there was not enough detailed information provided on this issue, and that Officers would add more criteria regarding environmental sustainability to future application forms.

The Panel declared that it was satisfied with the responses provided by the Officers and that the process of approving the BRDS for Bright-Tech Investments Ltd. had been correctly followed, despite its view that the scoring appeared simplistic. The Panel further declared that, even though it was noted that the proposal had scored highly, it seemed unusual that 100% rate relief had been applied. However, the Leader of the Council had acted reasonably and there was no reason to reconsider the draft executive decision.

Resolved:

- 2.1 That the Panel does not intervene in the Draft Executive Member Decision to utilise the Business Rates Discount Scheme to award 100% business rates relief to Bright-Tech Investments Ltd. for a period of twelve months, as set out in Appendix C to Report No 49/17.

HR&I

The meeting ended at 1:55pm.

P Gardiner
Chair