

DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 JUNE 2010

Present – Councillors J Barrow, Chadwick, A Connell, Critchley, Harkin, Jones, McKeon, Mrs Ronson, J Walsh, D Wilkinson and Woodward.

Lay Members

Mrs B Berry	-	BATRA
Mrs J Horan	-	BATRA

Also in Attendance

Councillor Ibrahim	-	Executive Member, Development, Regeneration and Skills
Councillor Peel	-	Executive Member, Housing, Neighbourhoods and Regulation
Mr A Donaldson	-	Assistant Director, Policy, Performance and Partnerships and Chief Officer Support
Mr K Davies	-	Director of Development and Regeneration
Mr S Young	-	Assistant Director, Policy and Performance (Environmental Services and Development and Regeneration)
Mr S Jordan	-	Head of Strategic Housing Services
Ms J Pollard	-	Policy Accountant
Mr A Walker	-	Head of Service, Enterprise, Employment and Skills
Mrs S Wootton	-	Senior Scrutiny Officer

Councillor Critchley in the Chair

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Development, Housing and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 12 April 2010, were submitted.

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Committee be signed as a correct record.

2. COMMITTEE REMIT

The Director of the Chief Executive's Department submitted a report which set out the powers and duties of the Development, Housing and Skills Scrutiny Committee for 2010/2011.

Resolved – That the Committee's remit be noted

3. DECISION MONITORING REPORT

The Director of the Chief Executive's Department submitted a report detailing the progress of decisions previously taken by this Scrutiny Committee.

Members were informed that Network Rail had been in touch and whilst no answer could be provided as to the outstanding item on the Decision Monitoring Report, it was confirmed that they would be attending a future meeting of this Committee to provide an update report.

Resolved – (i) That the position be noted

(ii) That Members looked forward to Network Rail's attendance at a future meeting.

4. DRAFT ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of the Chief Executive's Department submitted a report which puts forward a list of suggested issues which the Committee may wish to receive reports on or investigate further during the current Municipal Year.

Members were made aware that this was a continuing document and could be updated at any time during the Municipal Year and any items Members wished to add to the Work Programme would be considered and added accordingly.

It was reported that MIDAS, the Manchester based investment agency, would be attending a future meeting.

Resolved – (i) That the Work Programme as now submitted be approved

(ii) That MIDAS be in attendance at a future meeting of this Committee.

5. THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF BOLTON

Mr Andy Walker attended the meeting to provide a presentation to update the Committee regarding the progress being made with Bolton's position in regard to housing and employment levels.

Members were informed that the monthly changes in house prices were looking predominantly better and whilst Bolton was not perhaps meeting the average with England and Wales, there was certainly a noticeable difference. This could also be seen through the annual changes in house prices.

With reference to the trends in unemployment, Members were advised that in May 2010, Bolton had 7675 people claiming Job Seekers Allowance, this was deemed to be a decrease of 361 from the previous month of April 2010. In terms of comparison, in May 2010, Bolton had an unemployment rate of 4.8%, a decrease from the peak of 5.4% in January 2010. Also, Bolton saw an overall decrease in claimants between May 2009 and May 2010, which was the joint second highest decrease across the Greater Manchester authorities.

Members were provided with employment information for each ward in the borough, as further information in relation to claimant flows.

Members discussed the information that had been presented and raised queries around the following issues:-

- The amount of houses that were being built in the borough;
- The activity of the housing market;
- House sales across the borough;
- Retail sales figures;
- The re-possession rate of houses; and
- The amount of mortgages that were being frozen.

Resolved – (i) That the update be noted

(ii) That Members requested further information regarding the amount of houses being built, a quarterly report on sales across the borough, the retail sales figures, data on re-possession across the borough and the amount of mortgages that were being frozen.

6. SKILLS

Mr Andy Walker attended the meeting to provide information to the Committee regarding skills and how these were key to the economic growth and participation.

Members were appraised with information that put the skills issue into context, in terms of the following areas:-

- Attainment in Education;
- Introduction to the Working Ages Population;

In terms of the working age population, those with no qualification equated to 14.4% as at 2008, therefore ranking Bolton 28th out of 43 of North West Local Authorities and 6th out of 10 of the Greater Manchester Local Authorities. Where there had been improvement, Bolton were ranked 7th out of 10 of Greater Manchester Authorities, with the largest improvement coming from Tameside and the worst being Bury.

Those falling within level 2 of the working age population (those who achieved 5 GCSE passes A*-C or equivalent), equated to 67.2% as at 2008, ranking Bolton 25th of 43 North West Local Authorities and 5th out of 10 in the Greater Manchester Authorities respectively. Where there had been improvement, Bolton was ranked 8th

out of 10 Greater Manchester Local Authorities, with the largest improvement coming from Stockport and the least being Bury.

Members were also informed of those falling within level 3 of the working age population (A-Level standard or equivalent), which equated to 45.6% as at 2008, ranking Bolton 22nd highest of 43 North West Local Authorities and 5th out of 10 Greater Manchester Local Authorities. With reference to improvement, Bolton lay 10th of the 10 Greater Manchester Authorities, with the biggest improvement coming from Tameside.

The Committee were advised that priorities had been established across the Greater Manchester area, to help build skills for people within these local authorities and included the following:-

- World class apprenticeships in Greater Manchester;
- A Better integrated employment and skills system;
- New industries and new jobs growing within Greater Manchester;
- An innovative and sustainable economy in the city region;
- World class colleges and universities driving Greater Manchester's economic and social ambition;
- People and businesses helping to shape education and training in Greater Manchester; and
- Research and scientific excellence in universities and in business.

In closing, it was identified that there were several ways forward for skills in the Greater Manchester area, insofar as the Greater Manchester Skills and Employment Board offered a new and powerful opportunity to influence what was being commissioned with public money. There was certainly a need to reflect and understand what was working and was not for Bolton through the Work and Skills Plan. Also, there was a need to express the sectoral picture of demand both currently and for the future. Within the context of diminished public funds, there was a necessity to drive a business case for investment in skills, through procurement, best practice, quality advice and quality skills providers.

Resolved – (i) That the position be noted

(ii) That performance figures on GCSE attainment, trends and performance (against geographic and statistical neighbours) , specifically the percentage of students gaining 5 A* to C including English and Maths be made available at a future meeting

(iii) That joint working be made with Children's Services regarding skills of those leaving school and of school age.

52. MEMBER'S BUSINESS

The Committee received the extract of minutes of other meetings of the Council relevant to the remit of this Committee:-

a)	Extract of the meeting of the Executive held on 26 April 2010, in relation to the Council Housing Stock Transfer Proposal – Offer
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Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting be noted.

(The meeting commenced at 6.03pm and ended at 7.25pm).