

## DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 APRIL 2011

Present – Councillors J Barrow, A Connell, Critchley, Cox, Francis, Harkin, Jones, McKeon, Pickup, J Walsh and Woodward.

### Lay Members

|             |   |       |
|-------------|---|-------|
| Mrs B Berry | - | BATRA |
| Mrs J Horan | - | BATRA |

### Also in Attendance

|                    |   |                                                              |
|--------------------|---|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Councillor Peel    | - | Executive Member, Housing, Neighbourhoods and Regulation     |
| Councillor Ibrahim | - | Executive Member, Development, Regeneration and Skills       |
| Mr A Donaldson     | - | Assistant Director, Policy, Performance and Partnerships     |
| Mr K Davies        | - | Director of Development and Regeneration                     |
| Mr J Smethurst     | - | Chief Housing Officer                                        |
| Mr A Walker        | - | Head of Service (Enterprise, Employment and Skills)          |
| Mrs J Pollard      | - | Head of Finance                                              |
| Mr G Langley       | - | Principal Engineer (Network Planning, Safety and Management) |
| Mr S Clark         | - | Rail Programme Director – Transport for Greater Manchester   |
| Mr S Jordan        | - | Head of Housing Strategy and Quality Assurance               |
| Miss C Gore        | - | Housing Strategy Manager (Policy and Research)               |
| Mrs S Wootton      | - | Senior Scrutiny Officer                                      |

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor D A Wilkinson.

Councillor Critchley in the Chair

#### **41. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the proceeding of the meeting of the Development, Housing and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 31 January 2011, were submitted.

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

#### **42. 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 further received updates in reference to the Private Rented Sector in which the information provided was based on preliminary findings from the Housing Needs and Market Study 2011 that provided an understanding of what the 'per calendar month' rents were in the Private Rented Sector. The following was an indication of the situation in Bolton:-

- The average private sector rent in Bolton was £475 per calendar month;
- The most expensive property available for rent was a six bedroom detached house, in the Heaton and Lostock ward for £5000;
- The cheapest property available for rent is a one bedroom, terraced house in the Tonge with the Haulgh ward for £268 per calendar month;
- A one bedroom flat costs £395 per calendar month on average;
- A two bedroom terrace costs £435 per calendar on average;
- A 3 bedroom terrace costs £495 per calendar month on average;
- A 3 bedroom semi-detached costs £600 per calendar month on average.

The Private Sector Housing Strategy was currently in draft format and would prioritise intervention in the private rented sector for further growth. It provided the flexibility for those who needed the freedom to move and accommodated low income households who could not afford to buy and those who received housing benefit but did not have access to public sector housing. The strategy established four key objectives for the sector and delivery against these objectives required a varied approach which encompassed enforcement and accreditation as required, these were:-

- Improve Property Standards;
- Improve Management Standards;
- Increase access to the sector; and

- Support both landlords and tenants to increase sustainable tenancies.

Resolved – (i) That the position be noted

(ii) That the situation regarding the Private Rented Sector be reconsidered in the new Municipal Year.

#### **43. 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.

Resolved – That the Work Programme be noted

#### **44. THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF BOLTON**

Mr Keith Davies, Director of Development and Regeneration, attended the meeting to provide Members of the Committee with an update regarding the economic position that Bolton currently found itself in. Particular reference was made to the new Economic Strategy approved by the Executive at its meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2011.

Members were informed of the progress that had been made following the Community Strategy in 2007. £90 million had been invested in the co-location of Bolton 6<sup>th</sup> Form and Bolton Community College. Further developments that had taken place since 2007 included Bolton One and the investment made by NCP for two multi storey car parks, which amounted to £18 million.

Construction of the town centre hotel developments would be completed by October 2011, which had £3 million invested into the development and a further £1.5 million in new events and conference centre. A planning application had been recently received to build a new 100 bedroom hotel in Nelson Square.

Following discussions by Members at the previous Scrutiny Committee, additional information was provided regarding the Trinity Interchange. As a reminder, Members were informed of the key elements, which included:-

- The relocation of Bolton bus station to a site adjacent to Bolton Rail Station;
- A mixed use commercial development;
- A public realm/landscaping component;
- Planning application to be submitted in the near future; and

- Work would commence at the end of 2012 to be completed by the end of 2014.

The gyratory system was a Council policy and was designed for buses to have priority movement around the inner highway box and at the town centre traffic signals. Bus boarding doors would always be on the pedestrian precinct side, the route would also be used by the shuttle bus. Some junction facilitating works had already been undertaken and that the final piece of work to take place as part of the gyratory system was the bus station. All buses arriving at the new interchange would enter by making a left turn from Newport Street (via Great Moor Street). Buses leaving the interchange would exit next to St Patrick's Church onto Great Moor Street both east and west bound. Buses arriving from north and east would access bus station via Bradshawgate and Great Moor Street. Buses arriving from south and west will access bus station via Blackhorse Street and Great Moor Street. Great Moor Street adjacent to the bus interchange would be one way west bound but could be operated two way in case of an emergency.

Further information was provided regarding the issues affecting St Patrick's Church. Members were informed that extensive discussions and meetings had taken place with representatives from the Church over the past year. The area around the Church had been redesigned to enhance the external environment and provide a wider footpath for pedestrian safety. Ongoing work with regards to access and egress were currently being considered and once the wider highways issues had been resolved which impacted on the design for the church, a report would be finalised and shared with representatives from the church. A noise survey had been undertaken and an air quality test was now underway. Once the reports had been finalised, these again would be shared with the church before the submission of the detailed planning application.

The presentation advised Members of the impact of the recession on Bolton and what the Council's response had been. This was further enhanced by the short to medium term priorities, such as key employment sites, business and new enterprise support, skills development and supporting people back into employment.

Mr Andy Walker gave a presentation to the Scrutiny Committee regarding unemployment figures for Bolton, in-so-far as:-

- There had been a decrease of 0.5% since February 2010;
- There were 7688 claimants of Job Seekers Allowance in February 2011;
- National, unemployment increased by 0.1%;
- There had been 1212 job centre plus notified vacancies; and
- 1580 claimants moved off the unemployment register in February 2011, with 625 (40%) finding work or increasing work to more than 16 hours.

Miss Clare Gore finished the presentation with an update on the housing market. It was made clear that house sales were the key to recovery and that the demand for

housing had not disappeared, however, reduced access to credit and mortgage lending were seemingly stifling the market, Repossessions were continuing to fall and during 2010, there was a 15% reduction in mortgage possession orders made, compared to 2009.

Discussions took place around the following issues:-

- Horwich Loco Works; and
- What had been happening in other town centres, in particular Farnworth, where much work had recently taken place.

Resolved (i) That Members noted the presentation

(ii) That the presentation be made available to all Members of the Scrutiny Committee;

(iii) That figures relating to unemployment be circulated to the Scrutiny Committee

(iv) That an update be provided regarding town centres around the borough at the next meeting of this Committee.

#### **45. LOCAL AREA TRANSPORT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report regarding the Bolton Local Area Transport Implementation Plan.

The Plan was part of the third Greater Manchester Local Transport Plan (GMLTP3) which established a long term strategy for improving transport in Greater Manchester over the next 15 years with the objectives of promoting economic growth increasing environmental sustainability, improving public health and well being, addressing social exclusion and providing value for money. The Bolton Local Area Implementation Plan explained what would happen in Bolton to work towards those objectives over the next four years.

The transport strategy proposed for the Bolton Local Area Transport Implementation Plan would focus on the maintenance of the existing highway infrastructure using sound asset management principles. The Council would work in partnership with the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive to deliver the Bolton Town Centre Public Transport Scheme (Bolton Interchange) and associated highway improvements in Bolton town centre to stimulate regeneration and economic growth. The Council will have no Integrated Transport Block funding to deliver physical improvements such as Local Safety Schemes and Minor Works. The Council would provisionally support the Greater Manchester approach to the Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid to deliver smarter choice measures across Greater Manchester.

Further to this report, Mr Stephen Clark, Rail Programme Director from Transport for Greater Manchester, attended the meeting to provide Members of the Committee with information regarding rail developments in Greater Manchester and Bolton.

Members were appraised with the outcomes for rail investment in Greater Manchester, in terms of a stronger local economy would:-

- Improve access to jobs and depth of labour pool;
- Better links between centres to break down barriers in doing business;
- Reduction in transport costs for freight;
- Better international connections to drive trade and inward investment;
- Facilitating leisure and tourism activities;
- All subject to positive environmental and social outcomes.

The presentation further informed Members of the position regarding rail usage in and around Bolton, Bolton line destinations, issues surrounding overcrowding and electrification and new service patterns. With regards to electrification, the work would cost £300 million, with work commencing in May 2011 that would allow electric TransPennine trains to run from Manchester via Wigan (instead of Bolton) to Scotland from December 2013. Work would then follow to allow electric trains on the route from Manchester to Liverpool via Eccles and Newton Le Willow, with work finally commencing on the route from Manchester to Bolton, Preston and Blackpool would be complete by December 2016. These changes would allow the Preston-Horwich-Bolton corridor to be developed much more around local passenger needs.

Network Rail had plans to resolve many of the constraints on the over-stretched network around the Northern Hub. Improvements would be made to the links between the main centres, providing more commuter capacity with access to Manchester Airport to allow for growth of rail freight at existing and new terminals. Bolton should gain better links to the south of Manchester, for example, Stockport and more consistent service patterns that redress changes made in December 2008.

Members were given information regarding high speed rail, where the Government were developing plans for a high speed network over the next five years. Significant funding commitment during this time would be made available from Parliament of up to £750 million. The first phase of this new track would be a new line from Euston, London to the West Midlands. Trains would run over this line to Manchester and the North West from 2026 with the Northern Hub being a pre-requisite for its use. A public consultation was currently in progress.

Members raised questions with regards to the following:-

- More carriages on the rail network, of which more were planned;
- Franchising of the rail network;
- Stations; and
- The lack of use of the disabled parking bays at Lostock train station.

Resolved – (i) That Members thanked Mr Clark for his informative presentation

(ii) That the report and presentation be noted

#### **46. SKILLS SCRUTINY PANEL – FINAL REPORT**

The Director of the Chief Executive's Department submitted a report regarding the findings of the Skills Scrutiny Panel, which had been established by this Scrutiny Committee in 2010.

Members were advised that in 2007, Bolton published a new Community Strategy which anticipated enormous physical and social transformation for the Borough. Underpinning this aspiration was a ten year vision for economic growth which would see the creation of some 20,000 new jobs in the town. However, the global economic downturn meant that the pace of development and change had to be reviewed although it was still anticipated that around 5,000 new jobs would be created in Bolton by 2020. The Council has revisited its economic strategy in the light of this situation and has made the raising of skills levels within Bolton a major part of its refreshed approach. It is within this context that the Panel commenced its deliberations.

One of the main priority areas of the revised strategy concentrated on improving the skill levels within the working age population. Despite increased attainment of young people within formal education, skill levels within the working age population are failing to show any consistent upward trend.

One third of adults (approximately 40,000 people) lacked a level 2 qualification (equivalent to 5 good GCSE's) which was the basic entry requirement for the majority of low skilled jobs whilst less than half Bolton's Working Age Population had a level 3 qualification (equivalent of an A level).

It was against this backdrop that the Panel began its deliberations.

The Panel made six recommendations to the Executive Member for Development, Regeneration and Skills, which were as follows:-

1. To the Executive Member for Development, Regeneration and Skills:-
  - That the Council should recognise the need to create the right economic conditions for growth by addressing identified infrastructure problems or by identifying suitable development sites;
  - That the Panel recognise the valuable role played by the Bolton Skills Board but would recommend that, as part of the review of the Council's economic strategy, the opportunity be taken to review its terms of reference and membership to ensure that they are in line with the priorities contained in the refreshed economic strategy; and
  - That following the review of its terms of reference and membership, the Director of Development and Regeneration, in conjunction with the Bolton

Skills Board continues to work closely with local employers to deliver economic regeneration in Bolton.

2. The Panel was impressed by the work being done by Rochdale Council in developing its skills agenda by bringing together related Council functions and responsibilities. The Panel was of the view that the Council also needed to have a joined up approach to skills development by creating conditions which allowed joint working between schools, colleges and employers. Accordingly, it would recommend to the Chief Executive that a review be undertaken as to how this work is undertaken across the Authority.
3. The Panel, during all phases of its evidence gathering, received clear messages from employers and partners that apprenticeships would be a key element of any strategy aimed at economic regeneration and skills development. Accordingly the Panel would recommend that the Council should facilitate, with all key strategic partners, a new strategy for apprenticeships at a local level. Such strategy should:-
  - as a priority, take account of the contents of the Development Plan currently being prepared by the Work Based Learning Partnership;
  - build on the work currently being undertaken by Bolton College to develop apprenticeship programmes; and
  - Investigate alternative methods of delivery in the current economic climate.
4. The Panel recognised that the newly relocated and rebuilt Bolton College campus presented a unique opportunity to build and enhance its reputation as a provider of high quality learning provision. The Panel would wish to see this opportunity developed by way of the following:-
  - that the Council continues to work and support Bolton College to achieve its aims and aspirations;
  - that Bolton College should continue its drive to improve and extend partnerships with employers;
  - that Bolton College should explore joint working with the Council's Business Bolton Team via the sharing of information and resources;
  - that Bolton College should continue to have an open dialogue with partners to broaden and tailor its curriculum to enable as many Bolton residents as possible to access development opportunities to take advantage of economic growth; and
  - That the Adult Safeguarded Learning priorities and spend be reviewed as part of the Council's review of priorities and outcomes.

5. The Panel met with a number of employer representatives from the manufacturing and service sectors. It was evident from discussions that for positions requiring level 1 and 2 qualifications (5 GCSEs Grade A\*-C) employers were not having difficulty attracting suitable candidates. However when presenting for interview employers gave the clear and repeated message that candidates lacked “employability” skills. With this in mind, the Panel would wish to give a clear message to the 14-19 Partnership that as well as academic attainment being important, of equal importance was the development of those skills for life which would allow pupils to access employment opportunities and thus raise the aspirations of young people.
6. Finally, the Panel was aware that the Council had commissioned a major piece of work from the Commission for the New Economy to undertake an analysis of skills issues within Bolton and would ask the Executive Member for Development, Regeneration and Skills to consider the recommendations contained in this report within the context of that piece of research. The Executive Member is also recommended to enter into a continuing dialogue with those partners/employers who had given evidence to the Panel to ensure that the momentum generated by the Council’s refreshed policy and the work of the Panel is taken forward.

Resolved (i) That the report be noted

(ii) That the report and its recommendations be taken forward to the Skills Board for further information

(iii) That the Executive Member for Development, Regeneration and Skills report back to this Scrutiny Committee within the next six months.

#### **47. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE MONITORING FOR BOLTON AT HOME**

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report to inform the Scrutiny Committee on the performance of Bolton at Home for Quarter 3 2010/2011.

The Committee were informed that this report showed the performance for 28 quarterly performance indicators. Bolton at Home have rated 11 (39%) of the indicators as green and seven (25%) as amber against their own targets and these indicators gave no cause for concern, however, Bolton at Home had rated seven (25%) of the indicators as red against their own targets.

Resolved – That Members noted the position

#### **48. DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE OUTTURN REPORT – QUARTER 3**

The Director for Development and Regeneration submitted a report to provide the Scrutiny Committee with information relating to the financial position and the performance for Development and Regeneration, as of Quarter 3 2010/2011.

Members were advised of the financial key findings in which revenue expenditure for both Development and Regeneration and Housing Services was projected to exceed the budget by £54,000 however this was a contribution to reserves of £450,000. This variance comprised of an overspend of £71,000 for Development and Regeneration and £17,000 under spend in the Housing Services.

The performance key findings were provided to the Committee, whereby unemployment remained at 4.2% with the Workshop helping 103 local residents to secure employment in the quarter. Also:-

- The number of households in temporary accommodation had increased since the previous quarter;
- Complaints responded to within standard had improved to 94%;
- The Department was better than the Council average with more calls answered within standard and fewer calls lost; and
- Sickness absence continued to reduce across the Department.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

#### **49. MEMBER'S BUSINESS**

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

|    |                                                                                                                          |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| a) | Executive Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Regulation held on 8 February 2011, 22 February 2011 and 29 March 2011; |
| b) | Executive Member for Development, Regeneration and Skills held on 22 February 2011 and 29 March 2011;                    |
| c) | Bolton at Home held on 28 February 2011; and                                                                             |
| d) | Development, Regeneration and Skills Policy Development Group held on 15 March 2011.                                     |

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting be noted

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and ended at 7.46pm).