

**CORPORATE AND EXTERNAL ISSUES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 22nd AUGUST, 2022

Present – Councillors Silvester (Chairman), Heslop (Vice-Chairman), Brady, Connor, Cowen, Hornby, McKeon (as deputy for Councillor Jiva), Peel, Mrs. Thomas, Veevers, Walsh and Wright.

Augmented by members of the Place Scrutiny Committee for items 9, 10 and 11: Councillors Atcha, N. Ayub (as deputy for Councillor M. Ayub), Donaghy, Hartigan, Haworth, Hayes (as deputy for Councillor Wilkinson), Iqbal and Meehan.

Also in Attendance

Councillor Cox	Leader of the Council
Councillor Dean	Executive Cabinet for Stronger Communities
Councillor Warren	Executive Cabinet Member for Regeneration
Mr. T. Oakman	Chief Executive
Ms. S. Johnson	Deputy Chief Executive
Mr. G. Brough	Director of Place Development
Mr. P. Whittingham	Assistant Director Economic Development and Regeneration
Mr. P. Rimmer	Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Ms. H. Gorman	Borough Solicitor
Mrs. V. Ridge	Democratic Services Manager

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors M. Ayub, Eckersley-Fallon, Jiva, Mistry, Patel, Rimmer and Wilkinson.

Councillor Silvester in the Chair

6. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 July, 2022 were submitted.

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

7. THE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022/2023

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report which detailed the proposed work programme for 2022/2023.

The Chairman advised members that an item on Apprenticeships and Succession Planning would be included in the work programme and this would be at a joint meeting of this Committee and Place Scrutiny Committee on 9th February, 2022. In view of this, it was proposed that the item on decision making be deferred from the February meeting to the meeting on 17th April, 2022.

Resolved – That the Work Programme for 2022/2023, as amended, be approved.

8. £150 ENERGY PAYMENT

Mr. P. Rimmer, Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services gave a presentation which provided an update on the current situation with regards to the support for energy bills.

Information was provided in relation to the following areas, viz:-

- The background to the scheme;
- The funding levels for Bolton;
- The eligibility criteria;
- The process for making the payments;
- The progress made to date; and
- The discretionary scheme.

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In terms of the next steps, members were advised that second reminder letters were issued on 12th August, 2022 which confirmed the online application would close on 31st August, 2022. A copy of this had been circulated to members. The letters also confirmed that the £150 would be credited to Council Tax Accounts if residents did not submit a claim by 31st August, 2022.

With regards to the discretionary scheme, this had been agreed under delegated powers as agreed in the original report.

Following the presentation, members made the following comments/observations:-

- How processes have been improved;
- The process for residents who have £150 credited to their council tax account but don't pay council tax and how would they be aware of this and what happened if they passed away;
- Thanks be conveyed to officers for all their hard work in ensuring that residents received the £150;
- Who was the decision maker in relation to £150 being credited to council tax accounts if they had not applied ;
- Was the decision made under the Scheme of Delegation or an Executive Cabinet Member/Cabinet decision and what was the rationale behind the decision;
- How was the £28 discretionary amount to be paid;
- Concern about how the money would be allocated to pensioners who did not pay council tax and had not provided their bank details; and
- If a resident was in council tax arrears but then subsequently became in credit due to the energy rebate would officers consider withdrawing the summons and any charges associated with it.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

9. TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. G. Brough, Director of Place Development, submitted a presentation which provided information in relation to the progress being made with development in the Town Centre

Information was provided in relation to the following areas, viz:-

- Bolton's 2017 Town Centre Regeneration Objectives;
- The six main development challenges;
- An explanation of the development challenges which were
 - Acquisition, demolition and conveyancing;
 - Attracting developers and investors;
 - Financial viability;
 - Availability of funding;
 - The Council's limited ability to support construction costs (either by providing development grants or assuming financial risk); and
 - Market uncertainty.
- The progress made to date on the Council Projects;
- Other town centre developments;
- The commitments to date from the £100m Town Centres Development Fund'
- Other grant funding which had been secured; and
- The future of Bolton Town Centre's.

Following the presentation, members made the following observations/comments:-

- Thanks be conveyed to officers for the work undertaken on the Little Lever Health Centre;
- Previously £100 million had been committed towards the Town Centre. Did the Council still intend to utilise the £100 million within the Town Centre ;
- The level of income predicted to be received by the Council based on the number of new properties being built in the Town Centre;
- Town centre shopping habits had changed and there was a need to build it up publicly and were there any statistics compared with 10 years ago with regard to foot fall;

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- Concerns were expressed regarding the development at Church Wharf;
- Disappointment was expressed regarding the situation with Crompton Place;
- The timescales for the construction at Church Wharf;
- A query regarding a figure which had been quoted for the investment into Bolton Town Centre;
- As a result of Covid, had things changed and would the Council look at things differently in terms of office/retail/accommodation/public realm;
- The need to review the balance between the different types of developments and sites;
- The need for a leisure offer within the Town Centre;
- Thanks be conveyed to officers for the excellent presentation and the level of transparency contained within it;
- Was there a market for the development of apartments in Bolton;
- Pressures on the department and staffing resources/capacity;
- Issues associated with the Bank of Beijing and the withdrawal of their support;
- Any other issues with tenants/leaseholders;
- The current situation with the dividends from the Manchester Airport;
- Public dissatisfaction with the town centre and the need for small solutions to improve the experience for the public and the night time economy;
- The viability of housing at Church Wharf;
- What was the proposed digital city development area and were businesses in the surrounding development area aware of the plans and timescales;
- Concerns regarding the cost of acquisitions of buildings within the Town Centre; and
- Issues associated with the Marks and Spencer building.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

10. POCKET PARKS IN THE TOWN CENTRE

Mr. G. Brough, Director of Place Development, gave a presentation which outlined issues associated with developing pocket parks in the Town Centre.

Members were advised that the only true pocket park that had been proposed as part of the Council's regeneration plans was the one that was currently being constructed on the ex-Odeon site at Moor Lane.

It was also stated that public realm improvements would include green planting, wherever possible and practical, but it was unlikely that sufficient funding would be available to create more pocket parks, by acquiring private sites and ensuring their future maintenance and security. It was also pointed out that the Council's environmental and neighbourhood service budgets were currently under extreme pressure, therefore it was already increasingly difficult to maintain existing parks and green spaces.

Following the presentation, members made the following comments/observations:-

- The importance of having a policy on public open spaces and not just for the town centre parks;
- The importance of people's wellbeing within the Town Centre and outer townships in terms of green spaces and the environment; and
- The creation of unofficial pocket parks.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

11. COUNCIL PRIORITIES FOR LEVELLING UP BIDS

Mr. G. Brough, Director of Place Development, gave a presentation on how levelling up funding was prioritised for the Borough and the types of projects which were or had been considered.

Members were advised that this topic had been covered in detail at the meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee on 28th July, 2022, however, details were provided on how projects were selected based on the following criteria:-

- Only one successful bid allowed per MP Constituency, therefore, Bolton was restricted to a maximum of three successful bids;
- Bids to be related to Regeneration, Culture or Transport;
- Bids to a maximum of £20m unless related to a regionally or nationally significant cultural or transport project;
- Projects to be started by 31st March, 2022 and fully completed by 31st March, 2025;
- A bid could consist of a maximum of three inter-related projects; and
- A successful bid would need to demonstrate a Benefit Cost Ratio greater than 1:1.5.

It was stated that it was extremely difficult to construct bids, within each parliamentary constituency, that met the above criteria. Consequently, resultant bids for BCMS, De Havilland Way and Bolton Town Centre (North) were the best possible bids.

Following the presentation, the following comments/observations were made, viz:-

- The involvement of MP's' in the bidding process and the right to veto a bid;
- Following the missed bid for Crompton Place was the intention to resubmit that bid;
- The undeliverability of the original bid for Crompton Place; and
- Did the department have enough resources to deal with both the projects at De Havilland Way and the Loco Works which were happening at the same time.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

12. OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANISATION OF THE PUBLIC MEETING REGARDING THE DE HAVILLAND WAY LEVELLING UP BID

Mr. T. Oakman, Chief Executive, acknowledged that Ward Councillors should have been invited to the public meeting, which was organised on behalf of Chris Green MP, regarding the De Havilland Way Levelling Up Bid, and going forward this process would be followed.

Members enquired as to the costs of setting up this meeting and it was agreed that this information would be requested.

It was also proposed that the Borough Solicitor include something within the Scheme of Delegation to ensure that Ward Councillors are invited to any public meetings going forward and that this be brought back to the next meeting of this Scrutiny Committee for members consideration prior to approval at Council.

Resolved – (i) That the position be noted.

(ii) That the costs associated with the setting up of the public meeting be circulated to members.

(iii) That the Borough Solicitor be requested to amend the Scheme of Delegation in relation to the process of Ward Councillors being invited to all future public meetings and that this be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee for members consideration.

13. MEMBERS BUSINESS

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

- (a) The Cabinet held on 15th August, 2022;

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- (b) The Executive Cabinet Member Stronger Communities Portfolio held on 16th August, 2022.

Resolved – That the minutes of the various meetings be noted.

(The meeting started at 6.00 p.m. and finished at 9.15 p.m.)

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NOTES