

DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 October 2010

Present – Councillors R Allen (deputy for Cllr Woodward), J Barrow, A Connell, Critchley, Francis, Lord (deputy for Cllr Chadwick), McKeon, Mistry (deputy for Cllr Jones), Pickup, Mrs Ronson, J Walsh, and D Wilkinson.

Lay Members

Mrs B Berry	-	BATRA
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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
Mr K Davies	-	Director of Development and Regeneration
Mr S Young	-	Assistant Director, Policy and Performance (Environmental Services and Development and Regeneration)
Ms J Pollard	-	Policy Accountant
Ms C Fraser	-	Business Intelligence Manager – Bolton at Home
Ms T Cunliffe	-	Head of Development and Business Intelligence Services
Mr T Hill	-	Chief Planning Officer
Mr A Walker	-	Head of Service (Enterprise, Employment and Skills)
Mr S Jordan	-	Head of Strategy Housing Services
Ms T Gandhi	-	Home Improvement Officer (Affordable Warmth)
Mrs S Wootton	-	Senior Scrutiny Officer

Councillor Critchley in the Chair

16. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the proceeding of the meeting of the Development, Housing and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 16 August 2010, were submitted.

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

17. 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.

Resolved – That the position be noted

18. 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.

19. CONSULTATION EXERCISES ON LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS AND REGIONAL GROWTH FUND

Members were advised that the decisions taken by the Executive Member for Environmental Services at a meeting held on 1 September 2010, with regard to Consultation Exercises on Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) and Regional Growth Fund, which had been called in by Councillor J Walsh, in accordance with Part 4 of the Constitution – The Council's Rules and Procedures: Section E, Paragraph 7.

A copy of the relevant report had been circulated to Members.

The Committee was also appraised of the decisions that had been taken by the Executive Member.

In their deliberations, Members raised their concerns regarding the lack of time given to the consultation exercise and not allowing people to exercise their views on the matter in hand.

Members also expressed concerns at the need for Bolton to be fully represented in the overall Greater Manchester economic development activity and to retain capacity

at a local level to ensure this was achieved. In addition, Members endorsed the view that political and business representation on any Greater Manchester LEP Board should be pursued.

Members also expressed concerns in relation to the following points:-

- There were opportunities available in the north west for partnership working;
- That Bolton would be left behind following missed opportunities;
- The presentation Members received at a meeting in Manchester from MIDAS was very much focussed on Manchester rather than Bolton; and
- The partnership does require further representation from the Northern arc. Members were reminded of the options open to the Committee, in determining this matter, viz:-
 - a) To note the decision of the Executive Member;
 - b) Refer back to the Executive Member, with or without comment; or
 - c) Refer to Council in the form of a Motion to be moved by either one of the three Members who referred it to Council or if a decision was made by the Committee, then either by the Chairman or a nominated Member of the Committee.

Resolved – That the position be noted.

20. 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.

Members were reminded of the long term economic strategy contained within the Community Strategy, 2007-2017, there was the intention to make Bolton more ambitious, through physical and social transformation. This was in order to challenge and maximise the benefits of economic prosperity that would be brought into the town. Since 2007, Bolton had repositioned itself to be a major partner to Manchester, as well as staking a positive reputation within the private sector. Investments had also been secured for major projects such as the Colleges, Bolton One, Multi Storey Car Parks and the Transport Interchange.

Further work was being undertaken in terms of addressing worklessness and those seeking Job Seekers Allowances had fallen by more than 1000 since January, although the figure had risen to 6136 in June 2010 from 3871 in April 2008. Members were pleased to see that over 16% of the working age population were no longer on benefits, which could be attributed to key programmes such as the JobCentre service and other key commissioned programmes such as the Flexible New Deal and Pathways. The Work Shops in Bolton Town Centre and Farnworth were also of benefit to those seeking employment. The key outcome of this work was that 1334 clients had secured employment.

Provisions were also in place for promoting enterprises and supporting businesses, through the following means:-

- £3.8 million net additional investment;
- 110 high growth businesses assisted;
- Active portfolio of 700 businesses;
- 75 Inward Investment and Business Relocation enquiries;
- 125 start ups from the regional ISUS programme;
- 793 business counselling sessions delivered by Business Bolton officers; and
- As a result, almost 600 new jobs had been created through above programmes.

Members were further provided with information in regards to the differences between public sector growth and private sector growth by which Bolton were seemingly doing well in relation to other Greater Manchester authorities. Members were informed of the potentials for responding to this, through engaging partners within the new five year framework and action plan and as well reinforcing the commitment to “Town Centre First” and supporting major development sites at Horwich Loco Works and Cutacre. Other ways to respond were made of the following list:-

- Recognise that current skills levels made spreading the immediate benefits to local residents very challenging;
- Defining a way forward on skills that gave clarity to local provisions;
- To remain consistent with the Core Strategy;
- To be cognisant of the City Region changes, for example, the Local Enterprise Partnership, however, remaining focussed on Bolton’s unique assets; and
- To continue to bring private and public sector partner resources together to maximise impact and make activity sustainable.

With reference to the rate of improvement in Working Age Skills, Members were disappointed to see that in terms of Level 3 and 4, Bolton ranked 10th out of the 10 Greater Manchester local authorities. However, this was based on 2008 information and there had been improvement in the subsequent years.

In their deliberations, Members raised the following issues:-

- The profile of jobs created in future years
- How many jobs would come from Greater Manchester and how would the townships fare?
- The sustainability of the Work Shops;
- The issue surrounding skills, needed to be looked at more closely, involving other Departments of the Council where necessary.

Mr Davies then gave an additional short presentation updating Members on the developments around the Town Centre.

Members were informed that both Bolton College and the new block of the Bolton Sixth Form College had now opened and the building of Bolton One was now well underway and was in fact two weeks ahead of schedule.

Further information was provided in relation to the following:-

- Trinity Interchange;
- Merchant's Quarter;
- Town Centre Enforcement Update;
- The George Hotel;
- Town Centre Lettings;
- New Town Centre Lettings in empty shop, which were now being filled;
- Barclays Bank's new premises at the old Mothercare store was due to open in December 2010; and
- The building previously occupied by Woolworths was now under offer from another company.

Consultation regarding the Trinity Interchange was due to take place on 7 October 2010 and the Council were working closely on the design development with the GMPTE Project team.

Resolved – (i) That Members noted the position

(ii) That Members looked forward to the commencement of the Skills Based Scrutiny Panel and looking at the way forward.

21. DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE OUTTURN REPORT QUARTER 1

The Director of 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 1, 2010/2011.

Members were advised of the financial and performance changes that were to come into force following the Emergency Budget on 22 June 2010. The exact details on how to take the Council forward would be provided in the Comprehensive Spending Review which was due to take place on the 20 October 2010, which would detail the impact the national deficit would have on all local authorities.

Information was provided in reference to the following areas:-

- Finance;
- Worklessness;
- Strategic Developments;
- Environmental Sustainability; and
- Housing.

During their discussions, Members were pleased with the current sickness levels within the Department, which had been reduced by a further 0.48% compared to this time last year.

Resolved – That the position be noted.

22. QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE UPDATE REPORT 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 1 2010/2011.

Members were provided with information showing the performance for 28 quarterly performance indicators. Bolton at Home have rated 14 (50%) of the indicators as green and 4 (14.29%) as amber against their own targets and these indicators gave no cause for concern, however, Bolton at Home had rated 7 (25%) of the indicators as red against their own targets. One indicator could not be rated as it was for information only and no information had been supplied for two indicators.

During the course of the discussion, Members raised issue regarding the length of time it took for some disabled adaptations to be completed. Members were advised that the main issue associated with this was the lack of resources. However, a review of the private sector renewal programme, which funded disabled adaptations, was currently being undertaken to assess the priorities and Members would be informed on the proposals as and when they became available.

Resolved – (i) That the position be noted

(ii) That Member be provided with information regarding the consultation proposals on adaptations when they became available

(iii) That further information be provided to Members regarding long term voids.

23. AFFORDABLE WARMTH UPDATE

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report to provide the Scrutiny Committee of the findings; firstly, the NHS Bolton Report “Excess Winter Deaths” which monitored the period 2004/2005 to 2008/2009, secondly, the work previously conducted in Bolton to prevent excess winter deaths, thirdly, the work currently being conducted and the measures that were being put in place to prevent excess winter deaths and fourthly the future plans.

Members were informed that excess winter deaths were calculated by comparing the number of deaths that occurred in December to March with the average number of death occurring between the 'summer' months' of April to July and August to November. The 'summer months' numbers of deaths were then subtracted from the winter deaths to show the increase number of deaths that had occurred during the winter time.

Since the launch of Bolton's Affordable Warmth Strategy in 2005, the number of excess winter deaths had been declining. Bolton also had consistently lower rates compared to the North West and England. Regrettably, this pattern of decline in excess winter deaths did not continue in 2008/2009 (based on the provisional data of actual deaths, a 250% increase was apparent).

The report continued with the findings of the NHS Bolton report, 'Excess Winter Deaths' which concluded that there was no real difference in patterns of the cause of death, age, weather and fuel prices, that would indicate any significant influence on the recent increase of excess winter deaths, the report also stated that there had been no significant findings that would indicate that change was required within Bolton's Affordable Warmth Action Plan and the Affordable Warmth Health Action Plan.

Members were further advised that Bolton had been very pro-active in its combat against excess winter deaths and fuel poverty. The report provided to Members summarised the work previously conducted in Bolton to prevent excess winter deaths, the work currently being conducted as the future plans. At present, the grants/schemes that were available included the following:-

- Target Area Insulation Scheme (an insulation grant available to those living in target areas;
- AWARM Insulation (insulation grant for people with ill health);
- Better Behaving Boiler Scheme (aimed at owner occupiers on a low income);
- Awarm heating (heating grant for people with ill health);
- Warm Front Top Up Grants; and
- Warm Front Temporary Heating.

During their discussions, Members raised the following issues:-

- Pleased that Bolton was doing well in comparison to other Greater Manchester Authorities;
- It would be useful to obtain figures from the NHS.

Resolved – (i) That Members noted the position

(ii) That thanks be conveyed to the Affordable Warmth Team on the work they were doing to ensure Bolton Council remained the leading local authority by helping the public.

24. THE BOLTON HOUSING REPORT 2010

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report to inform the Scrutiny Committee of the housing situation Bolton regarding the following:-

- Housing Tenure;
- Empty properties;
- Private Sector Stock Condition;
- Lettings and the Social Sector;
- Homelessness; and
- New Social Housing.

Members were informed that each summer, Bolton Council was required to collate a range of statistics about local housing for the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) return, which was sent to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

The report contained a summary of the contents of the HIP return which showed that a HIP return provided a wealth of information about housing in Bolton and as the return gave consistent information, it was also a useful reference point. All figures were either a snapshot view on the 1 April or it covered the financial year which, from April to March, unless otherwise stated.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

25. 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 Development, Regeneration and Skills held on 1 September 2010 and 28 September 2010;
b)	Executive Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Regulation held on 31 August 2010 and 28 September 2010;
c)	Housing, Neighbourhoods and Regulation Policy Development Group held on 16 August 2010;
d)	Development, Regeneration and Skills Policy Development Group on 26 August 2010;

e)	Housing, Neighbourhoods and Regulation Policy Development Group augmented by the Licensing and Environmental Regulation Committee held on 18 August 2010;
f)	Bolton at Home Monitoring Group held on 6 September 2010; and
g)	An extract of the meeting of the Executive held on 23 August 2010, in relation to, the Land at King Street, Farnworth; the Council Housing Stock Transfer; and Excel Centre Consultation.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting be noted

(The meeting commenced at 6.00pm and ended at 7.55pm).