

DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 APRIL 2010

Present – Councillors J Barrow, Mrs Brierley (Chairman), Burrows (deputy for Chadwick), Harkin (deputy for Hornby), Hollick (deputy for Mrs Fairclough), Mrs Ronson, R Silvester, J Walsh, D Wilkinson, and Woodward.

Lay Members

Mrs B Berry - BATRA

Also in Attendance

Councillor J Byrne	-	Executive Member, Development, Regeneration and Skills
Councillor Peel	-	Executive Member, Housing, Neighbourhoods and Regulation
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
Miss C Gore	-	Housing Strategy Manager (Policy and Research)
Ms C Sutton	-	Head of Strategic Development
Miss L Boardman	-	Principal Project Officer
Mr P Lamb	-	Senior Project Officer
Ms J Pollard	-	Head of Finance
Mrs S Wootton	-	Senior Scrutiny Officer

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chadwick, Mrs Fairclough, Hornby and Zaman and also from Mrs J Horan (BATRA)

Councillor Mrs Brierley in the Chair

43. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the proceedings of the meetings of the Development, Housing and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 1 February 2010, were submitted.

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

44. 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 disappointed to learn that after almost a year, a response from Network Rail had still not been obtained, therefore it was suggested that a representative from Network Rail attend a future meeting of this Committee to provide an update as to the work that had been carried out in the Bolton area.

Resolved – (i) That the position be noted

(ii) That Network Rail be invited to a future meeting to providing a briefing report on the work being carried out in the Bolton area.

45. 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 as now submitted be approved.

46. TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT AND THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN AND BOLTON'S POSITION

Mr Steven Jordan 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 the economy.

Members were informed of the following information:-

- House Price Index;
- House Sales;
- Mortgage Lending;
- Possession Orders; and
- Unemployment.

Members were informed that unemployment had come down in the last few months, however, house prices had increased due to a higher value being given towards detached and semi detached houses, following an increased demand for these types of houses. The trend over the last year for monthly house sales had varied, however, it was now a year since the Bank of England base rate came down to 0.5% and this was allowing the average mortgage interest rate to also level out.

In reference to the rented sector, affordability issues seemed to be putting pressure on the social sector, as there seemed to be an increasing amount of people now on the housing register. There was an increasing demand and supply in private rented sector, however, the demand was seemingly pushing up the rentals in the North.

It was concluded that despite the impact of the recession still being felt, the report showed that for all local indicators, the situation appeared to be improving and signs of recovery becoming apparent. House sales were increasing, showing more market activity. With larger number of sales, more confidence would be felt in the average house price figures. It should also be noted that house prices had increased and unemployment had decreased.

Resolved – That the update be noted

47. FINAL REPORT OF THE NON-DECENT PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL

The Director of the Chief Executive's Department submitted a report regarding the outcomes of the Non-Decent, Private Sector Housing Scrutiny Panel.

Members were informed that at the meeting of the Development and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting that took place on 6th April 2009, it was decided to establish a scrutiny panel to investigate issues around the Council's handling of non-decent private sector housing.

The reasons for the review was to ascertain why properties were empty together with the number and condition of such properties in the private sector which were unfit for habitation and which could be used if brought up to standard to alleviate the housing deficit in the Borough. In this respect, the Panel had two main aims. Firstly, to examine the current policy in relation to private sector renewal and the powers available to the Council in respect of private sector housing and how these powers were exercised and secondly, to ascertain whether there were any initiatives open to the Council and its partners to improve the condition of private sector housing.

Following its findings, the Scrutiny Panel made these recommendations, to the Executive Member:-

- To investigate the possibility of the Council becoming an agent for leasing of former Right to Buy properties which had been brought back into use;
- To investigate, in an effort to generate sufficient resources to enable the Council to continue its successful policy in relation to Right to buy properties, the feasibility of pooling all or a large proportion of monies received from

section 106 Agreements to target bringing empty Right to Buy properties up to standard and back in use, should be explored; and

- To investigate the feasibility of using the Prudential borrowing arrangements in relation to funding a future Right to Buy reinstatement programme.

Members were informed that despite the lack of significant investment and prospects of on-going reductions, the panel considered that it was appropriate and necessary that support and incentive was continued in areas of considerable need, in conjunction with recognition that vulnerable owners were offered advice and assistance to remain safe and independent in their own homes.

In this regard, the Panel was of the opinion that in the recognition of continuing financial pressure on scarce local government resources, a robust and innovative approach was needed if the Council was to continue its undoubted success in this field and for that reason made the recommendations detailed above.

Resolved – (i) That the report be noted

(ii) That thanks be conveyed to those officers and Members involved in the process of the Scrutiny Panel.

48. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE UPDATE REPORT FOR BOLTON AT HOME

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report regarding the Performance Update Report for Bolton at Home for Quarter 3. The aim of the report was to inform the Scrutiny Committee on the performance of the ALMO through performance indicators.

Members were informed that of the 28 quarterly reported performance indicators, 15 were reported as green, seven as amber, against their own targets, which in essence gave no rise for concern, however, Bolton at Home had rated five of the indicators as red.

Resolved – (i) That the position be noted

(ii) That Members were pleased with the new lay out of the report looked forward to all future reports being of similar length.

49. QUARTER 3 DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE OUTTURN REPORT

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report to inform the Scrutiny Committee with information relating to the financial position and the performance for Development and Regeneration, as of Quarter 3 for 2009/2010.

Members were informed of the following information:-

- Financial key findings including:-

- Revenue expenditure;
 - Capital expenditure;
 - Reserve movement; and
 - Efficiency targets.
- Performance Key Findings, including:-
 - Unemployment figures;
 - Community Strategy 3 Year Plan; and
 - Customer care.

Resolved – That the position be noted.

50. UPDATE ON THE DISTRICT CENTRE ACTION PLANS

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report to provide the Scrutiny Committee on the progress that had been made in relation to the implementation of the four District Centre Action Plans and a brief summary of the performance of the individual district centres.

Members were informed that following the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on the 1 February 2010, there was a request for a progress report on the action plans in place for Farnworth, Horwich, Little Lever and Westhoughton town centres.

Members were appraised with information on each town centre which included action taken on the following:-

- Town centre environment;
- Business Forum;
- Public Realm Improvements;
- Development Opportunities;
- Environmental Improvements;
- Precinct and accessibility improvements;
- Anti-social behaviour and the use of CCTv;
- Public conveniences; and
- Markets.

Members were given a brief summary of the situation in the four town centres. Horwich, Little Lever and Farnworth were continuing to suffer from a declining performance, although Westhoughton appeared to be more resilient in terms of the affect of the economic downturn and had maintained an attractive and healthy town

centre. Also, due to the economic downturn, it could be said that this had led to a further decline in some district centres, with evidence of even higher vacancy rates, low operator demands and declining footfall, leaving the district centres struggling to compete with large superstores who were heavily discounting their products. Areas such as Little Lever and Farnworth were notably struggling. Farnworth offered the most opportunities for significant commercial investment, but it also had the most challenges. The clear focus on the town centre would be centred on creating the right environmental conditions to facilitate future investments.

Much discussion from Members was in relation to the following:-

- More public and private investment needed into Farnworth Town Centre;
- Investment from new supermarkets, such as Sainburys and Lidl had generated additional benefits within Westhoughton Town Centre;
- Horwich and Farnworth leisure centres had both benefitted in 2009 from huge Council investment and this had been welcomed by both Members and the public; and
- The planned refresh of the four District Centre Action Plans during 2010/2011 should consider the potential for change of use in appropriate district centre locations and the challenge to improve properties and derelict sites in private ownership.

Resolved – (i) That Members noted the informative report

(ii) That further information be sought from Serco, as to the plan for investment to upgrade the changing rooms at Horwich Leisure Centre.

51. UPDATE ON THE MILLS ACTION FRAMEWORK

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report to provide an update to the Scrutiny Committee on progress made in relation to the Mills Action Framework.

Members were appraised of the progress to date in terms of planning, regeneration, financial implications, communications and delivery of the new 5 year plan of the Mills Action Framework.

Members were informed of the success of the redevelopment of Atlas Mills number eight for 69 one and two bedroomed apartments, which provided a good practice model for the redevelopment of mills in Bolton and also developed a better way of working with developers at the pre-application stage. The developments at this mill were commended as they were the first development of their kind for being B* rated energy efficient.

In conclusion, the Mills Action Framework provided a basis for the future redevelopment of the Borough's Mills. The authority would continue to be pro-active in holding discussions with owners who wished to improve or redevelop their sites.

Where appropriate, these discussions would include adjacent landowners in order to encourage comprehensive development, as well as adding value to maximise the benefits. The methodology employed by the Council in undertaking the recent assessment work was viewed as an example of best practice when it came to prioritising mill sites. English Heritage had advised Regenerate Pennine Lancashire (formally Elevate) to learn from Bolton's approach as it combined a heritage, regeneration and economic development focus.

Resolved – That the position be noted.

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)	Executive Member for Development, Regeneration and Skills held on 22 February 2010 and 29 March 2010;
b)	Executive Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Regulation held on 23 February 2010 and 30 March 2010;
c)	Joint meeting of the Cleaner, Greener, Safer and Development, Regeneration and Skills Policy Development Groups held on 1 March 2010;
d)	Joint meeting of the Development, Regeneration and Skills and Corporate Resources, Strategy and Health Policy Development Groups held on 8 March 2010;
e)	Bolton at Home Monitoring Group held on 15 March 2010;
f)	Housing, Neighbourhoods and Regulation Policy Development Group held on 16 March 2010 and 24 March 2010;
g)	Development, Regeneration and Skills Policy Development Group held on 22 February 2010 and 17 March 2010;
h)	Joint meeting of the Development, Regeneration and Skills and Housing, Neighbourhoods and Regulation Policy Development Groups held on 22 March 2010; and
i)	Extract of the meeting of the Executive held on 1 February 2010, in relation to the Trinity Interchange Update.

Resolved – That the minutes of various meetings be noted.

(The meeting commenced at 6.07pm and ended at 7.21pm).