

HOUSING, REGENERATION & PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing, Regeneration & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 22nd September, 2010 at 6.00 p.m. in the Civic Offices, Telford, Shropshire

PRESENT: Councillors H.J. Unwin (Chairman), T.J Hope, R.A. Overton and H.J Williams

ALSO PRESENT:

OFFICERS: Sarah Bass (Organisational Capacity Projects Team Leader), Stephanie Jones (Scrutiny Officer), David Sidaway (Head of Property and Design), Matthew Taylor (Civic Offices Project Manager) and Kate Turner (Programme Manager for the Town Centre)

HRPSC-1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor D.R.W. White

HRPSC-2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

None.

HRPSC-3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

As only one nomination for Vice-Chairman had been received it was

RESOLVED – that Councillor H J Williams be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Housing, Regeneration and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

HRPSC-4 REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMEN'S FORUM

The Chairman reported that the Chairmen's Forum, held on 16th August 2010, had identified the following three topics for in-depth reviews for the current year

- Budget formulation
- Working with community groups to help improve the local environment
- Affordable, available and flexible childcare

Scrutiny Meetings would be supported by the Scrutiny Team during the year, and each Committee would hold one meeting during the budget consultation process to consider the budget proposals for that priority area. The Chairman advised that this Committee had been allocated five meetings which could be supported by the Scrutiny Team and at which it could scrutinise any issues agreed by the Committee during 2010/11. The Chairman indicated that it was, however, his preference to hold monthly meetings and he wished to explore what opportunities existed to hold additional meetings.

HRPSC-5 BACKGROUND PAPERS ON SERVICE REVIEWS

The report of the Lead Corporate Director: Environment & Rural Area/Housing, Regeneration & Prosperity informed the Committee of the programme of service reviews that was currently being undertaken across all service delivery units within the Council. The reviews would look at how services were managed and operated in order to propose ways in which they could be delivered to the community at a 20% non-staff cost saving.

Services have been categorised according to the amount of savings they have been targeted to make. Category 1 are services which have to make over £1m+ savings, Category 2 are those that have to make £500k-£1m and Category 3 are those that have to make savings below £500k. There are three major reviews which have to make over £1m savings.

A Service Review Steering Group had been set up to oversee the programme, to monitor the progress of each service delivery unit toward making their proposals, including information on changes in activity and savings, a timetable for which was included in the report, and to ensure a consistent approach across the Council. A process for involving scrutiny in consultation on the Service Reviews was currently being looked at.

In response to Members' questions the Organisational Capacity Projects Team Leader advised that wide consultation was taking place at each step in the Review, including with all staff working in each service area. She further clarified that the service reviews are targeting non-staff savings, but that the reviews could lead to restructuring and that in addition to the Service Reviews, the restructuring that has been going on for a number of months has to result in at least 20% staff savings. With regard to Single Status, the Organisational Capacity Projects Team Leader was not able to answer specific questions, but reported that agreement was still being negotiated with the Trades Unions and, therefore, no information was currently available as to how this would affect redundancy packages.

RESOLVED – that Members noted the briefing and took account of the service reviews when planning the Committee's work programme.

HRPSC-6 2010/11 WORK PROGRAMME

Telford Town Centre – Civic Offices

The Head of Property & Design apologised to Members that update reports had not recently been made to Scrutiny, in part due to the implementation of the new Scrutiny arrangements.

The Programme Manager for the Town Centre made a presentation about the overall Town Centre Development, and a presentation in support of the Cabinet Report dated 14 September 2010 which provided details on the key design decisions which had informed the size, configuration and appearance of the new Civic Offices at Southwater, in readiness for a reserved matters application to be submitted.

Civic Offices

The basic building parameters and the accommodation schedule for the new Civic Offices had been informed by a number of decisions made by the New Ways of Working Steering Group. These decisions had been based on proposals for the future of the Council's accommodation, based on the "One Council" vision and commitment to "New Ways of Working". Through rationalising the Council's property portfolio and adopting the principles of New Ways of Working it had been possible to reduce the office accommodation for the new civic to circa 8,000sqm, from circa 9,850sqm in the existing building. Concept proposals, including an executive summary of the design report, were appended to the report. Aspirations for an iconic building with high levels of quality, sustainability and civic presence had been achieved in accordance with the original brief.

Town Centre

The Southwater site itself would be transformed into a vibrant, mixed use centre including residential units, retail units, offices, sport and leisure facilities, an extension to the TIC, multi-storey car park, hotels and active ground floor frontage to all buildings. The site would encompass a wide cultural and leisure offer courtesy of the Learning and Media Centre, leisure hub and TIC Events Box and Hotel.

The following responses were made to questions raised during the presentation:

- Despite National funding restrictions, the Homes and Communities Agency had maintained their funding contribution of £9.5m to the overall package. Advantage West Midlands had, unfortunately, had to reduce their match funding from £9.5m to £4m, but the loss had been absorbed through a rationalisation of costings, taking a different approach to services and reducing preparation costs. The overall package was worth £28m.
- The funding package would include infrastructure and enabling works of the site, the lake, the public realm and the Learning and Media Centre. The funding for Civic Offices sat outside of this £28m funding package.
- Residential usage would be mixed with the Randlay Lorry Site offering a more traditional build; opportunities existed for the provision of 'city living' apartment style accommodation in the long-term vision.
- The development would raise the value of the site significantly which it was hoped would attract significant interest from the Private Sector, particularly if a cinema was located on the site. However, it was possible to deliver the project in any event.
- Although concern was raised that the public perception may be that Southwater Events Group was receiving preferential treatment by the planners due to the partnership, this was wholeheartedly refuted as being the case. Furthermore, the partnership did not cause any loss of business with other brands.
- Cabinet would receive a report in the new year regarding parking options for the new Civic Offices and the leisure offer. Current parking provision was considered sufficient for the area until 2020.
- The Town Park boundary was now to be changed due to a change of approach to that taken by Transforming Telford. The Arena was a valuable

asset and the area was not required to form part of the Southwater Development.

- Although consultation on the development had been weak in the past, it was now very much improved; particular consultation had taken place with the Highways Department and the Police and options to establish a Management Company were being considered. It was envisaged that the outdoor public area would not feature a concentration of trees and would be a safe, low maintenance area similar to that at Brindley Place (Birmingham). The IT infrastructure was being considered, including making the space wifi enabled.
- The Authority did not own the current cinema site so it had not been possible to consider building the new Council offices on that site. However, it was considered that the current cinema was situated on the periphery and it was important to site the Council building within the heart of the Southwater Development to increase footfall which would create leverage for private investment into the development. The market suggested that only one cinema would be supported in the area.
- Concerns were expressed surrounding the ambiance and feel of the site during clearance and building works. This was a concern shared by officers and stakeholders which had been a subject of great discussion. It was difficult to manage the look of temporary spaces but there was scope to utilise temporary landscaping, quality hoarding and prominently site innovative sustainable technologies to demonstrate the Authority's commitment to sustainable development energy use. These ideas were based on those which had been utilised at Spinning Fields (Manchester) and the new Birmingham Library. Even locally, at the new build at the Wellington Civic Offices, innovative practices such as a viewing platform were in use and proving popular.
- The new Civic Offices did not have a dedicated Council Chamber and it was suggested that a number of exciting opportunities existed around the Borough for meetings to be held off-site. The current Reception Suite has an area of 200m² and the largest room in the new building would be 50m². It would be a significant cost to incorporate a larger room and, although some flexibility was possible in the division of meeting spaces, carving up the rooms in future would seriously undermine the philosophy underpinning the design. It was agreed that the Committee would be provided with the basis of the calculation which resulted in a £0.5m figure to incorporate a Council Chamber.
- Criticism of the aesthetic appeal of the design was raised – noting that it did nothing to alleviate a 'concrete jungle' image - and the Committee was assured that a balance had been struck between cost and function which could still lead to the provision of a quality, iconic building. Confidence was expressed by officers in the materials and the appointed architects (the design team behind The Mailbox in Birmingham and the new Severn Trent Headquarters). The quality of materials and build was similar to several buildings in Birmingham and the Special Projects Manager would be willing to assist if Members desired a tour.
- The branding for the development had been carefully considered, and the brand image was shown to the committee. The brand was being launched to the public on 4th October, with a new website www.heartoftelford.co.uk.

The Committee was referred to the key milestones set out in the report and it was suggested that Members could use this information to inform their discussions as to when Officers would be requested to attend to update the Committee on progress. The Public Realm Complete Concept Design and Learning & Media Centre Concept Drawings were highlighted as possible points in the process which would be of greatest interest and information.

Work Programme Planning

The report of the Scrutiny Manager provided the Committee with information to enable them to plan its Work Programme. Annex A of the report set out the suggestions for items made by the Scrutiny Assembly Workshop and Annex B set out the outstanding items from the Scrutiny Leadership Board which it was considered fell within the remit of this Committee.

The Committee agreed that the following action should be taken with regard to the Work Programme suggestions.

Scrutiny Assembly Workshop

Priority	Topic	Decision
A	Wellington Town Council tourism issues	An update on the implementation of recommendations of a previous Scrutiny Review of Tourism, and strategies for the future would be added to the agenda for the next Committee meeting.
A	Homelessness	Members were advised that a recent Scrutiny Review on Homelessness would be presented to Cabinet on 12 October and it was agreed that report should be circulated to the Committee so that discussion could take place on whether any further action needed to be taken. (October)
A	Strategic planning processes and structures	Relevant Cabinet Member and Head of Service to be invited to make a report to a future meeting of the Committee.
A	The regeneration of private and social landlord property / housing	Relevant Cabinet Member and Head of Service to be invited to make a report to the next meeting of the Committee.
B	Lifetime Homes project	Due to difficulties in enforcing any recommendations with developers, this item would not be added to the Work Programme.
B	Capacity of the Council to plan, organise, and complete the	Special Interest Meeting. Timing and scope to be agreed at the next

	regeneration schemes planned and on time	meeting.
B	How the Council's procurement processes support the local economy.	Members noted clear links to a previous Scrutiny Report which would be circulated to the Committee so that discussion could take place on whether any further action needed to be taken

Outstanding Items from the Forward Plan of the Scrutiny Leadership Board

Topic	Decision
Town Centre Update. (Call-In)	Copies of the Call-In documentation and supporting reports/minutes to be circulated to the Committee. Regular update reports required. Key Dates in the timetable had been identified as October (Public Realm Complete Concept Design) and early 2011 (Learning & Media Centre Concept Drawings) and the Head of Property & Design would be invited to report to the Committee at those stages.

HRPSC-7 DATES AND TIMES OF NEXT MEETINGS

It was agreed that the next two meetings of the Scrutiny Committee be held on the following dates at 6.00 pm:

Thursday, 21st October 2010
 Wednesday, 24th November 2010

A third meeting was provisionally set for Thursday, 16th December 2010 at 6.00pm.

The meeting ended at 8.15pm

Chairman:

Date: