

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on
Friday, 18th January 2013 at 10.30am in Meeting Room 3, Darby House,
Telford**

PRESENT: Councillors D. White (Chair), M. Ion, A. McClements, S. Reynolds, C. Turley.

IN ATTENDANCE: Cllr. C. Smith, Cabinet Member Housing, Regeneration and Economic Development; Fiona Bottrill, Scrutiny Group Specialist; Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Officer; Michael Barker, Assistant Director Planning Specialist (Part).

SMB-24 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meetings of the Scrutiny Management Board held on the 16th November 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

SMB-25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs. V. Fletcher and C. Mollett.

SMB-26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

SMB-27 HOLDING THE EXECUTIVE TO ACCOUNT

The Chair welcomed Cllr. Smith, Cabinet Member Housing, Regeneration & Economic Development to the meeting for the Holding the Executive to account session. The Cabinet member had received a list of standard questions from the Scrutiny Management Board and a list of supplementary questions from the Housing, Economy & infrastructure Scrutiny Committee in advance of the meeting.

The Chair began by asking what Cllr. Smith's priorities were as Cabinet member. Cllr. Smith said that for him there were two key priorities:

- House building was a priority because the borough needed affordable / social housing but this was dependent on outside agencies. The Council was working with the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) to use Council and HCA land, including HCA giving grants to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) conditional on building affordable homes. There was a target for

RSLs to build 1000 affordable new homes by 2105. In response to a question about whether the Council had a preferred provider, Cllr. Smith said that all RSLs were treated equally and that it was up to each RSL to put their proposals forward to the HCA. He gave some examples of schemes that had been proposed by the RSLs including Wrekin Housing Trust (WHT) on the Ercall Lane School plot, BVT in Lightmoor Village and a Sanctuary scheme. HCA land had also been sold to a private developer for a 300 house development. The priority was to get the housing market moving.

- Business growth and inward investment was a priority. A one-stop-shop for businesses had been set up in Wellington Civic Office although the office was not in the best place in the building and needed to be moved to a more prestigious position. This gave businesses a single point of contact to Council services and improvements were being made to the business-facing services. For companies enquiring about a planning application, the target was to register the application within 3 days and for a planning decision to be made within 8 weeks. An example was given of an application in Hortonwood which had been registered within 24 hours in mid-October, consent had been granted in mid-December and the building was now underway. One member commented that the Council should be careful in making this kind of commitment because if the development was controversial, consultation would be needed and the process would take longer than 8 weeks, and another member said that planning regulations can also hold up the process. The Cabinet member agreed that a decision on bigger developments could take longer and that if consultation was needed it usually took around 13 weeks. In terms of planning regulations holding things up, the aim was to bring the three teams together into one team so that the business only has one point of contact. Cllr. Smith suggested that this was something scrutiny could look into. It was a priority to get industry back into the borough to create employment. The Telford Business Board was looking at the youth agenda with TCAT who are on the Board to see how people can be up-skilled with the skills businesses want. There was still a work to be done on increasing apprenticeships because some businesses did not want to offer them.

Cllr. Smith said that there was long way to go, but that these were his priorities. There had been a change of officers with the restructure last year, but this had now settled down and the new teams were in place. The government had made a lot of changes in planning and there would probably be more so there was also the issue of keeping up with all the changes.

Members then raised a number of points and questions with Cllr. Smith:

- The Chair said that the Council needed to start to influence the type of new housing built especially smaller properties which would be in demand because of the so-called “bedroom tax”. Scandinavian countries plan from cradle to grave and there was a need to do this here. Cllr. Smith said that the Council was trying to influence developers but they were resistant to building one-bedroom properties because they felt there would be no demand for them once the economy picked up. The government wanted to speed up the planning process and Telford & Wrekin had shown that the

timescales could be met although there had been delays with a recent decision which had been called-in. There was a new build scheme in Ketley which had been built to a very high specification with parking and care places and Cllr. Smith thought this was a good example of the type of high quality development needed to get the housing market going. The Chair said there would be a need for smaller properties for people down-sizing, that there was a need to monitor multiple occupancy properties in the private rented sector for example in Sutton Hill and that open thinking and a co-operative way of working was required. Cllr. Reynolds said, from her role on Plans Board, there was an issue with developers having the Council over a barrel. Cllr. Smith said that he felt the bedroom tax had not been thought through but it was not possible to build overnight.

- Cllr. Ion said that the housing portfolio was an important one but difficult to influence because the Council does not have direct responsibility, but the Council *does* have responsibility for care leavers. He wanted to know how Cllr. Smith worked with other Cabinet members to help care leavers post-18 so that they did not slip through the net. He asked what the challenges were and whether there had been any successes. Cllr. Smith said that he spoke regularly to the Cllr. Watling, Cabinet member for Children, Young People & Families and Liz Clare, Cabinet member for Adult & Social Care. They were all aware of the issue and were trying to make sure that these young people do not fall through the net. The Council does not have its own housing stock but monitors these young people. One problem with children in care and care leavers is that the general population may not want them around. He pointed to a scheme in Ketley with homes for young people and a warden on-site to monitor the flats and help the young people and more of this was needed.
- Cllr. Ion raised an issue about the lack of provision for care leavers post-18. He had heard at a scrutiny meeting from a foster carer who had had a young person in her care for a number of years but the young person was about to turn 18 and the support would end but she would continue to look after the young person. He wanted to know more about how services were joined up particularly around the transition from children to adult services. The Chair said this issue applied to other children and not just children in care and there was a need to think about how this is dealt with for example by providing supported lodgings and help with money management to move the young people onto independence. The need was even greater because 18-25 year olds would not get housing benefit. Cllr. Smith agreed this was difficult and that there was a need to prioritise housing provision such as apartments for disadvantaged young people and he said he would take this back for further discussion with relevant Assistant Directors.
- The Chair suggested that the Council should organise a borough-wide housing conference with all providers and the voluntary sector to discuss the issues and felt this would be a good opportunity for the Council to bring partners together to work co-operatively. Cllr. Ion said this would pick up on the theme discussed with Cllr. Clare about working with voluntary sector organisations and that private landlords should be included, and he supported the Chairman that this should happen at a strategic level, but

made the point that there were immediate issues with children leaving care that need to be addressed now and that the two portfolios should be aligned. Cllr. Smith said he would discuss this further with Cllrs. Watling and Clare.

- Cllr. McClements said she felt the Council needed to develop the relationship with RSLs and that this needed to be taken up at Cabinet level. Cllr. Smith said that he would discuss the idea of a conference with Katherine Kynaston, Business & Development Planning Manager, and he agreed that the relationship with the WHT was not as good as it could be but pointed out that it was a private company and separate from the Council. The Chair said that the RSLs had a responsibility to build social housing and that Wrekin Housing Trust had made a commitment to build 2 houses for every house sold off. He felt it was important for the Council to have a relationship with providers who are co-operative. Cllr. Smith said there was a need to re-establish the relationship with the WHT.
- Cllr. Turley commented that there was a risk that people who may become homeless as a result of the welfare benefit reforms would blame the Council rather than government policy.
- Members asked about progress on the regeneration of Brookside and why Brookside had been prioritised for funding when there were more deprived wards. Cllr. Smith replied that the South Telford estates had had problems for the last 15 years. Woodside had received £45m regeneration funding and work was nearing completion. £7m had been invested in regenerating Sutton Hill and work was on-going. The focus had moved onto Brookside. There were plans to regenerate the centre so that it had more of a community heart but it was not an overnight solution. There had been a need to find accommodation for people being displaced and some landlords had not been co-operative. Cllr. Davies was leading the regeneration from a community point of view and Cllr. Smith was leading from an infrastructure point of view. A member commented that the flats in Brookside seemed to be becoming a sink hole like the flats in Woodside had been. Cllr. Smith said there were plans to demolish and redevelop but that it takes time and there was a need to communicate what was happening to local people. The Chair said that the Council needed to be open with local people about what can be delivered so they are not misled about what is happening. Members agreed that regeneration was not all about money and buildings but about people and that the Brookside Improvement Group was doing good work. Cllr. Smith agreed that it was not just about the fabric of buildings but about helping people to help themselves and the community needs to take ownership. Cllr. McClements said that once the work was done, the Council must not pull out but should continue to work with the community to make it sustainable. The Chair said the two officers who had worked on the Woodside estate had made a big difference as local contacts for the community and dealing with complaints and wanted to know if similar could be done in Brookside.
- Cllr. Ion wanted to know more about the Council's role in the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). There were good examples of local regeneration projects for example, 80 people in Wellington had chosen the

Dunelm store as a regeneration project and local people in Market Drayton were looking at the potential for regenerating the cinema which would be a hub for the town and local economy. He wanted to know what role the Council played in the LEP and where these local projects would fit in. Cllr. Smith explained that Telford & Wrekin was part of the Marches LEP along with Shropshire and Herefordshire. There was a LEP Executive Board which included the Leaders of each authority and Cllr. Sahota represented Telford & Wrekin. There were auxiliary advisory groups and Cllr. Smith sat on the housing and tourism groups. He was not sure that the Telford & Wrekin was on the right LEP but a view had been taken that it would be made to work for Telford & Wrekin and he had fought Telford & Wrekin's corner well on housing. He considered Telford & Wrekin to be influential and starting to be recognised as a powerhouse in the LEP. Significant funding and grants had been already been accessed for business support in Telford. He gave some examples of outputs achieved in Telford & Wrekin in relation to the total LEP outputs:

	Project total	Telford
People Assisted to Start a Business	195	83
Businesses Assisted to improve Performance	49	26
Business Assisted – Social Enterprise	12	12
Businesses Created and/or Attracted to the Region	110	34

Cllr. Smith was working closely with Peter Roach who was the Chair of the group.

- Cllr. McClements had heard concerns about being part of the Marches LEP and that Telford & Wrekin should be looking to the Black Country which would be better for developing links with industry in that region. Cllr. Smith said that the Marches LEP has a rural outlook and did not understand urbanisation. There was a need to look eastwards and talk to the Black Country LEP but their plans were set and they did not want Telford & Wrekin to join. He was not sure that Telford & Wrekin would want to be in the Stoke-on-Trent / Staffordshire LEP. Cllr. Sahota and Cllr. Smith had regular one-to-one meetings with Dr. Geoffrey Davies, the Chair of the Executive Board, and they have said they would not want to leave the Marches LEP. Cllr. Smith considered that Telford & Wrekin had weight within the LEP and this showed in the flow of funding into the borough.
- Cllr. Turley asked how the Cabinet member was making sure that Telford & Wrekin was in a position to benefit from the Regional Growth Fund, Enterprise Zone and other funding allocations announced in the Autumn Statement. Cllr. Smith replied that ERDF funding had already been attracted which had supported the outputs described previously. The Council would look at what was required for the borough and then put the schemes forward to the LEP for appropriate funding. For example, the Box Road (ring road) improvement scheme had been put forward for £6.1m Department of Transport funding with match funding from the Council of £3.251m of which £564k was from LTP resources. Schemes had to show outputs in terms of jobs, and the Council could show it had land, access to the West Midlands and Rail Freight Terminal. The Box Road scheme included traffic calming which would make it easier for pedestrian crossing giving better access to the shops, and would help create a proper street

scene and townscape. There could be bus stops along the route. Access to the Southwater development would be important to support the envisaged night life. The Chair and Cllr. McClements said they were struggling to see the benefits of the Box Road scheme and would like to see the plans. Cllr. Smith said the scheme was necessary to open up the town.

- The Chair asked about the Council's relationship with the Town Centre Management Company. Cllr. Smith felt this was improving and he had asked for a meeting with the managers. They had previously objected to the closure of a verge on Box Road but the objection had been withdrawn. The company saw the changes to Box Road as an improvement and they were now looking at plans for the old Do It All building. There was a need to build along the front of Coach Central and to make the frontage more attractive. The scheme would give lower levels of speed and greater pedestrian access which had been a big issue for the Central Telford Area Action Plan. The Telford International Centre (TIC) was now the 6th largest conference centre in England but business people were travelling outside Telford for night life and this needed to be developed in Southwater. The TIC wanted to be part of this and was investing money in the development.
- Members asked whether there were any plans to improve the railway station which was a gateway to Telford and whether this was a priority for businesses. Cllr. Smith said that improvements were being looked at. There was a limited budget and the Council could not afford to widen the bridge, and the previous Town Centre owner had not been interested, but improvements were possible within the limited budget. The path to the station and signage could be improved and there was potential to use some of the open spaces for example to create places to lunch outdoors and community spaces which would improve the look of the area.
- Cllr. Ion said a direct rail link between Shrewsbury and London stopping at Telford would be a real growth driver and wanted to know what Cllr. Smith and Cllr. Rhodes, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Transport, were doing to lobby the LEP and Virgin Trains to ensure this was in their plans. Cllr. Smith said that a direct rail link to London and the M6 link road were priorities for the LEP. Dr. Geoffrey Davies, the Chair of the Executive Board, was a business man and understood the need. Cllr. Rhodes sat on the LEP transport group and if she was unable to attend then Cllr. Smith attended. A joint submission had been put forward with Shropshire and this was being pushed with the LEP. All MPs in Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire were pushing for a direct rail link to London. Virgin had promised to look at this but it had been put back because of the need for electrification of the line but in the mean time it could be possible to have a more regular service.
- Cllr. Turley asked whether the Council had any plans to develop its own housing stock. Cllr. Smith said all opportunities to deliver housing in the borough needed to be considered. This would generate income from the New Homes Bonus scheme. 800 affordable homes had been built in the borough last year. There was an issue with developers saying that S106 contributions were unaffordable and there was a need to find other ways of

delivering affordable homes for example by using Council and HCA land to encourage development. The Council did not have a housing revenue account but was exploring ways of addressing the need for temporary accommodation as part of the Council's homelessness duty. Work was being done with landlords and 600 empty properties had been identified. The Council was looking at the possibility of buying empty properties and bringing them back to occupation - this would attract the New Homes Bonus grant – so it was possible that the Council would take on a small amount of stock to manage but not likely that it would build its own. The Chair said that the Council had previously bought about 100 houses which were rented out for a period and then sold on the open market making a considerable amount of money. A separate housing company had been set up so that the Council was not deemed to own the properties and there were no revenue problems. He wanted to know whether this could be reproduced. Cllr. Smith repeated that the Council was exploring the potential for doing this with a small number of properties but in the current economic climate it was not easy.

When there were no further questions the Chairman thanked Cllr. Smith for attending the meeting and asked for his feedback on the holding to account process. Cllr. Smith said that although questions had been sent to him in advance to enable him to prepare information, not all of the questions had been asked at the meeting. He felt that the supplementary questions put forward by the Housing, Economy & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee had been better than the standard questions. Cllr. Smith then left the meeting.

SMB-28 SCRUTINY OF THE BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Chair introduced this item which was to discuss scrutiny of the budget strategy and proposals (Service & Financial Planning Strategy 2013/14-2015/16). Cllr. Reynolds, Chair of the Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee gave a verbal update on the work to date and approach to scrutinising the proposals. The Committee had met in December to look at the savings proposals approved by Cabinet for consultation in September and had met twice so far in January. The Cabinet Member Resources & Service Delivery and Chief Financial Officer had attended the first meeting in January to present the budget strategy and proposals. The Committee's key concerns had been around the overspend in safeguarding and the Early Help / Safeguarding Cost Improvement Plan. The Cabinet Member Children, Young People & Families had been invited to attend the next meeting but had been unable to attend, so the members had met to formulate a list of questions which had been sent to the Cabinet member for a written response. The Cabinet member Resources & Service Delivery had also attended part of the second meeting in January and had suggested that the Committee might want to request quarterly reports on the Cost Improvement Plan from the Managing Director and Cabinet member. At the next meeting the Committee would be looking at savings and impacts in adult social care, leisure and environmental services and Cabinet members had been invited to attend. She felt there was good scrutiny of the proposals but that this was a difficult time. She had suggested that once scrutiny of the budget proposals was over, the Committee

should move on to look at the Council's approach to medium and long term financial planning. The committee would be meeting on 5th February to agree its response to the proposals.

Cllr. McClements raised the issue of how to manage scrutiny of the budget across Council Committees. The budget is very important and there needs to be monitoring and scrutiny, but there is a need to avoid duplication for example with the Audit Committee. Cllr. Ion drew members' attention to an issue raised by the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee with the reporting of financial information on the Children in Care Performance Dashboard. The Chair called a short adjournment while members discussed these issues in private.

The Chair reconvened the meeting. Cllr. Turley began to update members on scrutiny of the waste management services procurement when the fire alarm sounded and the Chair declared the meeting closed.

The meeting ended at 12.30pm.

Chairman:

Date: