

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on Friday, 17th May 2013 at 10.30am in Meeting Room 3, Darby House, Telford

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Cllr. A. England, Cabinet Member Leisure & Wellbeing; J. Eatough, Assistant Director Law, Democracy & Public Protection; F. Bottrill, Scrutiny Group Specialist; S. Jones, Scrutiny Officer.

SMB-37 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meetings of the Scrutiny Management Board held on the 15th March 2013 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendments:

- The Chair's update on the work of the Health & Adult Care Scrutiny Committee under SMB-35 should record that Cllr. Fletcher raised an issue about the lack of pharmacy cover in the evenings in South Telford and the suggestion that this be referred as an issue to the Health & Adult Care Scrutiny Committee.
- That the incorrect reference to the "Leader's newsletter" under SMB-32 page 6 be replaced with "Leading Magazine for Governors".

SMB-38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None except Cllr. Reynolds would be late.

SMB-39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

SMB-40 HOLDING THE EXECUTIVE TO ACCOUNT

The Chair welcomed Cllr. Arnold England Cabinet Member Leisure & Wellbeing to the meeting for the Holding the Executive to Account session. The Chair clarified that Cllr. England had been invited in his existing Cabinet position but noted that he had been nominated for appointment as Cabinet member for Adult Social Care at Annual Council on 23rd May.

The Chair began by asking Cllr. England about the key issues in his area and

where improvements could be made. Cllr. England had prepared responses to questions sent to him in advance and said he would work through these as a structure for the meeting.

In response to the question about his priorities when he became Cabinet Member, Cllr. England said that he had been appointed straight to Cabinet when he was elected so he had not had time to think through his priorities, but because he had worked in leisure for 17 years and had a good working knowledge of the area and some of the officers working in leisure, the settling in period was easier. His main priority had been to protect as much of the service as possible in the light of the cuts. He had initially identified the core services to prioritise for protection, but it turned out that more had been protected than hoped.

In terms of achievement of priorities and the priorities for the future, Cllr. England referred to the list he had prepared in advance and said he would send this to the scrutiny team to forward in full after the meeting. He felt the soft play area in the town park had added greatly to the leisure mix and 60% of visitors were from out of town.

The Chair asked whether Cllr. England thought the temporary ice rink had been value for money. Cllr. England said it had not, but a lot of groups had made representation to the Council and they felt the Council had an obligation to provide a temporary solution while the rink was being refurbished. The temporary rink had been created to fill the gap. It was the best that could be done but had not really worked because of the rain and a small loss of a few thousand pounds had been incurred.

Cllr. Fletcher asked about usage of the ice rink and whether the Russian Ice Ballet performance in Shrewsbury had had an impact on usage of the rink. Cllr. England said uptake at the rink had peaked with the television series Dancing on Ice and had then dipped and the Russians had brought added interest. He did not know if the Russians appearing in Shrewsbury had had any impact on Telford but would endeavour to find out.

Cllr. England continued that the new fitness centre at Abraham Darby had opened. The picture was not wholly successful because the academy sponsors had constrained public use of the facilities and some rooms could not be used because of issues with ventilation or security. The idea had been for the academy to use the facilities during the day and the public in the evenings. It was a great concern that the academy was in control and could withdraw public access. There had been similar issues with Madeley Academy which had reneged on a deal and withdrawn public use of the synthetic pitch. This issue had been taken up with the MP. Going forward, schools were going for Co-operative Academy status which would create a better offer for members of the public.

The Chair said that leisure facilities should serve the whole borough as not all people would or could travel, and Cllr. Fletcher wanted to know who had been consulted on changes to facilities in Priorslee where there had been a loss of long-standing amenities. Cllr. England replied that there was only a limited pot

of money so he had to look at the net picture across the borough and there would be some losses and some gains. There had been a loss of squash courts at Lord Silkin, but squash courts were being looked at in Oakengates. There had been a loss of some playing fields in South Telford but an increase in synthetic pitches so there would be an overall increase in capacity. Madeley had largely the same facilities although there were issues with public access and there had been investment in new facilities in Dawley. Overall he felt there was some reduction of space, but enhanced facilities.

The Chair felt that public access at Madeley had been reduced to an unacceptable level. Cllr. Ion felt the problem lay with the Articles of Association because public rights of access had not been built in for Madeley or Abraham Darby but this would change with new academies. The Chair agreed that future agreements needed to ensure public rights of access and Cllr. England reiterated that this had been taken up with the MP. Cllr. Ion argued that this was not about one Cabinet member pursuing the issue but was part of a broader conversation. Cllr. England was not certain whether the sports facilities at BRJ were being retained, but it needed to be accepted that BRJ were in the driving seat with the money. Cllr. Ion confirmed that the facilities were being retained.

Cllr. Fletcher said that taking away amenities would impact on children's and adult exercise and we need to get this right. Cllr. England agreed. He had asked to become a member of the Health & Wellbeing Board and had been accepted. The driver for the Board was health and Cllr. England felt that as a Council Committee the Board needed to understand the link between leisure and health to inform procurement decisions. The Health & Wellbeing Board had received a presentation from Dr. Peter Bird on the link between physical activity and mental and physical health and a copy of the presentation would be provided to circulate to members.

Cllr. England continued that the co-operative process would help ensure public access and he highlighted the Stirchley library partnership project which officers had made happen and was working well and had received national recognition. The amalgamation of services to share space and overheads was the way to work in future. Changes to the social structure, including changes brought about by the welfare benefit reforms, would drive greater demand. The focus had been on Stirchley but the service would look forward to exploring this model at Donnington library if the Parish Council were in support. It was likely that Cabinet responsibility for libraries would pass to Cllr. Hilda Rhodes after Annual Council.

Cllr. Fletcher asked for assurance that members' concerns about public rights of access would be addressed and Cllr. England replied that he had tried to set things in place and had been making representations. The Chair said it was the job of scrutiny to pass on concerns.

Continuing, Cllr. England said there had been a significant programme of investment through "invest to save" and further new projects were being developed. Leisure facilities, and the method of running them, had changed. Income was driven from health and fitness suites, and bars had been removed

which was a good move financially and from a health point of view. The centres needed a USP to attract customers – this should not be alcohol – and must remain dynamic to keep up with changes in the leisure sector. An “invest to save” investment was planned in Newport for facilities adjacent to the swimming pool.

Cllr. McClements wanted to know whether the saving targets in leisure were sustainable without making cuts, particularly if private providers had dropped their prices. Cllr. England replied that the new facilities in Newport was an “invest to save” and with the projected income generation the investment would be paid back over a 3-4 year period. There had been a massive bounce from the investment in the new facilities in Wellington. He felt the quality of staff had improved enormously since he had worked in leisure. Sophie Griffiths had secured £1.5m government funding to add value to the Phoenix community facilities, and he felt retaining the quality of staff was important. There had been 2 voluntary redundancies recently and responsibilities had been shared around to make further staff savings. His priority had been to retain as much of the core services as possible and to expand from there.

The leisure concessions policy had been reviewed and changed following recommendations from scrutiny. The automatic concessionary status for new over 60s had been removed except for those in receipt of pension credit and a flat £1 charge for swimming had been introduced for all concessionary groups which still offered good value for money. Cllr. Fletcher agreed £1 was good value for money, but was concerned there may not be sufficient capacity in the pools especially if the schools dominated use and wanted to know if people were kept waiting or turned away. Cllr. England was aware that some young people had been turned away from Abraham Darby because they were unaccompanied, and that there was a maximum loading for pools, and that there had been some re-programming of the schedule at Abraham Darby to try to accommodate more people. He did not have any information about people being turned away but would try to find it for Cllr. Fletcher.

There was a discussion about the use of frosted or clear glass in swimming pools. Cllr. England said the idea had been to work towards clear glass so activities were visible which helped to promote them. Cllrs. Turley and Ion made the point that this needed to be balanced with safeguarding concerns and Cllr. England said he would feed this back.

The Chair asked what was happening with the walking groups. Cllr. England said this had been considered by the Health & Wellbeing Board and he was having discussions with the relevant Cabinet members. He referred again to Dr. Bird’s presentation which showed a sedentary lifestyle could be as damaging to health as smoking and obesity and could lead to hypertension which was a main killer. It was important to get this message out. Members suggested that opportunities to work with partners, schools, volunteers and private sector sponsors should be explored to develop the heart-beat tracks (or trim trails) which members thought would be a cheap alternative to leisure centres and a good Olympic legacy. Cllr. England said this could be looked at but there were heavy financial constraints and other organisations would need to provide the money.

There were questions about uptake of the Telford Loyalty Card (TLC) which members were told was 1900. Members wanted to know how many of the card holders were transferred FlexCard holders and requested further information about the profile of TLC holders and how data was used to monitor usage and to inform the marketing strategy and requested this to be reported back to scrutiny. Cllr. England made the point that the TLC had only been introduced a month ago.

Regarding income generation, the service had an income growth/savings target of £5m for 2011-2017. £1m had already been saved, two thirds of which was from income growth. The pantomime had been a great success and it was important to build on this for the next year. Cllr. Fletcher questioned why a booking fee was charged by the theatre for tickets bought at the box office, and members could see no legitimate reason for this and felt it was misleading for the public to add this to the face-value of the ticket. Cllr. England replied that officers had done an analysis of market practice and charges to ensure this was not out of step, and that it was necessary to meet the required savings target. The Chair felt it was the Cabinet member's role to set policy and Cllr. England said he would take this on board.

Cllr. England, supported by the Managing Director, was keen to introduce an annual arts festival but needed to find a sustainable financial model to make it affordable. Cllr. Fletcher said there had been a two-day event 2 years ago which had been very good, with adults paying and children going free. The Chair said there had been no cost for the event which was co-funded by partners with a guarantee against loss. Cllr. England said the ambition was to raise it to a higher level, and said that there had been a cost to the Council for the previous event in terms of the Innovator Bus and officer time.

Cllr. England pointed out that should the nominated members be appointed by Council, he would switch Cabinet responsibilities with Cllr. Clare. He had passed all the information prepared for this meeting and other correspondence and e-mails to Cllr. Clare in anticipation. He was not yet actively involved in Adult Social Care, but was starting to put future meetings in his diary. There was a lot of communication between him and Cllr. Clare which would continue, and he would introduce her to the large number of outside bodies relevant to leisure services such as Telford Trust, the Local Access Forum and the Shropshire Playing Fields Association. It was not always possible to change things the groups wanted, but it was important to build relationships and to know what was going on.

Cllr. Ion wanted to know the position regarding the Clifton building. Cllr. England replied that there had been some discussion about the Council buying the site and renting it out at a peppercorn rent, but although there were some good ideas for the site, it was not possible for the Council to support it without a return on investment.

Cllr. England said the Council was very good at identifying and attracting external and partner funding – for example the £1.5m government grant for Dawley mentioned earlier. A BMX track and third generation hockey pitches

were being built which would be regional attractions.

There were no further questions and the Chair thanked Cllr. England for attending.

SMB-41 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME – PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Scrutiny Officer presented the performance monitoring report which showed the level and impact of scrutiny work during the first year of the 2012/14 work programme. This included quantitative information about the amount of work completed and the number of meetings held, qualitative information about the outcomes and impact of scrutiny work and some examples of good practice from the ways the Committees have worked over the year. There was further information about regional scrutiny work and call-in and key decision requests.

Members made a number of points relating to the report and the work programme:

- The Chair informed members that he had approached the Managing Director about additional resources to increase capacity for health scrutiny. There were a number of important issues with the hospital that need to be looked at as well as mental health services.
- The Chair asked members whether they thought the Holding the Executive to Account sessions were serving their purpose. Members agreed they were, but Cllr. Ion suggested distilling the list of pre-agreed questions into three areas, namely what was going well, what was not going so well and what the future looks like. It was necessary to be mindful of officer time in helping Cabinet members to prepare.
- Cllr. McClements requested an item on the Police & Crime Commissioner and Police & Crime Panel to come back to a future meeting and suggested that the PCC Bill Longhorn should be invited. The Scrutiny Group Specialist reminded members that the Board's role was to scrutinise the Community Safety Partnership and not the Commissioner or Police service. A decision on further work was deferred until after the Police's stakeholder and community engagement event in Telford on 17th June.
- Cllr. Ion requested an item on youth unemployment and NEETs be added to the work programme and suggested the principals of the two colleges should be invited to give evidence with Cllrs. Paul Watling and Shaun Davies attending. The Chair thought this would be an issue of interest to the wider membership and suggested a Scrutiny Assembly meeting could be held later in the year in place of a Scrutiny Management Board meeting.

The Chair then requested views from the Scrutiny Chairs as to whether they felt their committees had been effective and were making a difference.

- Cllr. Reynolds said she was happy with the work the Budget & Finance

Scrutiny Committee had done on the budget proposals and there had been good joint working on the welfare benefit reforms. The Cabinet member for Resources & Service Delivery had provided feedback on the committee's comments on the budget proposals and was attending a meeting next week to discuss.

- Cllr. Ion said the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee had done a really good piece of work on the children in care placement strategy which was not easy when costs had to be balanced with the quality of care provision. Key challenges were to increase the number of internal foster carers and reduce the number of residential placements. The report and recommendations would be presented to Cabinet on 27th June. The Committee was now looking at the provision of primary places. The Scrutiny Officer had attended a meeting of the Primary Heads' Forum Executive Committee on the Chair's behalf to engage Heads in the review. The response had been very positive and 2 primary heads had been nominated by the Forum to give evidence to the Committee on 6th June. The review was potentially controversial because the lines of enquiry included balancing expansion of places with quality of provision. The Chair suggested that the Committee may want to look at how schools are dealing with Aspergers and Autism.
- Cllr. McClements said the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee had done some good work on the welfare benefit reforms which had been shortlisted for a Centre for Public Scrutiny Good Scrutiny Award. As part of the review, Cllr. McClements had met Wayne Gethings from the Wrekin Housing Trust to explore partnership working with the Council and the response was very positive especially about the good work of Lee Higgins. The Committee would be moving on to look at issues around debt and food banks. The current review of the Co-operative Values and Employee Commission would be completed over the next few weeks. It had involved members getting out and talking to staff. The feedback had been generally very positive and it had also been a good opportunity to raise awareness about scrutiny.
- The Chair reported that the Health & Adult Care Scrutiny Committee had concluded the review of Continuing Healthcare which was about making sure that people were dealt with fairly and had been a very good piece of work. The recommendations had been presented to the Clinical Commissioning Group Board and the Health & Wellbeing Board and a formal response would come back to the Committee. Cllr. White had met the met the Chief Executive of the hospital trust for an informal discussion about a number of major issues which were being picked up by scrutiny and the Committee would be looking at the best options for Telford & Wrekin. Issues which would come to scrutiny included the outcome of the stroke and urgent care reviews and the 111 service. Members had already visited the 111 operations centre.
- Cllr. Turley said that the Housing, Economy & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee had agreed to defer a review of the Community Infrastructure Levy. The review of the waste procurement process was on-going. Most

of the meetings had been held as private briefings for reasons of commercial confidentiality. At the last meeting, the Committee had checked that a detailed evaluation of the option of a Council waste transfer station had been carried out and members had been assured this had been done. Cllr. White had raised issues with him about homelessness and he was arranging to meet the manager of KIP to find out more. The Committee's next review would be of empty properties and private landlords.

The Chair commented that the quality and amount of scrutiny work was good and he thanked the Scrutiny Chairs and all Committee members for their hard work. During his year as Chair of the Regional Scrutiny Network, Cllr. White said his ambition was to increase the national influence of the network and discussions were on-going to look at how the network could feed into Select Committee inquiries. The next meeting would be in Telford & Wrekin on 11th July and one of the main agenda items was future proofing scrutiny.

The Assistant Director gave his apologies as he was unable to attend the remainder of the meeting due to a prior commitment and he left the meeting.

SMB-42 SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

There was a discussion about agenda items for the July meeting.

- It was agreed that Cllr. Davies would be invited for the Holding to Account session.
- The Chair advised that the item on Domestic Violence had been deferred until September due to on-going work.
- It was agreed that the July meeting would include an item on homelessness including an update on the implementation of previous scrutiny recommendations. Homelessness was a cross-cutting issue and had not been included in any of the Scrutiny Committee work programmes.
- An item on flood and water management would be brought to a future meeting as the Board was the designated body for exercising statutory scrutiny powers of partners on the Strategic Flood Management Board. The Chair wanted to explore specific issues around sub-contracting.

The meeting ended at 1.30pm.

Chairman:

Date: