

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on Thursday 17 March 2016 at 6.00pm in Meeting Room G4, Addenbrook House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT

PRESENT: Councillors S A W Reynolds (Chair), A Burford, N A M England, V A Fletcher, J Greenaway, K Guy, J M Seymour.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor S Davies, Cabinet Member Business, Neighbourhood & Customer Services; Councillor E Clare, Cabinet Member Leisure Services & Culture; A Astley, Assistant Director Customer & Neighbourhood Services; J Eatough, Assistant Director Legal, Procurement & Commissioning; F Mercer, Assistant Director Commercial Services; K Kynaston, Assistant Director Business, Development & Employment; P Hudson, Arts & Culture Manager; F Bottrill, Scrutiny Group Specialist; D Moseley, Democratic Services Officer; S Jones, Scrutiny Officer.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors G Cook, P Scott, B Tillotson.

SMB-14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs. S Bentley (Scrutiny Management Board) and J Ashford (Customer, Community & Partnership Scrutiny Committee)

SMB-15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr. Fletcher declared an interest as a member of St George's and Priorslee Parish Council.

SMB-16 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 4 November 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

SMB-17 HOLDING THE EXECUTIVE TO ACCOUNT: CLLR. S DAVIES, CABINET MEMBER BUSINESS, NEIGHBOURHOOD & CUSTOMER SERVICES

After welcome and introductions, the Chair set out that one of the roles of scrutiny is to hold the Executive to account. The Scrutiny Management Board carries out this role but the sessions also enable scrutiny members to consider matters of importance that are not covered by the work programme. Members of the Customer, Community & Partnership Scrutiny Committee had been invited to ask questions about issues within the committee's remit.

Cllr Davies thanked the Board for inviting him and then responded to questions.

What are your main achievements as Cabinet member in the first 9 months of the administration?

Cllr Davies summarised achievements in key areas as:

- Business – Telford & Wrekin has become recognised nationally as a ‘Business Supporting, Business Winning’ Council. Telford is an Enterprise Town and the Telford Business Growth Hub has been launched to provide tailored business support packages to rival the Enterprise Zones. The £25m investment in the Property Investment Portfolio would further improve the offer. Businesses are being drawn into the borough and are committed to staying.
- Neighbourhood services –the Pride programme is delivering some excellent projects. In terms of highways, there has been a focus on ‘pothole busting’ but the priority should be to get things right first time and the £2m additional funding agreed in the budget for planned maintenance should reduce the need for reactive repairs. The Council has a good track record of securing funding from the LEP and would be working to achieve a fair share of investment through the West Midlands Combined Authority. The Veolia waste contract has delivered significant savings, recycling rates have increased and there is good feedback from residents.
- Customer services – a priority had been to address wait times at the contact centre and there have been tangible improvements in wait times and call abandonment rates. The longest wait in June 2013 had been 1 hour 10 minutes and in January 2016 was down to 19 minutes. Corporate communications has been transformed with the use of Twitter, Facebook, other social media and the introduction of video technology enabling the Council to interact daily with residents. The Council has over 3,000 followers on Twitter.
- Commercial services (overseen by the Commercial Board) include the housing investment in Nuplace where the first tenants had moved into Randlay and half the houses in Madeley, which would be complete by the end of the year, were already reserved; the solar farm had generated a profit of £185k which has been invested in adult care packages and services for children in care; Services for Schools have generated record amounts of income from schools in Telford and Wrekin and increasingly out of the borough.

Have you formed any views on the implications of the Chancellor’s budget for services in your area?

Cllr Davies said he welcomed the increase of the cap on business rates as good for the many small businesses in the borough but was concerned about the cost to the Council in lost income and how the loss from the discount would be made up. The Council currently retains 50% of business rates set to rise to 100% by 2020 as government grant is phased out.

What do you see as the main challenges for the Council over the next 4 years?

Income will be the key challenge. Of the main funding streams -

- Government grant will be phased out by 2020
- Income from business rates will be affected by the business rate reform although details are not clear. The UK growth forecast has been downgraded which would

potentially impact on income from business rates. Telford has relatively few large businesses and the loss of even one business would have an impact.

- Council Tax – Telford & Wrekin has the second lowest level of Council Tax in the West Midlands and a low Council Tax base with the majority of properties in Bands B/C. By the government's calculation this means that Telford & Wrekin has the equivalent of £11m p.a. less spending power than the national average.
- Commercial income is important but there are risks and limitations for local authorities raising commercial income and it will not be enough to bridge the gap.

In terms of budget pressures:

- The majority of expenditure is on adult social care and services for children in care. The introduction of the living wage will impact on care provider costs and demand will continue to increase with the ageing population.
- The borough has pockets of above average levels of deprivation which puts pressure and expectations on public services.
- Telford is a New Town and infrastructure and assets are failing at the same time.

The uncertainty of income and increased pressure on expenditure will mean that more difficult decisions will need to be taken.

Why do you think it is important for the Council to invest in commercial projects like Nuplace or the solar farm?

The solar farm generated £500k revenue in its first year of which £185k was net profit which went towards supporting adult care and children in care. The land is Council owned and at the end of the project will still be owned by the Council. As a legacy of Telford Development Corporation, the Council is asset poor. Nuplace will create 400 homes owned by the Council as assets to pass on. Each home will generate rental income and Council Tax for the authority as well as raising the bar in standards in the private rented sector. The houses are built on Council owned brown-field sites that had been dormant for 15 years and had not attracted private developers.

If the Council does not make these investments it would mean making further cuts to services. Other authorities have approached Telford & Wrekin to find out more about the commercial approach including Shropshire Council which is exploring solar.

In response to further questions about Nuplace Cllr Davies clarified that:

- The model is based on ownership and there are no plans to sell the properties;
- As private lets there is no Right to Buy provision for tenants.
- Registered Providers (RPs) have not expressed concerns about Nuplace either with Phase 1 or Phase 2. RPs have a different product – they provide discounted social housing and Nuplace rents at market rates - and as such private landlords are more likely to feel the impact. Nuplace is building on Council owned land which RPs had chosen not to develop.
- Cllr Davies disagreed that Nuplace, by letting at market rents, is not meeting a social need. The first tenant at Randlay had previously rented in the private sector and had welcomed the opportunity to rent from the Council as a trusted landlord, to have good quality accommodation with a simple registration and

occupation process. Nuplace is therefore meeting a social need. 100% of the Phase 2 houses in Newport would be let at affordable rents.

- No income assumptions from New Homes Bonus had been built into the financial model and Nuplace would not be affected by changes to NHB. The government has consulted on reducing NHB from 6 to 4 years but the details are as yet unclear.

Given the uncertainty around income, from your position on the Commercial Board, are you looking to expand the portfolio of commercial projects?

Nuplace Phase 2 would continue to develop the housing stock, the solar farm would continue and Services for Schools would be working to retain and develop new business – there are challenges and opportunities around ‘academisation’ – and the Commercial Board would consider other ventures. All propositions take into account the cost of borrowing and the potential to generate a surplus.

There were a number of questions about Pride in Your High Street.

Cllr Davies clarified that:

- There had been a robust bidding process and not all bids had been successful.
- Some areas were over-subscribed and others were under-subscribed.
- The underspend of the fund would be ring-fenced for projects in Wellington, Donnington and Oakengates which had been under-subscribed. Options for using the money were being considered such as a retail challenge.
- There were no plans to re-run the programme.

Are you considering any different ways of working when the remaining elements of the waste services contract are handed over to Veolia?

The remaining contracts with TWS (residual and green waste collection, green waste disposal and community recycling centres) are due to expire in 2019 and will be managed by Veolia as part of the new contract. The plans for the community recycling centres have been brought forward to move from 4 centres to 2, one in the north and one in the south, managed by Veolia. The possibility of bringing forward the red-top collection service is being looked at.

In terms of environmental services, the Parish Environmental Teams (PETs) have transformed local services such as litter picking and leaf clearing and will be a factor in specifying the environmental services contract when it is put out to competitive tender. In response to further questions about the PETs Cllr Davies clarified that:

- In terms of roll-out, 3 new PETs had just been agreed taking the total to 13 (out of 33 parishes) which cover the majority of the population.
- PETs were set up to enhance the basic contracted service. The basic service has reduced over recent years and will be reduced further when the contract is re-tendered. The issue for small parishes is that they lack capacity to set up their own PET but the Council would support a joined-up model where parishes could work together.
- Parish Councils valued the PET and had made them a priority for funding.
- PETs had created apprenticeship opportunities, some of whom had progressed to full time employment.

- The PETs provide an enhanced local service and offer value for money. Members of the Board commented on the good work of the PETs.

In response to further questions about recycling rates Cllr Davies responded:

- There is no evidence to suggest that a reduction in the number of recycling centres will impact on recycling rates. The two new centres will have extended opening hours compared to the existing centres so there will be better access.
- Compared to ten years ago residents can now recycle most waste at the kerbside and recycling has been made simpler with the mingled recycling containers.
- Recycling rates are increasing. Telford & Wrekin is 116 in the table of 352 local authorities and is improving. Figures could be provided to show the increase in recycling rates, savings on operating costs of the new contract and associated reduction in landfill charges. Veolia are contractually obliged to show a year on year improvement in recycling rates.
- Cllr Davies would look into the disposal of plastic compost bags.

What is the scope of the funding for the St Georges and Gower Street regeneration, what is the Council's role and when will work be completed?

Cllr Davies explained that £650k had been earmarked in the 2015 budget for the regeneration of St Georges including the refurbishment of the old youth centre building on Gower Street. Further money was then allocated under the Pride In Your Community programme for the improvements to the Square and the Timbers Roundabout leaving the £650k available for the refurbishment of the Gower Street building. The funding is held by the Council and a Gower Street Project Board has been set up including local stakeholders and community groups to oversee the project. In the meantime a lottery bid has been submitted for £2m and a condition of lottery funding is that it cannot be allocated to projects which are significantly underway. If the lottery bid is successful, the project will move full steam ahead, or if unsuccessful the Project Board will consider how the money can best be allocated but progress would be evolutionary as additional funding is identified and secured for different phases of work. Cllr Davies assured members that the project was in control and on track.

Members asked further questions about how issues with waiting times at the contact centre were being addressed.

A significant amount of work had been done to reducing call waiting times. Working patterns and staff terms and conditions had been changed. A call-back facility had been introduced after five minutes giving customers the option of a call-back within half an hour and use of call-back was increasing. Alternative ways for customers to contact the Council are being developed such as Apps, on-line services and the introduction of an appointment system at First Point to reduce the number of calls to the contact centre. The key is to get things right first time, e.g. making sure waste is collected at the right time, to avoid the need for customers to contact the Council. The contact centre is relatively small for the volume of calls, handling 26,000 calls in January.

The Assistant Director clarified that the waiting times discussed earlier in the meeting were the longest recorded waits and not the average waiting time. Data showed that

in January, 15 customers had waited 15-19 minutes which was an improving trend but still not acceptable for those customers. The call-back service had been beneficial and customers were learning to trust that they would be called back within 30 minutes. The contact centre and benefits teams were joining up to create additional capacity and would drive on-going improvements through efficiencies of scale and sharing of skills.

The borough has key assets like the Town Park and Ironbridge. What commitment is there to promoting Telford, and will you keep T-Live?

Tourism is crucial. Destination Telford now has a dedicated team who actively promote Telford at trade shows and link into the tourist industry. The borough does not have many fiscal assets but it has a lot of community assets and punches above its weight as an events town. With regard to T-Live, if an act is available at an affordable price that the residents want to see it will be considered but if we are not confident of demand then it would not be recommended. The Council is putting on many other events to attract visitors such as the Spring into the Park programme.

What sort of organisation will the Council be at the end of the administration and what will success look like?

The organisation will be smaller. The Combined Authority and LEP will play a greater role; Telford & Wrekin has been good at securing money from the LEP and is well placed to benefit. There will be a greater role for Town and Parish Councils and they will be asked to do more. Local democracy will prevail and it will be up to voters to decide if they want to pay more to keep Council services.

When there were no further questions the Chair thanked Cllr Davies and he left the meeting.

**SMB-18 HOLDING THE EXECUTIVE TO ACCOUNT: CLLR E CLARE,
CABINET MEMBER LEISURE SERVICES & CULTURE**

The Chair welcomed Cllr Clare to the meeting and opened the questioning.

With regard to key achievements in the first 9 months of the administration Cllr Clare highlighted key achievements as:

- Developing the relationship with Energize had been key to increasing their level of activity in Telford and Wrekin. Recent activities had been held in Brookside and Donnington, and the Telford Trust is looking at a small awards programme for community sports projects backed by Energize.
- A key event was the Rugby World Cup visit to Telford at the T-Party in July
- Supporting local groups and clubs to develop provision, including gym and tennis clubs for the over 50s
- Improvements to facilities including the new gyms at Stirchley Recreation Centre and Horsehay Village Golf Centre including activities for the over 50s
- A leisure services portal had been set up to provide information and make it easier for customers to book and pay on-line and to set up direct debits

- The impact of the decision to end free swimming for the over 50s had been reconsidered and a new scheme would be introduced to allow over 50s with a Telford Loyalty Card to swim for £1
- The income strategy has continued with many successful bids
- The Council's First Aid training (brought to bear recently in Newport when leisure staff used CPR and the defibrillator to resuscitate a customer) has been developed as a commercial service and money has been raised locally in Newport for three new defibrillators
- There has been a focus on developing football provision including the need for 3G pitches and enhanced facilities. This has included a task and finish group looking at football provision in Newport, and discussions with AFC Telford about developing a football hub at the ski slope.

Cllr Clare then addressed a number of detailed questions:

- With regard to progress on a new football pitch in Newport, the Playing Pitch Strategy had been developed as recommended by Sports England to assess provision across the borough – what pitches and playing fields there are, where, who owns them and which have secured community use. Newport had been identified as having limited capacity for football. The discussions with Newport would continue over the possible sites but nothing had been agreed yet. Cllr Clare would discuss the problem of the moles on one of the potential sites with the Town Council.
- In response questions about the future of the libraries, the reduced budget for the book fund and the cessation of the mobile library services, Cllr Clare responded:
 - There have been positive discussions with Town and Parish Councils about taking over library services. Opportunities for co-location, self-service libraries and the use of trained volunteers were being looked at as ways of increasing capacity and sustaining the service. Cllr Clare was proud that the Council had continued to fund the libraries until now and it was right for Town and Parish Councils to play a greater role if local people wish the service to be sustained.
 - The budget for the book fund had been reduced but other ways of generating income – one idea was a pulping contract for old books – and ways of increasing donations were being explored to invest back into the service.
 - The use of the mobile library would be looked at once decisions have been made about the libraries so that any gaps in service can be identified. However, the financial viability of the mobile library needs to be considered and if there are alternative ways of filling gaps such as a home 'book buddy' volunteer service.
- On the question of the Council's role in encouraging girls and women into sport, especially under-represented sports, Cllr Clare replied that there is a role for the Council. The Council has worked with Energize who were responsible for delivering the national This Girl Can campaign locally, and rounders and hockey had been developed to attract more people into sport particularly targeting women. (Over 100 women now play rounders in Telford.) Other issues were being looked at, for example ensuring car parks at venues are well lit. The Playing Pitch Strategy identifies specific actions to increase participation of girls

and women in under-represented sports and work is being done with cricket and football clubs to encourage girls into the sports. The Council is also working with partners and clubs to help access external funding for segregated facilities. Volunteers play a key role and Energize provides training for volunteer coaches. Many people want to give back to the community, for example Kelly Holmes had attended the Shropshire Homes Sports day at Shrewsbury and was enthusiastic about giving back to the community who had supported her over the years. However, schools had to qualify to be invited and Cllr Clare wanted to explore who tried and were unsuccessful and if the same schools were there every year. It is important for all schools to have an equal opportunity.

- There was a question about how serious the discussions with ACF Telford about the football hub were and how they are being pushed forward. The question was put in the context of increasing childhood obesity and the lack of provision in some areas. Cllr Clare replied that the discussions were very serious and they were working closely with AFC but were linked to the sale of the Buck's Head. It is key to invest in all-weather 3G pitches for the future.
- In terms of assessing demand and extending provision for over-subscribed activities, concerns about public access to facilities in academies and the cost of joint use agreements where facilities are already fully booked, Cllr Clare said that the fact that activities are over-subscribed showed that the right provision is in the right place and it would be more worrying if activities were under-subscribed. Before expanding provision, the reason for the popularity of an activity is considered to assess whether there is a sustainable demand or if the activity is a passing 'fad'. With regard to community use agreements, there are currently negotiations with the new school in Priorslee about shared access and better access had been negotiated with the tennis centre provider. Other establishments with facilities - such as Harper Adams or New College - could be approached to potentially negotiate access on a paid basis.
- Members were pleased to hear that £40k had been allocated from an underspend in the Public Health budget to update the Definitive Map for Rights of Way. Work would be done with the Access Forum, the Ramblers Association and local partners to update the map. It was noted during the discussion that the Definitive Map had been lacking for a number of years and that the footpaths which provide connectivity across the borough must be registered by 2026 to keep their historic Rights of Way.
- With regard to developing the Town Park Visitor Centre, including as a commercial asset, Cllr Clare replied that the centre was used for various activities by parties of school children, for example an archaeological dig. Officers added that there is an education officer as a funded post to develop the programme of activities to offer to schools as a traded service and they were looking at how the use of the centre could be broadened.
- Cllr Clare was asked, given the link between sport and public health, if a return to free swimming for the over 50s would be considered. Cllr Clare said free swimming would not be reintroduced but from 1 April over 50s with a Telford

Loyalty Card would be able to swim for £1. TLC customers over 50 would be informed in writing and Members could help in making people aware.

- In terms of arts and culture events coming up, there will be a full programme of events though to Christmas including the Spring into the Park event, a new world picnic, a carnival and events on the river at Ironbridge using Arts Council funding
- Members were informed that a fund raising strategy would be developed once the restructure had been completed and the Board requested this to come back to a future meeting.
- In terms of what kind of organisation the Council would be and what success would look like at the end of the administration, Cllr Clare replied that:
 - The Council would be a leaner organisation with a more commercial approach
 - There will be a focus on maximising income (for example increasing gym membership) to sustain and reinvest in services (such as the new gym at Horsehay Village)
 - New products will be developed to trade commercially e.g. First Aid training
 - It was important to recognise the needs of individual communities and ensure provision meets the needs of the whole community and all age groups
 - A priority is consultation on libraries to ensure the sustainability of the service
 - A key success would be to have an equitable playing field provision

When there were no further questions the Chair thanked Cllr Clare and she left the meeting with the officers.

SMB-19 REVIEW OF SCRUTINY CO-OPTees

The Board noted the appointment of scrutiny co-optees since the last meeting as Carolyn Healy (Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee) and Roy Williams and Cindy Mason-Morris (Finance & Enterprise Scrutiny Committee).

SMB-20 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Board noted the update report circulated as Appendix B and discussed matters arising from the report.

RESOLVED –

- **That the Scrutiny Suggestion to consider the work of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust was not appropriate for scrutiny and that the person making the suggestion would be notified accordingly**
- **That Cllrs Overton and A England be invited to the next meeting for the Holding to Account session (date to be agreed by email)**

SMB-21 CHAIRS' UPDATES

The Scrutiny Chairs updated the meeting on the work of the Scrutiny Committees since November. Key items were the Children & Young People scrutiny review of

CSE which was on track to be finalised in May and presented to Cabinet and the Local Safeguarding Children Board, and the work of the Finance & Enterprise Scrutiny Committee on the budget scrutiny.

SMB-22 UPDATE ON SERVICE RESTRUCTURE

The Assistant Director Legal, Procurement and Commissioning was in attendance to update the Board on the restructure of the service. However the Chair recommended that the discussion be held in exempt session as it would involve discussing individual members of staff.

RESOLVED – that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for this item of business on the grounds that it may involve the disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as defined in paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

The meeting ended at 8.10pm

Chairman:

Date: