

## **SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on Wednesday, 4 May 2016 at 6.00pm in Meeting Rooms G3/4, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford**

**Present:** Councillors S A W Reynolds (Chair), S Bentley, A J Burford, N A M England, V A Fletcher and J M Seymour

**Also Present:** Councillors R A Overton (Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing, Public Health & Protection), G C W Reynolds (Cabinet Member for Employment & Skills) and B Tillotson (member of Customer, Community & Partnerships Scrutiny Committee)

**In Attendance:** K Hodgetts (Programme Manager - Youth Unemployment), Katherine Kynaston (Assistant Director: Business, Development & Employment), D Moseley (Democratic & Scrutiny Services Team Leader), L Noakes (Assistant Director: Health, Well Being and Public Protection) and N Rushton (Group Manager Structures and Geotechnics)

#### **SMB-023 Apologies for Absence**

Councillors E J Greenaway and K R Guy.

Apologies were also received from Councillor P Scott of the Customer, Community and Partnership Scrutiny Committee.

#### **SMB-024 Declarations of Interest**

With regard to minute number SMB-026, Councillor S A W Reynolds advised that she was employed by Telford College of Arts and Technology and Councillor S Bentley advised that he was a private landlord.

#### **SMB-025 Minutes**

**Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on 17 March 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

#### **SMB-026 Holding the Executive to Account**

The Chair reminded the Board of its role in holding the Executive to account and noted that members of the Customer, Community & Partnership Scrutiny Committee had been invited to ask questions about issues within the Committee's remit.

- a) **Cllr Richard Overton, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Public Health & Protection;**

The Deputy Leader noted his achievements over the last nine months as:-

- Introduction of the Green Guarantee;
- Securing the MOD logistics Depot;
- Madeley Neighbourhood Plan;
- Waters Upton Neighbourhood Plan;
- Local Plan consultation;
- Establishment of NuPlace;
- Stabilisation of the Gorge within budget;
- Reduction in the percentage of mothers smoking;
- Increased commissioning responsibilities;
- Smoke Free Telford & Wrekin resulting in increased quit rates;
- Improvements to the Drug and Alcohol service;
- Improvement of the Sexual Health offer through the relocation of the Sexual Health clinic to Bishton Court;
- Successful recruitment of Health Champions;
- Roll out of making every contact count; and
- The Live Well for Longer report which had reached over 23,000 people.

He noted the challenges for the Council in relation to his remit as:-

- Responding to Government changes to the planning process and adoption of the Local Plan;
- Supporting Parish visions for growth;
- Managing change in the borough (eg at the Gorge);
- Managing housing needs in light of government policy;
- In terms of Public Health, early death rates had fallen and he believed that the government's cuts to the Public Health grant had been short-sighted; and
- The impact of welfare benefit changes on homelessness.

*Members asked the Cabinet Member about the current relationship between the Local Authority, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and Housing Authorities and how this related to the allocation of land for development for social housing and the regeneration of the Radburn design estates.*

The Cabinet Member responded that good relationships existed with RSLs and commented upon the success of the Find Your Own Home scheme, which was operated in-house, and the Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

The Assistant Director: Business, Development & Employment reported that the Project Team were developing close working relationships with registered providers. With regard to land allocation, Housing Authorities were able to access land and figures for the provision of affordable housing were rising. Opportunities to jointly deliver affordable schemes would be explored where they existed and the Authority continued to work closely with registered providers and the Homes and Communities Agency to identify appropriate development opportunities. The Assistant Director: Business, Development & Employment advised that there had been a total of 40% affordable housing completions in the previous year and that Wrekin Housing Trust had been the largest social landlord developer.

With regard to existing properties requiring improvement, the Cabinet Member noted that Social Landlords were investing in improving their properties, particularly pointing to the work of Sanctuary Housing in Sutton Hill. However, private landlords could not be forced to invest in improvements. The Assistant Director: Business, Development & Employment commented that the accreditation scheme assisted with bringing properties to a higher standard and that landlords could be pointed to grant programmes for support as a part of this. She noted that capital funding for regeneration projects, such as that which took place at Woodside, no longer existed.

With regard to a query regarding replenishment of lost housing stock by RSLs as a result of right to buy schemes, the Cabinet Member pointed to the Local Plan for the strategic delivery of housing.

The Cabinet Member pointed out to the Committee that rates of homelessness among the 18-24 age group had been increasing and 194 people had been declared homeless in the borough since January. He stated that this was not due to housing supply but was a result of Welfare Benefit Reforms and people not being able to access the funding to live.

The Committee felt that it would be helpful to receive statistical data for building by Housing Trusts over the last five years, figures for vacant properties and the percentage of landlords signed up to the Landlords Accreditation Scheme.

*Members asked how the Council could monitor Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs).*

The Cabinet Member noted that it was challenging to provide statistical data for HMOs as they did not necessarily require a licence, although it was hoped that many would be identified through the Landlord Accreditation Scheme and contact with Ward Members. An Officer Task Group was currently considering the issue of licensing HMOs following legislative changes and further activities would be taking place to this end.

*Members asked what consideration had been given to the viability of introducing the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)*

The Cabinet Member noted that it was not a statutory requirement to adopt the CIL and that the Section 106 Agreement process was working well at this authority. The benefits of one against the other could not be assessed until the Local Plan had been introduced. He appreciated further work was required and that it was important not to damage growth, therefore, based on current circumstances, his feeling was that the authority was better placed not to adopt the CIL. The Assistant Director: Business, Development & Employment noted that the Customer, Community and Partnership Scrutiny Committee had done a lot of work on the Local Plan and would receive a report on this issue in due course.

*Members asked about the review of pharmacy provision.*

The Cabinet Member responded that the Health and Wellbeing Board had considered this issue in depth. Access to a pharmacy was vital for residents and any

reduction in provision would have an impact on patients and increase numbers visiting the GP.

*Members asked about teenage pregnancy and young people's health.*

The Assistant Director: Health, Well Being and Public Protection noted that the authority did not have sophisticated equipment to monitor health outcomes for young people and it was therefore necessary to rely upon national datasets. Teenage pregnancy was high in comparison to national figures but not high against the rates for statistical neighbours. Efforts to address rates included the commissioning of a new Sexual Health Service which would open in Bishton Court in May 2016 and offer a more accessible and user-friendly experience than that available at the current premises. The Public Health Team had varied levels of success working with schools in terms of health implications and, following a recent survey, it had been noted that young people's mental health was a key issue of concern. The Assistant Director: Health, Well Being and Public Protection also noted that the Scrutiny Review of Child Sexual Exploitation had assisted with developing an understanding of sexual health and healthy relationship education in schools. The Cabinet Member added that rates of smoking in pregnancy had reduced.

*The meeting adjourned at 6.40pm until 6.50pm.*

*Members asked for an update on stabilisation works in The Gorge.*

The Cabinet Member advised that stabilisation works in Jackfield had been completed. Monitoring of the wider Gorge continued alongside monitoring within the Jackfield project area and results illustrated a significant reduction in movement as the stabilisation works took effect. Members praised the Group Manager Structures and Geotechnics for his work on the project.

Members were advised that DCLG had been approached to release funding for the work but the bid had been declined. The local MP and MEP had visited and had been asked to support an intervention for funding. Members recognised that the Council had undertaken to fund the project to ensure the safety of residents and the protection of the World Heritage Site.

*The Cabinet Member was asked what he envisaged the organisation would look like at the end of the current administration and what future successes he anticipated.*

The Cabinet Member considered the organisation would be leaner, more business-focussed and less reliant of government grants due to successful income generation projects. He counted the adoption of the Local Plan and increasing health benefits in the sphere of Public Health as future successes.

*Cllr J M Seymour left the meeting at 6.57pm.*

**b) Cllr Gilly Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Employment & Skills.**

The Cabinet Member noted her achievements over the last nine months as:-

- Decreased unemployment over the previous 12 months;

- Focus on the “Life Ready, Work Ready” project which would create mutually beneficial links between schools and local businesses;
- The conduct of a skills audit in primary and secondary schools in order to assess gaps in local skills requirements;
- OfSTED inspection of the Community Learning Team: graded as good with some outstanding features and the Job Box model had been put forward as a model of national excellence;
- Apprenticeship Grant Scheme had seen seven local businesses sign up to receive support in providing apprenticeships;
- Increased income from the National Careers contract;
- Apprenticeship Training Grant provided funding opportunities for Council apprenticeships to undertake specific training relevant to their placement (eg specialist driving licence); and
- Job Junctions continued to provide support to the unemployed.

She noted the challenges for the Council in relation to her remit as:-

- Budget pressures;
- Slight increase in youth unemployment against the previous quarter; although this could be in part due to refocus on over-50s unemployment;
- Figures to NEETs remained stubbornly high;
- Financial stability of New College and TCAT;
- Lack of information from government on the Apprenticeship Levy;
- Pressures caused in the post-16 workforce by employers retaining older workers for longer; and
- Diversification of the population resulting increasing ESOL providers which provided both a challenge and an opportunity;

*Members asked to what extent it would be possible to buck national trends with regard to young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs).*

The Cabinet Member explained a pilot scheme whereby individuals expected to be future NEETs were identified for early intervention. The Job Box had seen some success in this area: the projects were run by local people who knew the area and there was some potential to devolve funding in future. The refocus of support to over-50s had caused an increase in youth unemployment and a balance in support needed to be found. The Cabinet Member suggested that the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee might want to consider this issue for their future work programme.

*Members asked what strategies and support was available to parents and what impact this had on NEETS and what support was available to those who worked with NEETs.*

The Future Focus service was offered through the Job Box; the service provided impartial information, advice and guidance on careers and future planning for 13 – 19 year olds or up to 25 years with additional needs.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that parents were a big influence and the Job Box website had been rebranded to include areas for parents, social media (Facebook and Twitter) was used to highlight opportunities and the offer of Family Learning Courses provided wider impacts in terms of help for parents as well as increased attainment levels.

The Council had also embarked on a project to engage with young people on regular or modified educational timetables. This was just one avenue being tested as the main difficulty with NEETs was engagement and this project sought to build a programme around their interests.

*Members asked about funding opportunities in the educational support arena, particularly for Post-16s.*

Members were disappointed to hear from the Programme Manager - Youth Unemployment advised that ESF funding had been applied for to support NEETs through the Turnaround Teams by bidding to provide a national project but that the bid had been unsuccessful and awarded to a national body. She felt that it was important to focus on the needs of local businesses and encourage STEM careers.

The Cabinet Member noted that the position with regard to the Apprenticeship Levy was unclear.

*Members recalled that the Conservative Administration had previously considered introducing a technical college to the borough and asked the Cabinet Member if she saw any advantages in such a scheme.*

The Cabinet Member noted that Telford College of Arts and Technology (TCAT) served the borough as its vocational college and included a wide variety of courses including landscaping, catering etc.

Due to her own personal circumstances, the Chair was able to confirm that TCAT accepted students as young as 14 on travel to learn vocational programmes. The Cabinet Member and Assistant Director: Business, Development & Employment noted ongoing work to engage schools in the travel to learn programme and commented that further engagement with schools was required to map out demand. No correlation between demand and whether a school had academy status or not had been identified.

*Members noted support for youth unemployment and the over-50s and asked if there were any other specific groups which would benefit from support from the job box, for example where local businesses were closing at Clive Barracks and about the morale of over-50s job seekers. Members asked what work took place with the Job Centre.*

The Cabinet Member noted that a redundancy support package was available to businesses which sought to match existing skills with new employment opportunities. The Programme Manager - Youth Unemployment advised that Job Box Mentors worked with all individuals regardless of age. Anecdotally she felt that it was easier to get over-50s into work as they tended to be more proactive and engaged and

employers welcomed their skill sets. She had no feedback that morale was an issue with this group. The Cabinet Member indicated that it was the long-term unemployed who tended to suffer with morale and these people were offered 1:1 confidence building support.

The Programme Manager - Youth Unemployment stated that good working relationships existed with the Job Centre due to the Council being the contract holder for the National Careers Service.

The Cabinet Member noted that some Parish Councils offered support for the Job Box scheme in terms of providing office space.

*Members asked what inducements were offered to businesses looking to relocate into Telford.*

The Cabinet Member noted that there was limited overlap with her role but she was able to confirm that engagement with businesses at an early stage enabled the Council to ascertain skills needs and point local people towards appropriate opportunities. There were good relationships with local businesses.

The Assistant Director: Business, Development & Employment added that Enterprise Telford offered a bespoke package for businesses; financial incentives were not included but there was support regarding business rates, rent, land packages, apprenticeships and recruitment. The recruitment offer meant that opportunities could be identified, through the Job Box, to work with young and older people to prepare them for the types of jobs which would come up and, if the individuals met the relevant person specification, they were offered a guaranteed interview.

*Members asked whether it was anticipated that the result of the EU Referendum would have an impact on local jobs.*

The Cabinet Member considered that, depending on the outcome, the EU Referendum may pose a serious challenge. The Assistant Director: Business, Development & Employment clarified that, whilst she was not aware of any high level of concern locally, foreign direct investment companies from China and India sought access to European markets by locating within the European landscape.

*The Cabinet Member was asked what she envisaged the organisation would look like at the end of the current administration and what future successes she anticipated.*

The Cabinet Member hoped to see sustained low levels of unemployment, increasing skills sets and access to opportunities. She felt that statistical data backed up her position with regard to the Council being best placed to serve local people and she would continue to seek funding opportunities despite the disappointments of bid-awards being made to private companies.

**SMB-027     Update on Scrutiny Co-optees**

The Democratic & Scrutiny Services Team Leader informed the Board that, since the last meeting, the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee had made two appointments to be formally confirmed at its meeting on 16 May 2016.

**RESOLVED** – that the appointment of Lyn Fowler and Sue Hudson as co-optees to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee be endorsed.

**SMB-027     2015/16 End of Year Scrutiny Work Programme Report and Scrutiny Annual Report**

The Committee considered the end of year report of the Scrutiny Team and recorded their thanks to staff for supporting a greater number of meetings than benchmarked for 2015/16. The Chair noted that this was the last meeting of the municipal year and work programming for 2016/17 would now begin. In accordance with the Scrutiny Handbook, suggestions for the work programme would now be sought from Cabinet Members, Scrutiny Assembly, senior managers and partner organisations for consideration early in the new municipal year.

The Chair asked Members to submit their comments on the Annual Report 2015/16 by email to herself and the Democratic & Scrutiny Services Team Leader.

The meeting ended at 7.48pm

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:** .....