

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 30 July 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)
Councillor D. Anson
Councillor B. Douglas-Maul
Councillor L. Harrison
Councillor J. Rochelle
Councillor K. Sears
Councillor I. Shires

Portfolio Holders present

Councillor A. Andrew - Regeneration

Officers present

Tim Johnson	Executive Director – Regeneration
Mike Tichford	Assistant Director – Regeneration
Alison Butcher	Building Schools for the Future Project Director
Simon Tranter	Head of Regeneration Delivery and Development
Stuart Wootton	Finance Manager – Regeneration and Neighbourhood Services
Craig Goodall	Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

08/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor B. Tweddle .

09/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor J. Rochelle substituted for Councillor B. Tweddle.

10/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

Councillor I. Shires declared a personal interest in item 5 'Strategic Regeneration Framework'.

11/09 MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

12/09 STRATEGIC REGENERATION FRAMEWORK

The Panel were informed of the background proposals, principles and progress towards the delivery of the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF).

Councillor A. Andrew and Simon Tranter gave a presentation to the Panel on SRF.

(annexed)

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- It was uncertain what the net gain of housing would be once the SRF programme was completed. Increasing the level of housing on offer was not one of the projects key priorities. The key aim of the project was removing poor housing and replacing it with modern high standard homes of mixed tenure thus regenerating communities for the future.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the links that this, and other local regeneration projects, has with the remaining regional and sub-regional strategies in existence. It was pointed out that the currently active Unitary Development Plan (UDP) set out different policies for land use than those expressed in yet to be enacted Local Development Framework (LDF) which would eventually replace the UDP. Members were informed that the LDF would gain more weight as it moved closer to formal adoption. The current downturn in housing construction was providing an opportunity for the LDF to develop without new housing being constructed based on UDP policy.
- Members questioned how the SRF linked with other regional and sub-regional strategies and projects and agreed to consider an item at a future meeting on how local plans linked with the region. Members requested that any supporting report should be illustrated where possible.
- It was important that the new housing was as environmentally friendly as possible. Code 5 or 6 on the Code for Sustainable Homes rankings should be the aim for all new housing. More efficient homes would be more affordable to run for local residents.
- Appropriate levels of parking were required on all new housing estates.
- Concern was expressed about the potential density of the new developments. It was felt that flats would not be a popular residential choice.
- The Panel were concerned about the affordability of new affordable housing due to the low wage levels experienced in the borough.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel consider an item on regional and sub-regional regeneration strategies and projects and how they link to local regeneration plans and priorities.

13/09 BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

Members received an update on the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme.

Alison Butcher guided the Panel through the report in the agenda papers (annexed). In addition to the details contained in the report the Panel were informed that the Wave 6a BSF schools had been invited to submit innovative learning ideas to pilot as part of their inclusion in the BSF programme. She reported that Streetly, Pool Hayes and Alumwell had made submissions with learning ideas ranging from modifications to physical spaces (both indoors and outdoors) to the trialling of new learning ideas using handheld

technology. It was agreed that further information would be provided to the Panel on why the other three schools did not submit ideas for new learning projects.

A Member commented that it was preferable for BSF funding to be provided by the Government upfront.

Following the concerns from a Member of the Panel regarding the potential for school closures as a consequence of capacity being increased at the six BSF schools despite falling rolls it was agreed that the long term plans for managing school places in the borough would be provided to the Panel.

RESOLVED:

That:

1. Members be informed of the reasons why three schools selected for Wave 6a Building Schools for the Future funding did not submit ideas for the introduction of innovative learning practices;

and;

2. Members be informed of the long term plans for managing school places in the borough.

14/09 FINANCIAL BUDGETARY POSITION 2008/09 PROIR TO EXTERNAL AUDIT

Members were informed of the budget outturn position for the year ended 2008/09, subject to external audit, for services within the remit of the Panel.

Stuart Wootton reported that the final budget position for services within the Panels remit was a revenue overspend of £2.5m (following the use of earmarked reserve) and a capital underspend of £150,000. He highlighted the areas and reasons for the revenue overspend and a breakdown of the capital outturn.

The Panel expressed concerns regarding the £81,000 shortfall in income generation from the markets service. Particularly as previous years had seen this income target reduced and the quarter 1 prediction for 2009/10, featured later in the agenda, was predicting a further overspend. Councillor Andrew noted this concern and reported that one current consideration was to remove the income generation target from the markets service in the future.

15/09 REVENUE AND CAPITAL MONITORING – 2009/10 FIRST QUARTER FORECAST

Members were informed of the predicated revenue and capital outturn position for 2009/10 based on quarter 1 (April – June 2009) performance for services within the remit of the Panel.

Stuart Wootton reported that the predicted revenue variance for 2009/10 was an overspend of £766,000. He also reported that the capital programme was currently expected to deliver within budget. He highlighted the analysis of the use of earmarked

resources, a service breakdown of revenue spending, an analysis of predicted overspend and a breakdown of the predicted capital outturn.

In response to earlier concerns expressed by the Panel regarding the predicted overspend in the markets service Tim Johnson explained that the Councils plans to take over Brownhills market could help to mitigate the current predicted overspend. In addition to this he advised Members that nearly all services with an income generation target were suffering as a consequence of the economic downturn. It was impossible to predict whether or not there would be an upturn or if the current downward trend was to continue.

16/09 VALUE FOR MONEY REVIEW OPTIONS

The Panel considered a range of options for potential value for money (VFM) reviews that they could complete.

Craig Goodall gave an overview of the VFM toolkit, explaining its purpose and the process that was required to be followed in order to complete one.

Mike Tichford outlined potential areas for the VFM review, namely:

- Multi-use centres – such as Manor Farm
- Development and Control Service
- Walsall Regeneration Company

The Panel debated the options and elected to complete a VFM review of the Development and Control Service.

RESOLVED:

That:

1. a Value for Money Review of the Development and Control Service be undertaken;

and;

2. Councillor D. Pitt be appointed Lead Member for the Value for Money Review of the Development and Control Service.

17/09 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10 AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered their work programme for the year ahead and the Forward Plan that was issued on 6 July 2009.

Craig Goodall reported that the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel had appointed a working group to consider integrated transport in Walsall and due to the cross cutting nature of the investigation were inviting the Panel to appoint three Members to their working group.

RESOLVED:

That, Councillors: D. Anson, D. Pitt and I. Shires, be appointed to the Integrated Transportation Working Group being operated by the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

18/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted the date of the next meeting as 1 October 2009.

The meeting terminated at 7.40 p.m.