

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 17th December, 2013

Present:- Councillor David Stringer – in the Chair

Councillors Miss Baker, Clarke, Holland, Jones, Loades, Matthews and
Olszewski

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Cairns and Cllr Wilkes.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

4. ASPIRE BOARD MEMBERSHIP

The Group Secretary of Aspire Housing stated that it was currently a time of immense change. Part of the challenge for Aspire was to make sure that it was running to its best effect. The challenges that Aspire were facing included welfare reform, financial pressures, households changing and changes in the banking environment. To meet the growing demands it was felt that change was required to the Board. New skills sets were required on the Board including specific competencies and experience in finance, health, housing, development, customer service and more. The current Housing board size of 12 was considered heavy in the context of effective governance and because 50% of the Board was recruited from a narrow range of candidates, 3 customers and 3 councillors, it was more difficult to recruit for specific skills and experiences under such constraints. It was therefore proposed to reduce the size of the Board from 12 to 9, with an additional space for an Independent Non-Executive. The change in the composition of the Board would not affect the Council's 33% vote which could be used on key issues at the AGM whereby a 75% majority vote was required. Aspire were looking to widen the ways which it engaged with the Council. They were currently planning an open day on an annual basis which all Councillors would be invited to attend.

A member suggested that it should be a Member of the Executive as the Council's representative on the Board. Members felt strongly that the Borough Council's representative on the Board should not receive the remuneration that was being proposed for Board Members. If any remuneration was to be paid it should be paid to an Officer supporting the Member in their work for Aspire.

A Member stated that it was important that the Council's representative should receive adequate training.

RECOMMENDED:

1. That the Council's representative on the Aspire Board should be a Member of the Executive and that they are able to nominate a substitute.

2. That adequate training be given to the Council's representative on the Board.

5. HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Head of Housing and Regeneration stated that the Council considered the Housing Capital Programme every year to ensure that the housing investment priorities were up to date. With limited funding available from national fund streams it was appropriate for the Council to continue using the New Homes Bonus for housing purposes. A range of options were proposed regarding how the money could be best spent. The Committee were asked to consider the potential scheme for 2014/15 utilising the planned £515,000 from the New Homes Bonus together with £100,000 valued land to be disposed of for delivering affordable housing, to give a total investment of £615,000.

RECOMMENDED: That funding be allocated as follows:-

Priority Schemes

DFGs - £350,000

Health & Safety - £50,000

Home Improvement Agency - £13,000

Optional Schemes

Additional support for Health and Safety - £30,000

Energy Efficiency measures through the Energy Service Provider - £20,000

Empty Homes - £20,000

Accredited and Licensed Landlords Support - £32,000

Affordable Housing - £100,000

Stock Condition Survey - £0

After discussion about the use of virements, if a particular funding allocation was being under used, it was:-

RECOMMENDED: That the Portfolio Holder be given the power in conjunction with officers to authorise virements for use of the New Home Bonus funding together with the £100,000 valued land to be disposed of for delivering affordable housing.

A Member suggested that the credited landlord scheme should be scrutinised in the future.

6. RYECROFT

The Executive Director Regeneration and Development introduced a report on the Ryecroft Led Regeneration and Re-Development Scheme. The report highlighted the main issues, with the intention of identifying some of the work streams in the future. Essentially there were two projects, the Ryecroft Development and the relocation of Civic Offices. This meant there could be two work streams for Scrutiny to consider. He was certain that the other scrutiny committees would have specific areas they would wish to scrutinise. One area which he thought Scrutiny could consider was the tracking of the development selection process, which would add value to the ultimate decision by Cabinet or Full Council.

The Executive Director Regeneration and Development stated that the advice from the consultants was that the area would be suitable for a medium scale department store and a food store. An independent study, joint with the County Council, had concluded that the former St Giles and St Georges School was considered to be the best site for the re-provision of the Civic Offices.

A Member stated that the report before the Committee was excellent. A Member commented that it was important to take note of the fact that the City Central development had to be scaled back. He therefore had some concerns over the deliverability of the Ryecroft project. He felt that housing should be considered as an option, which was in line with one of the priorities for the Council to deliver. He believed some form of housing would be beneficial to the Borough. The Portfolio Holder in response stated that if the Developer could make housing or even a leisure scheme work then he too could see the benefits. There was potential for having some flats over retail units. Keele University students and key workers at the University Hospital North Staffordshire could potentially stay in the accommodation. There was also potential for housing suitable for older people.

The Chairman stated that the report referenced the potential for meeting Cushman and Wakefield who had been advising the Council on the scheme at its next meeting on 12 March. It was agreed that if this did prove to be an appropriate time to meet the consultants then the commencement time of the meeting could be at 6pm.

7. WORK PLAN

The Chairman reported that the Constitution Review Working Group was currently giving consideration to the remits of each of the Scrutiny Committees and they were keen to hear from Members of any suggested changes to the remits. The Group was Chaired by Cllr Elizabeth Shenton.

A Member suggested that the credited landlord scheme should be scrutinised in the future.

8. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business within the meaning of Section 100B (4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

9. PART 2

10. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the Asset Management Strategy, because it is likely that there will be disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

11. **Asset Management Strategy**

COUNCILLOR DAVID STRINGER
Chair