

SCRUTINY BOARD (DEVELOPMENT)

TUESDAY, 21ST NOVEMBER, 2006

PRESENT: Councillor B Cleasby in the Chair

Councillors P Davey, D Hollingsworth,
G Latty, M Lobley, A Lowe and A Millard

38 Declaration of Interests

There were no Declarations of Interest.

39 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Ogilvie and R Lewis.

40 Minutes of Last Meeting

Regarding Minute No. 27 Minutes of Last Meeting, on the lessons learned over the Telecoms Mast on Rawdon Billing and concern that a similar situation happened again in Otley, despite procedures having been updated to minimise the risk. The Chair stated that the Director of Development would be present at the December meeting of the Board and the Board's concerns would be conveyed again then.

The Board also requested that the following point be added to the bullet points under Minute No. 31:

- That the information on the valuation should have been provided to Members prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED – That, with the above addition to Minute No. 31, the minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2006 be approved as a correct record.

41 Executive Board Minutes

Regarding Minute No. 91, the Deputation to Council by residents concerned with Ringroad safety, Members requested that the report received by the Executive Board be submitted to the December meeting of the Scrutiny Board for consideration.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the minutes of the Executive Board meeting held on 18th October 2006 be noted.
- (b) That the report on Ringroad safety be considered at the December meeting of the Scrutiny Board.

42 Overview and Scrutiny Minutes

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9th October 2006 be noted.

43 Former Blackgates School at Tingley - Further Scrutiny

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report outlining the background to the approval of a request by local residents for Scrutiny into the disposal of the former Blackgates School at Tingley. Attached was a report from the Director of Development responding to Members' concerns which were raised at the Scrutiny Board (Development) meeting on 10th October 2006.

With the Board's support, the Chair had declined to table at the meeting further written information submitted by the community safety representative of Shancara Court in response to the Director of Development's report. The Board also rejected a request from this resident to speak at the meeting, as his request for scrutiny and evidence on behalf of residents had been received at the previous meeting.

The Chair then welcomed Paul Brook, Chief Asset Management Officer, Chris Gomersall, Head of Property Services, Mike Darwin, Head of Highways Development Services, and Andrew Thickett, Section Engineer - all from the Development Department - to present the report and respond to Members' questions.

In brief summary, the following issues were discussed:

- The Chief Asset Management Officer referred to the comment made earlier in the meeting under minute 40 regarding circulation of exempt information in advance of the meeting. He reported that it was usual at meetings of the Executive Board for exempt items to be tabled on the day of the Board meeting and for those papers to be collected again at the end of the meeting. He took the view that this should also apply to Scrutiny Boards and that it was not intended to cause any offence to Scrutiny Board Members.
- The comment from a resident that the original company had gone into receivership and the challenge as to the legality of any agreements with Mintons.
- Access to the Blackgates School site from Bradford Road – the position of the pedestrian crossing, vehicle movements and the calculations for the volume of traffic generated.
- Confirmation that Shancara Court which is a Mews Court arrangement had been designed to serve a maximum of 25 dwellings.
- Achieving best consideration and whether tenders should have been invited from other developers.
- The valuation – the Board were satisfied with the valuation of the site but questioned whether it was good practice to obtain the second external valuation from the same company. The paper designated exempt under Access to Information Procedure Rule 10.4 (3) on the second valuation

was distributed at the meeting for Members' information and collected again at the conclusion of this item.

- Recognition that nationally accepted procedures and internal and external audit requirement, in particular for seeking valuations, had been complied with in every respect.
- The timescale of events, in particular when it was known that Blackgates School was to be disposed of and the negotiations with Mintons to build Shancara Court.
- The significance of the ransom strip owned by Mintons in achieving best consideration and whether Mintons had agreed to give this up if negotiations could not be concluded.
- The continuing negotiations with Mintons and the current position regarding their appeal following the Council's recent rejection of their planning application.
- The adoption of Shancara Court by the Council.

Having listened to the response of officers to their queries and concerns, the Board concluded that they were satisfied that further scrutiny was not necessary. However they expressed a number of concerns, chiefly the need for greater transparency in these matters and improved consultation arrangements wherever possible.

The concerns were in summary:

- The view that in order to ensure transparency in assessing whether best consideration had been achieved in negotiations of this kind that more than one tender should be obtained.
- The view that where a second external valuation is obtained that this should be from a different company.
- The view that consultation with residents, Parish and Ward Councillors on the disposal of the site had sometimes been misleading and lacked transparency.
- That there should be ongoing consultation between departments and Members/the public/partners about service priorities which then shapes future policy against which individual proposals can be assessed. Members of Council should be advised that departments would sponsor or support a particular proposal if it was consistent with those pre-agreed policies.
- That the Heads of Terms should be agreed with Mintons as soon as possible, preferably within 30 days, or the site should be offered on the open market for informal tender.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That having considered all the evidence from Officers, that no further scrutiny be required on this particular matter.
- (b) That the Director of Development be asked to expedite the Heads of Terms with Mintons as quickly as possible, preferably within 30 days.

44 Tackling Worklessness

The Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing submitted a report updating Members on the strategies and actions designed to tackle worklessness across the City.

The Chair welcomed Stephen Boyle, Chief Regeneration Officer and Martin Green, Strategy Manager, Regeneration, both from Neighbourhoods and Housing, to the meeting to present the report and respond to Members' queries and comments.

In brief summary the following issues were discussed:

- Discrimination by prospective employers, not only against minority ethnic groups, but that experienced by anyone living in a perceived problem neighbourhood, those suffering from mental health and ex-prisoners.
- Worklessness statistics and the effect that reducing the number of claimants on Incapacity Benefit had on increasing the number of those listed as unemployed and vice versa.
- The difficulties of becoming trapped on a particular benefit that might be paid at a higher rate.
- Breaking the cycle of worklessness, through education, obtaining qualifications and mentoring young people who sometimes had unrealistic aspirations.
- The huge growth in the number of jobs in the City but little difference to the percentage rate of worklessness in the City.
- The significance of the small business sector and self employment, both of which in Leeds were below the national and regional average. The important part that the East and South East Leeds initiative (EASEL) could play in resolving this, by increasing home ownership by supporting affordable housing schemes, by promoting enterprise and by improving transport connectivity in the Lower Aire Valley.
- Traditionally local people were more likely to be employed by the small business sector which generally tended to recruit through methods which were more favourable to local people than the recruitment practises of large employers.
- The difficulties experienced in resolving issues of worklessness due to the fact that no one Council department had control of the issues, the number of partners involved and the many different funding streams available. The importance of the strategic leadership that the Council could give in bringing the partners together to provide a coherent and cohesive response to these issues.
- The part that the Leeds City Region could play in reducing worklessness in the City.
- The part that the Narrowing the Gap initiative was playing in helping to reduce worklessness.

The Chair thanked officers for attending the meeting and responding to Members' concerns.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report and comments made by the Board be noted.

- (b) That it be recommended that responsibility for tackling worklessness be brought under one body or department within the Council.
- (c) That a further progress report on this matter be brought to the Board in February 2007.
- (d) That reports submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on “Narrowing the Gap” be circulated to all Members of the Scrutiny Board for information.

(Note: Councillor Lobley left the meeting at 12.00 noon during the consideration of this item and Councillor Hollingsworth left the meeting at 12.07pm at the conclusion of this item.)

45 Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report on the Board’s Work Programme, together with the Forward Plan of Key Decisions pertaining to this Board’s Terms of Reference covering the period 1st November 2006 to 29th February 2007 for Members’ consideration.

The Chair informed the Board that a request for Scrutiny had been received from Councillor Pryke relating to X-site, the in-house publication of the Development Department. The Board considered that it would be more appropriate for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the issue of Departments producing their own in-house publications on a more general level.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report and Forward Plan of Key Decisions be noted.
- (b) That the Principal Scrutiny Adviser inquire whether ‘Parking in Town and District Centres’ could be brought forward on the Work Programme from the April to the January meeting of the Board.
- (c) That the report to the Executive Board on 18th October 2006 on Ringroad safety be included on the December agenda of the Board for possible future scrutiny.
- (d) That the Request for Scrutiny received from Councillor Pryke, relating to the in-house publication of the Development Department, be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

46 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday 19th December 2006 at 10.00am with a pre-meeting for Board Members at 9.30am. Noted that Councillor Millard submitted his apologies for this meeting.

The meeting concluded at 12.10pm.