

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Friday 21 September 2012

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs Aspinall, in the Chair.

Councillor Tuffin, Vice Chair.

Councillors Bowie, Bowyer, Casey, Monahan, Mrs Nelder, Nicholson, Singh (Substitute for Councillor Philippa Davey) and Wigens.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Philippa Davey, James and Murphy.

Also in attendance: Oliver Colvile, MP, Giles Perritt (Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships), Alison Seabeck MP and Helen Wright (Democratic Support Officer).

The meeting started at 9am and finished at 10.05 am.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

46. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by members in accordance with the code of conduct.

47. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

48. **MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT FOR PLYMOUTH MOORVIEW AND PLYMOUTH SUTTON AND DEVONPORT**

The Chair considered that this was a good opportunity for joining up the work carried out at both local and national level and it was hoped that this would be the beginning of regular meetings with the city's MPs. The Chair reported that Gary Streeeter, MP for South West Devon, had sent his apologies for today's meeting.

(a) Alison Seabeck, MP for Plymouth Moorview, provided an overview of the committees that she was a member of, which included –

- all party armed forces group;
- all party dentistry group;
- all party housing group;
- all party insurance group;
- all party finance group;
- all party confectionary group;

- (b) as the Shadow Defence Minister she was not permitted to sit on any of the Select Committees;
- (c) Oliver Colvile, MP for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, provided an overview of the committees that he was a member of, which included –
 - select committee for Northern Ireland;
 - vice chair of the all party armed forces group;
 - vice chair of the all party pharmacy group;
 - all party water group;
 - all party mental health group;
- (d) he was not a member of the Government or a Parliamentary Private Secretary, however, he regularly spoke in the House of Commons and in doing so tried to raise the profile of the city.

The following responses were provided to questions raised by members –

- (e) question – how were the city’s MPs going to champion Plymouth, in order to help people with mental health issues to lessen the impact of the Welfare Reform Act?
 - (Oliver Colvile MP’s response) he considered that the skills base within the city needed to be improved and in order to achieve this, he would be campaigning for more private investment to aid job creation;
 - (Alison Seabeck, MP’s response) she had recently questioned the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Ian Duncan Smith, on the significant impact of the Welfare Reform Act on the citizens of Plymouth (it was important to make ministers aware of the impact of their policies);
- (f) question – the council had requested a breakdown of information from the Department of Work and Pensions regarding the Social Fund, however this information had not been shared; how could the council plan for a local Social Fund replacement scheme when information was being withheld?
 - (Alison Seabeck MP’s response) requested the information, so she could take this issue forward;
 - (Oliver Colvile, MP’s response) confirmed that he would also be willing to take this matter forward on the council’s behalf;
- (g) question – in order to boost the economy, the Government was proposing to relax the planning regulations, on a temporary basis, to allow 25 foot extensions to be built without having to seek planning permission; it was envisaged that this proposal would cause tensions

between neighbours; what were the MP's views on this?

- (Oliver Colvile MP's response) acknowledged that there could be potential for tension between neighbours, however he considered that better communication between neighbours could resolve issues; the scheme would boost the economy by benefiting local business (in his opinion the planning laws were over regulated);

(planning permission would still need to be sought for building on party walls);

- (Alison Seabeck MP's response) acknowledged that there could be scope for tensions between neighbours; she had recently met with the Federation of Master Builders who had been lobbying for a cut in the VAT rate;

(h) question – 6200 houses were waiting to be built within the city, how would this be achieved?

- (Alison Seabeck, MP responded) raised concerns regarding the proposed planning changes to permitted developments rights;

(i) question – unemployment amongst young people was far higher than was acceptable; how would Plymouth be able to address this issue with the abolishment of the Local Enterprise Partnership?

- (Alison Seabeck MP's response) raised concerns regarding funding, management issues and the focus of the Local Enterprise Partnership; Ministers needed to be encouraged to visit Plymouth to see its potential; local businesses also needed to understand the potential for them to export their goods and services; job creation would follow from the growth of businesses;

- (Oliver Colvile MP's response) a positive role of selling Plymouth to the City of London was required, in order for the City to realise the opportunities that Plymouth had to offer; development of the skills base was essential (young people needed to be educated, if they were unable to read or write they would not be able to secure a job); Plymouth was a global leader in marine research and needed to build on its success;

(j) question – when the city's MPs next met with employers, would they encourage them to employ apprentices, to help reduce youth unemployment within the city?

- (Alison Seabeck MP's response) she had been liaising with Bob Harrison (National Apprentice Service) regarding apprenticeships within the city (more work was needed to encourage employers within legal services to employ apprentices);
 - (Oliver Colvile, MP's response) the largest employer of apprentices within the city was Babcock;
- (k) question – what measures were being put in place to lessen the impact of the Welfare Reform Act for fosterers and carers, in particular, the reduction in housing benefits and the spare room rule?
- (Alison Seabeck MP's response) she would urge the Government to relook at this issue;
- (l) question – the city had a higher than average number of looked after children that needed to be fostered; what measures were being put in place to ensure that the reduction in housing benefits (including the spare room tax) did not act as a barrier and prevent people from fostering?
- (Oliver Colvile MP's response) requested information specific to Plymouth, so he would be able to speak to the minister;
- (m) question – there was an increasing number of people who were living longer; would the future funding proposals cope with this?
- (Oliver Colvile MP's response) welcomed the recommendations from the Dilnot Report (individuals would be eligible for full state support once the capped amount had been reached), however the Government would need to be convinced to deliver these recommendations;
 - (Alison Seabeck MP's response) the long term care of the elderly would have a cost to the individual, however this needed to be planned for; housing provision for the elderly also needed to be considered (housing developments needed to include housing for the elderly to enable them to live in their own homes for longer);
- (n) question – what is the rationale behind regional pay?
- (Oliver Colvile MP's response) it had been proven in Europe that a strong public sector prevented the private sector from growing; more growth was needed within the private sector to boost the economy;

- (Alison Seabeck MP's response) depressing the public sector and pay levels would not help growth in the private sector;
- (o) question – what would be the long term effect on retaining graduates if regional pay did come into effect?
- (Oliver Colvile MP's response) work was needed to build on the success of companies within the city in such areas as marine science engineering research; Plymouth University should also be looking at similar schemes that Cambridge had carried out in such areas as research and genetics; City investors needed to be encouraged to invest in Plymouth;
 - (Alison Seabeck MP's response) more work was needed to promote Plymouth (Plymouth had recently been represented at the Tourism Conference); an invitation should be extended to the Lord Mayor of London to visit Plymouth to raise the city's profile.

The Chair considered that the meeting had been extremely helpful and informative and thanked Alison Seabeck MP and Oliver Colvile MP for attending.

The Management Board agreed to –

- (1) ask MPs to press for an early response from the Department of Work and Pensions to the city council's request for data concerning crisis loan awards;
- (2) ask MPs to seek early clarification on permitted development policy changes;
- (3) request MPs to take every opportunity to press for apprenticeships and employment for young people within the city;
- (4) provide information to MPs to look again at the impact of housing related benefits and tax changes relating to fosterers and carers.

49. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.