

Growth and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Monday 9 January 2012

PRESENT:

Councillor Nicholson, in the Chair.

Councillor Coker, Vice Chair.

Councillors Berrow, Churchill, K Foster, Murphy, Mrs Nelder, Mrs Nicholson, Dr. Salter, Wheeler, Williams and Wright.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Martin Leaves

Also in attendance: Gill Peele (Business Manager for Development), Councillor Wiggins (Cabinet Member for Transport), Clive Perkin (Assistant Director for Transport), Paul Barnard (Assistant Director for Planning Services), Dave Taylor (Spatial Planning Officer), Clint Jones (City Centre Company Manager) and Helen Rickman (Democratic Support Officer).

The meeting started at 3.00 pm and finished at 5.30 pm.

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.

53. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Councillors in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

54. **MINUTES**

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2011 are approved as a correct record.

55. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

56. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS AND FEEDBACK FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

The Chair informed the panel that previous tracking resolutions greyed out in the tracking document had been completed and would be removed. It was also highlighted that the Democratic Support Officer would continue to contact David Draffan, the Assistant Director for Economic Development, for the information requested by the panel at 17 October 2011 meeting regarding land transfers since the demise of the Regional Development Agency (RDA). Once received this information would be emailed to the panel.

With regards to feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board the Chair informed the panel that the motion on notice submitted to the 5 December 2011 City Council meeting regarding youth unemployment in the city had been agreed by the Management Board to be a task and finish group. This would be a joint task and finish group with Growth and Prosperity OSP and Children and Young People OSP. The membership would comprise of the following councillors:

Councillor Nicholson
Councillor Coker
Councillor Williams
Councillor Stark
Councillor Ken Foster
Councillor Wildy

The panel was advised that this task and finish group on youth unemployment would supersede the recommendation sent to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board regarding the task and finish group on apprenticeships for young people as it was considered that this new piece of work would also encompass those issues.

57. **TRANSPORT RELATED ISSUES**

Councillor Wogens, Cabinet Member for Transport, and Clive Perkin, Assistant Director for Transport, provided the panel with an update on transport related issues.

The panel was informed that –

- (a) the review on grit bins had been included in the annual maintenance review;
- (b) the five recommendations from the panel's Highway Maintenance task and finish group had been submitted to Cabinet;
- (c) as part of the highway maintenance review the need for increased funding was identified, this had been approved by the Cabinet and service levels were being reviewed;
- (d) Operation Upgrade had delivered works of £1.8m across the city however an additional £1.3m had been made available for this budget in October 2011;
- (e) it was not feasible for large scale work to be carried out on footways in Plymouth as there was no identified pattern of problems;
- (f) the Community Events and Road Closure task and finish group undertaken by the panel had resulted in five recommendations that had been submitted to Cabinet, currently work was being undertaken to progress a new policy however work had been delayed due to the government changing the criteria for dealing with this process;
- (g) a decision had been taken to waive fees for smaller community road closures;

- (h) the final policy was nearing completion and the panel would be kept updated on the progress;
- (i) a Rail Task Force group had been formed to look at the issues concerning rail connectivity in Plymouth;
- (j) it was of paramount importance that the rail link between London and Plymouth, specifically with regards to timings, was improved;

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (k) additional funding for highway maintenance had been secured however, the amount received linked to several factors including the length and categorisation of the highway as well as the current state of the highway;
- (l) it was the intention of the Cabinet Member to attend the Growth and Prosperity panel meetings to update the panel on relevant issues and not provide a written report;
- (m) Councillor Wiggins was unable to answer specific ward related transport queries as this was not the correct forum to do so however, he encouraged panel members to approach the transport department if they had any further questions;

The Chair thanked Councillor Wiggins and Clive Perkin for their attendance and agreed to ensure that in the future agenda items would be labelled specifically to avoid confusion as to what was expected from Cabinet Members and officers.

58. **UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT POLICY CHANGES**

Gill Peele, Business Manager for Development, advised the panel that this item would be covered by Assistant Directors later in the agenda.

59. **LOCALISM UPDATE**

Paul Barnard, Assistant Director for Planning Services, provided the panel with an update on the Localism Act.

The panel was informed that –

- (a) government, through the Localism Act, aimed to streamline the planning system and allow new freedoms and flexibilities for local government;
- (b) there would be an increase in community empowerment as communities and individuals would have new rights and powers;
- (c) there would be reform to ensure that decisions about housing would be taken locally;

- (d) there would be the creation of a new tier of neighbourhood planning and a neighbourhood development plan;
- (e) there would be an opportunity for a Neighbourhood Forum to be created in a neighbourhood area; the Forum must comprise of 21 people in that area;
- (f) the key principles of the Localism Act included:
 - growth and efficiency
 - streamline and speed up
 - less prescription and regulation
 - community empowerment
 - incentivisation
- (g) the Infrastructure Planning Commission would be abolished.

The Chair advised the panel that due to the enormity of the Localism Act and the restricted time allocated to this item because of the size of the agenda it would be beneficial for this item to be included on the agenda for the next meeting. The panel was in agreement and raised the following issues to be answered by Paul Barnard at the next meeting:

- the Localism Act was intended to simplify legislation, is it the opinion of Paul Barnard that this is the case?
- how is the planning department changing as a result of this legislation, what plans does the council have with regards to planning currently and will they still be current?

Agreed that –

1. the Localism Act would be included on the agenda for the next panel meeting;
2. the power-point presentation on the Localism Act would be emailed to the panel for their information.

60. **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT**

Paul Barnard, Assistant Director for Planning Services, provided the panel with an update on the Local Development Framework - Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

The panel was informed that –

- (a) the Local Development Framework Annual Monitoring Report 2011 had been produced as a series of web-pages that could be accessed on the following link:

<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/amr.htm>

- (b) it was the intention that the electronic version of the AMR would be live and more accessible;
- (c) the economic downturn was having an effect on the levels of unemployment within the city, this was linked to the ongoing concerns of job creation within Plymouth;
- (d) housing waiting lists were increasing and the number of homelessness was beginning to rise;
- (e) there were increased retail vacant units across the city;
- (f) there was still an inequality in the life expectancy across the city;
- (g) more homes were built in Plymouth than had been expected;
- (h) there were more affordable housing completions in the city;
- (i) the quality of developments was improving;
- (j) there was a growth in tourism and leisure across the city;
- (k) household waste targets had been met;
- (l) core strategy targets had been met.

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (m) officers had yet to analyse air quality management data;
- (n) the costs award to the council due to planning appeals would be emailed to panel members;
- (o) the targets relating to buildings at risk in the city were no longer proactively monitored;
- (p) the housing delivery national indicator target had been abandoned by the government and was therefore not monitored by the council;
- (q) the specific measures of delivery for an indicator set would be provided to panel members;
- (r) the council's adopted city centre area action plan proposes to concentrate retail activity to Drake Circus however, the Independent Sector in the West End would also be supported; changes of use for city centre land could enable residential and office use in vacated city centre areas;

Agreed that –

1. the costs awarded to the council due to planning appeals would be emailed to panel members;
2. the specific measures of delivery for an indicator set would be provided to panel members;

61. **ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION IN RESPECT OF HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO)**

Paul Barnard, Assistant Director for Planning Services, and Dave Taylor, Spatial Planning Officer, provided the panel with an update on Article 4 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

The panel was informed that –

- (a) a recent consultation on Article 4 HMOs was carried out, comments received as part of the consultation were detailed in the report submitted to the panel;
- (b) it was considered that the Article 4 Direction would remove the current permitted development rights in certain areas of the city to the effect that planning permission would be required to change the use of a family dwelling to a House in Multiple Occupation;

Agreed that the Growth and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Panel –

1. endorse the use of a non-immediate Article 4 Direction;
2. propose to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Strategic Housing and Economic Development that, taking into account the consultation responses received, he should confirm the Direction.

62. **PLYMOUTH CITY CENTRE COMPANY (BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT) (BID)**

Clint Jones, City Centre Company Manager, provided the panel with an update on the City Centre Business Improvement District.

At the commencement of this item, the Chair highlighted to the panel that the report on pages 39 – 52 in the agenda pack were the views of the City Centre Company and not the Council.

The panel was informed that –

- (a) the BID was in a strong position in terms of project delivery as 75 per cent of projects had been delivered;
- (b) city centre retail was currently in a very challenging position; several store closures had taken place including that of TJ Hughes, Woolworths and Derry's;

- (c) Plymouth was doing well in terms of fashion retail;
- (d) the City Centre Company had been approaching companies to encourage them to set up in Plymouth;
- (e) with the help of Plymouth College of Art empty shop fronts in Plymouth were being improved as they were used to display students' artwork;
- (f) Plymouth College of Art and the City Centre Company had taken over the lease of 109 Cornwall Street to use as a gallery/ shop space as well as a space for a project for people not in employment or education;
- (g) the City Centre Company was working with partners to deliver retail apps (phone applications) for Plymouth;
- (h) a specific element of the report concerning Operation Drake, which limited the number of foreign students into any one shop at one time, had been taken out of context by the press and should not have been in the public domain, this aspect of the report submitted to the panel was withdrawn by the City Centre Company;

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (i) Clint Jones would provide the panel with data, definitions and explanations that contributed to the mapping exercise;
- (j) officers were looking at alternative uses for buildings if commercial organisations moved to web space, away from physical retail space;
- (k) council properties were currently 100 per cent let out, the city centre company were trying to liaise with owners/managers of vacant premises in the city to encourage discussion;
- (l) it was not in the city centre company's business plan to liaise with bigger retailers to encourage them to come to Plymouth however retailers, as part of the BID, were encouraging officers to do this;
- (m) the approximate cost of the Plymouth Christmas Shop TV advert was £36,000, this included the design and production and was aired for a three week period;

The Chair thanked Clint Jones for his attendance.

Agreed that Clint Jones would provide the panel with data, definitions and explanations that contributed to the mapping exercise.

63. **PLYMOUTH HOUSING PLAN 2012 - 2017 AND UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT POLICY**

Stuart Palmer, Assistant Director for Strategic Housing, provided the panel with an update on the Plymouth Housing Plan.

The panel was informed that –

- (a) the Plymouth Housing Plan was now available on the council's website;
- (b) the consultation for this plan would run until 13 February 2012;
- (c) there were currently five strategies for housing however, the aim was to move to one plan instead and an action focused set of delivery plans for the four themes;
- (d) the current housing plan 2008-11 was successful in bringing inward investment to the city, as well as increased social rented housing;
- (e) major regeneration had taken place across the city, specifically in Devonport; the North Prospect project had also just started;
- (f) the four new themes would be 'Growing the City', 'Better Homes, Healthy Lives', 'Housing Choice, Smarter Solutions' and 'Successful Communities';
- (g) private rented sector housing had the worst quality housing in the city;
- (h) it was important to be able to adapt homes to enable people to stay in their own homes when their circumstances might change;
- (i) there had been a 28 per cent increase in family homelessness;

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (j) house prices were high and the private rented market prices were also increasing; Plymouth was more affordable than the majority of the South West;
- (k) officers were trying to get a balance of housing requirement needs, such as four bed housing, across the whole city;
- (l) the new planning regime allowed officers more flexibility and freedom however the issues for the future would be the viability of builds;
- (m) Stuart Palmer would provide panel members with details of local initiatives using Plymouth investment to assist in the housing sector;
- (n) the welfare reforms could cause people to be relocated however it was considered that officers could use their discretion and only certain people would be affected due to the criteria used (working age, etc);

The Chair thanked Stuart Palmer for his attendance.

64. **TAMAR BRIDGE FIVE WEEK PROGRAMME OF WORKS UPDATE**

The Chair informed the panel that he did not consider it was necessary to have a report on this item as the works on the Tamar Bridge had already been completed.

65. **CONNECTIVITY: RAIL NETWORK AND TRAVEL TIMES**

The Vice Chair informed the panel that he was on the newly formed Rail Task Force Group and would keep the panel informed on the rail connectivity issues, specifically with regards to the Plymouth to London rail link.

66. **WINTER MAINTENANCE PREPARATIONS FOR CORPORATE NON HIGHWAYS MAINTAINED AT PUBLIC EXPENSE (HMPE)**

The panel noted the Winter Preparations update.

67. **BI-ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT**

The panel noted the Bi-annual Scrutiny report however, the Chair advised that Councillors Mrs Nicholson and Churchill should be included in the attendance figures for the Winter Maintenance task and finish group.

68. **YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT PROJECT INITIATION DOCUMENT**

The panel considered the Youth Unemployment PID, it was agreed that the scope of the task and finish group would be discussed at an informal planning meeting to be arranged by the Democratic Support Officer.

69. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The panel discussed it's work programme for 2011/12.

Agreed that –

1. an update on the Localism Act would be provided at the next panel meeting on 5 March 2012;
2. agendas should be appropriately planned to ensure that items of particular interest should be allocated the appropriate amount of time at future meetings.

Under this item Gill Peele informed the panel that the Local Housing Allowance Update due to be brought to the panel in September might not be ready however she would advise members.

70. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.

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