

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & MANAGED GROWTH SCRUTINY BOARD - 13
March 2023**

MINUTES

- Present: Councillors: D Pinwell (Chairman), M Parker (Vice Chairman), A Feeney, Mrs D Holl-Allen MBE, M McLoughlin, M Parker (Vice-Chairman), D Pinwell (Chairman), W Qais, J Ryan and K ThomasM McLoughlin
- Councillors in Attendance: Councillor I Courts: Economy Portfolio Lead and Leader of the Council (virtual)
- Officers: Perry Wardle: Assistant Director, Growth and Development
Alison McGrory: Assistant Director, Communities & Partnerships
Fiona Hughes: Chief Executive, Solihull Community Housing (SCH)
Martyn Sargeant: Executive Director, Customer Services, Transformation & Business Support, Solihull Community Housing (SCH)
Darren Baggs: Executive Director of Operations, Solihull Community Housing (SCH)
Rachel Egan: Head of Inclusive Growth
Rupert Waters:
Paul Rogers: Democratic Services

The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board meeting commenced at 6:00 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor A Hodgson.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Councillor D Pinwell declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item 5 'Solihull Community Housing: Delivery Plan 2023/23, informing the Scrutiny Board that he was a member of the SCH Board and therefore would not participate in the discussion.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were received.

4. MINUTES

Councillor Thomas raised a correction for the draft Minutes under Item 7 'Housing Allocations Scheme', page 17, which should read 'The Safeguarding and Community Project Manager SCH clarified that SCH had a dedicated ~~tram~~ **team** to investigate instances of allegations of ASB'.

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The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- (i) Subject to the above amendment, to agree the draft Minutes arising from the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board meeting held on 17th January 2023 as a true record.

5. SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING: DELIVERY PLAN 2023/24

The report before the Scrutiny Board presented the draft SCH Delivery Plan 2023/24 for consideration and review.

The Chief Executive, SCH provided a PowerPoint presentation highlighting key areas of the SCH: Delivery Plan 2023/24. Following the presentation, Members of the Scrutiny Board raised a number of questions pertaining to the report, which in summary included the following matters:

Councillor McLoughlin referenced figures for the recorded instances of damp and mould in SCH properties and queried whether the number of cases related to the recent rise in energy prices and domestic heating bills. Secondly, Councillor McLoughlin highlighted the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for *Satisfaction Home is Safe*, which detailed the sector benchmark at 82.9%, with the proposed SCH target for 2023/23 at 80%, querying why this was the case.

The Scrutiny Board was advised by the Chief Executive (SCH) that the 80% target figure represented an increase on the current years target. Furthermore, due to the national focus on damp and mould in properties, SCH had publicised to tenants the need to report any such cases to SCH for them to be addressed. Increased inspections have taken place, with accompanying repairs turned around within 14 days. Extra resource was also being allocated to address this issue.

The Executive Director, Customer Services, Transformation & Business Support (SCH) advised Members that SCH reviewed the sector benchmark with some care. A number of Housing Associations had yet to implement performance measurements. The sector benchmark was used as a guide only at this point. The SCH Board had reviewed SCH's historic data and found that previous outcomes against the *Overall Satisfaction KPI* had been just under 80%.

Councillor McLoughlin referenced in the themes for 2023/24 section of the Delivery Plan, specifically the reference to SCH's aspiration to grow the housing stock through acquisition and new build to help meet an ever-increasing need for housing. Considering the significantly challenging financial environment in terms of interest and borrowing rates, to what extent had the reduction in new build properties been attributable to the national economic

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conditions and, secondly, could the expectation of increasing the housing stock still be met whilst operating under such economic constraints.

The Chief Executive (SCH) advised Members that SCH continued to seek to increase housing stock through new build but were proceeding with caution. There was a need to fully understand the current market conditions before investing in new stock. Delivery was dependent on achieving Value for Money (VfM) in terms of new development.

Councillor Holl-Allen sought clarification as to whether cases of damp and mould could be attributable to specific types of property. Members were informed cases were largely due to leaks and condensation in low- and high-rise blocks. It was important that tenants reported such cases to SCH. SCH worked with partners in the health sector to address such cases and continued to work in partnership with the private rented sector.

Councillor Qais noted that some of the KPI's for national tenant satisfaction measures did not have any sector targets and questioned what data was used to establish the sector benchmark for 2023/24. Members were advised that this was dependent on the data collected at national and local levels. In setting its targets, SCH had consulted various Council Directorates, reviewed historic KPI performance and factored in a drive for further performance improvement in 2023/24.

Councillor Ryan welcomed the SCH Delivery Plan 2023/24, noting it was an improvement on the previous years iteration. Councillor Ryan referenced the *Implications and Considerations* section of the report, specifically *People and Communities – Enable Communities to Thrive*, and stated that he wished to see more detail as to how this ambition would be achieved, particularly in relation to children and young people. Councillor Ryan raised further questions regarding:

- Further information addressing the role of apprenticeships and accessing local and regional employment opportunities, such as UKC and HS2, would be informative. Councillor Ryan noted that with inward investment into Solihull, young people needed access to appropriate skills training to access the arising employment opportunities available.
- What housing pressures were brought through the demand for accommodation for refugees entering the borough without adequate new build provision. Were refugees automatically placed in Band A priority on the housing list.

The Executive Director (SCH) clarified that there was a specific SCH priority in place addressing apprenticeships through creating further opportunities to access them. The SCH apprenticeship programme was already embedded, currently comprising six apprenticeships across SCH. A number of apprentices

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had already moved into other roles within SCH for longer term employment opportunities.

The Chief Executive (SCH) advised Members that the refugee housing allocation did not go into priority Band A of the housing waiting list, but were assessed in terms of their specific housing needs.

Councillor Thomas highlighted the *Enablers for 2023/24* section of the Delivery Plan detailing digital themes and priorities, particularly concerning the embedding of digital opportunities for customers, stating that it was apparent many people were not digitally capable or engaged. Many people did not have access to digital devices, nor did they wish to engage with digital.

The Executive Director (SCH) advised that it was not the case of digital by default. SCH operated to the concept of *Voice of the Customer*.

Councillor Thomas sought clarification as to whether funding was secured to deliver the objectives relating to sustainability of the housing stock. The Chief Executive (SCH) advised that delivery of green homes in relation to carbon reduction was a significant challenge. Not all funding for the programme had been secured at this stage and further funding was required. Similarly, the Councils Asset Management Plan (AMP) Net Zero target presented a greater challenge with net zero objectives across the Councils buildings stock. SCH was fastidious regarding data collection for the stock condition profile. Efforts continued to reduce the housing stock carbon footprint and for providing warmer properties for tenants.

Councillor Pinwell concluded that there was support from the Scrutiny Board in addressing the challenges detailed within the report and SCH Delivery Plan 2023/24. Two issues arising through scrutiny of the Delivery Plan had stood out; namely actioning cases of damp and mould in residents homes and, secondly the requirement to performance manage the Delivery Plan objectives against the KPI suite and benchmarking data as the systems mature.

Having considered the report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

To note the Solihull Community Housing Delivery Plan 2023/24.

6. DELIVERING INCLUSIVE GROWTH IN SOLIHULL

The report before the Scrutiny Board provided an outline of progress on the delivery of the inclusive growth programme and wider activity to deliver inclusive growth.

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Following a report presentation by the Head of Inclusive Growth, Members of the Scrutiny Board raised a number of pertinent questions to the report, which in summary included the following matters:

Councillor Parker commended the report and the actions detailed within it. Inclusive Growth was recognised as a broad designation. Councillor Parker highlighted the essential role public transport and wider transport infrastructure had to play in inclusive growth delivery. Finally, Councillor Parker stated he was surprised that no risk implications had been detailed, such as inflationary cost pressures and questioned whether these factors had been considered.

The Head of Inclusive Growth advised the Scrutiny Board that funding challenges had already been highlighted and would be captured via various regeneration projects in the borough. Officers were reviewing the issue of transport via the Councils Solihull Connected Transport Strategy. As such although transport was not reflected as a theme in the current Inclusive Growth programme it was reflected elsewhere through other Council strategies.

Councillor McLoughlin questioned how the current U.K Shared Prosperity Fund compared with the former E.U funding programmes; noted the work undertaken around Investment Zones, noting that they had since ceased impacting on some Solihull projects, and queried in relation to poverty and inequalities how much was this being reduced arising from individual actions or the result of the Inclusive Growth Programme. Councillor McLoughlin stressed the requirement to qualify impacts arising directly from the Inclusive Growth Programme.

Members were advised that the current shape and volume of funding approximated to a third less than that previously available, but that some additional elements of funding were available at a national level. The revised funding criteria was currently being worked through by Officers.

Concerning judging and appraising impacts arising from the Inclusive Growth Programme, the Head of Inclusive Growth advised Members that Officers continued to address this area and were working to produce an outcomes framework for the Inclusive Growth Programme. It was recognised that there could be a requirement to undertake a further deep dive during 2023/24 to address this area once the Economic Strategy was agreed.

Councillor Qais questioned what measures/actions would be considered to ensure the Inclusive Growth Programme was at the centre of the Council Plan. The Head of Inclusive Growth stated that there was a clear focus on objectives to move funding available through the U.K Shared Prosperity Fund to support delivery of the Inclusive Growth objectives, rather than chasing other funding streams opportunistically. Work continued to put Inclusive Growth in a clear priority order and in a sustainable way through the Council.

Councillor Thomas noted that a low level of funding had been received via the U.K Shared Prosperity Fund and directed towards the Kingshurst Village

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Centre development and questioned where other funding sources were expected to be sourced.

Councillor Thomas welcomed the potential employment opportunities to be created in the East Birmingham – North Solihull Corridor but queried whether residents would have the technical skills to access any employment opportunities arising. Councillor Thomas sought clarification as to how employment opportunities for those in low paid roles were made accessible via the new development opportunities that became available.

The Head of Inclusive Growth advised that one aspect the Economic Strategy addressed was the end of European funding streams, particularly in relation to enterprise and skills. Consequently, the Council was keener to engage with employers to identify how the Council should scope all the workforces needs, involving engagement and local training providers requirements for the future workforce in new developments such as Arden Cross. Finally, Members were advised that there was an increasing move towards in work training and that the WMCA was shifting emphasis towards this agenda.

The Assistant Director, Growth and Development further advised Members in respect of Kingshurst Village Centre (KVC) development funding that the Council had been successful in attracting external funding for the design and property acquisition phase. Funding was also secured for the major demolition phase of the project to date.

Almost all of the funding had been secured externally. A funding plan was in place and Officers were always seeking to secure additional funding for the project. However, it should be noted that additional funding often becomes available for an application in relatively short time frames. The Council tried to use external funding wherever possible as a first option. Other bids were currently in the bid process with others still under development. The Council also had access to direct Council funding e.g. the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), or through additional borrowing. The Council sought to use match funding wherever possible.

Councillor Ryan stated that all young people required ambition to acquire the skills which were in demand to access employment.

Councillor Ryan highlighted figures from the report detailing engagement with 535 new job seekers and 226 Solihull residents accessing training. However, the figures did not clarify how many led to offers of employment, entering further education or accessing training. What outcomes were arising against the funding provided for these purposes.

Finally, Councillor Ryan stated that wider discussion was needed as to how the Council moved forward via discussions with local employers, residents and businesses to clarify if transport, health and access issues were proving to be a barrier to access employment opportunities in Solihull.

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The Head of Inclusive Growth informed Members that the Council held substantial data on the issues of access to and barriers to employment in the borough, incorporating NEETS data and health issues impacting barriers to employment. It was important to draw the data and peoples stories together to gain clarity and insight to employment barriers.

Councillor Feeney highlighted the section of the report addressing the East Birmingham and North Solihull Corridor and queried whether any more detail was available as to what this entailed.

Members were advised that on-going discussions were being held with Birmingham City Council over what North Solihull could look like potentially. The discussions had proved to be positive and continued.

Councillor Parker noted that the Council was duty bound to support refugees settling in the borough and that the Council had a duty of care to help refugees integrate into local communities economically in terms of access to employment. Councillor Parker noted that should this not happen then future levels of poverty in the borough would be accentuated.

Members were informed by the Head of Inclusive Growth that the Council was supporting a number of refugees, principally from Hong Kong.

Councillor McLoughlin made a case for a KPI suite around the Inclusive Growth Programme to measure progress over the course of a year. Although data may be available Councillor McLoughlin felt that a data driven review of progress was not apparent. A KPI suite would provide some clarity over future direction of travel for the Inclusive Growth Strategy, including impact and outcomes.

Councillor Pinwell concluded the scrutiny of the Inclusive Growth Strategy report by highlighting the substantive issues arising from Members questions, as follows:

- There was an identified need to matching skills people possessed with the jobs that were available to them.
- Many groups of people needed support to be matched into employment: - e.g. refugees, NEETS, learning disabled people.
- Some form of evaluation of the extent of funding required per person to attain employment was required.
- Quantification and supply of underlying data was required to further enhance any future Inclusive Growth Programme reports submitted to the Scrutiny Board would be beneficial, especially in terms of clarifying progress towards implementation of the programme.

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- Transport continued to play a significant role in determining how many people could access employment and education opportunities across the borough (including how residents could support local businesses).

Having considered the report, the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- i. To note the progress to date with the Inclusive Growth Programme.

7. UKC/LEVELLING UP BRIEFING PAPER

Having considered the report, the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- i. To note the UKC/Levelling Up Briefing Paper.

8. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGED GROWTH SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- i. To note the final status of the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board Work Programme 2022/23; and,
- ii. To include in the Draft Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board Work Programme 2023/24 the following subject for potential discussion:
 - a) Routes into employment / workforce development (potentially via a Task & Finish Group and subject to clarification with other Scrutiny Boards regarding terms of reference and remit).

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The Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board closed at
7:47 p.m.