

GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in the Council Chamber, The Arc, Clowne, on Wednesday 7th August 2019 at 1000 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Jenny Wilson in the Chair

Councillors Jim Clifton, David Dixon, Graham Parkin, Peter Roberts and James Watson.

Officers:- Kath Drury (Information, Engagement & Performance Manager), Karl Apps (Joint Housing Strategy & Growth Manager), Joanne Wilson (Scrutiny & Elections Officer) and Alison Bluff (Governance Officer).

0217. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Tricia Clough, Chris Kane and Tom Kirkham and in relation to item 6, Quarter 1 Performance 2019/20, Councillors Mary Dooley, Sandra Peake and Liz Smyth.

0218. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

0219. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

0220. MINUTES – 10TH JULY 2019

Moved by Councillor Jim Clifton and seconded by Councillor Graham Parkin
RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Growth Scrutiny Committee held on 10th July 2019 be approved as a correct record.

0221. LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

Moved by Councillor Jim Clifton and seconded by Councillor Graham Parkin
RESOLVED that the List of Key Decisions and Items to be considered in private document be noted.

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0222. CORPORATE PLAN TARGETS PERFORMANCE UPDATE – APRIL TO JUNE 2019 (QUARTER 1 – 2019/20)

Committee considered a report which provided the Quarter 1 outturns (April to June 2019) for the Corporate Plan 2019-2020, which sat under the ‘unlocking our growth potential’ aim as of 30th June 2019.

There were 7 targets in total which were all reported as being on track.

G 01 - Through the use of Key Account Management develop a relationship with a minimum of 25 local businesses by March 2019

Quarter 1 - Two Businesses engaged with. The Building Resilience programme continued to engage with businesses across Shirebrook with work commencing on the first units funded through the scheme. It was hoped that this would encourage more businesses to engage and apply for the grant funding. Round 2 of Business Growth Fund had received approval and work would be commencing in the next quarter on the re-design of the application forms and process.

In response to a Member’s query regarding the re-design of the application forms, the Joint Housing Strategy & Growth Manager advised the meeting that as part of continuous improvement the application form had had minor changes made to it to make it more appropriate.

G 05 - Through the Bolsover North East Derbyshire LEADER Approach collectively support the creation of 40 sustainable jobs in the combined programme area by December 2020

No further projects were approved in Quarter 1, however, Expressions of Interest to the value of £91,970 were received in Quarter 1, which were currently being developed to their Full Applications. The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) had extended the contracting deadline to 30th September 2019 which had been publicised to business support networks and parish and town councils in order to attract further applications.

Queries had been raised at the Scrutiny pre meeting by the Chair and Vice Chair and responses to those queries were circulated at the meeting as follows;

1. Are the 40 sustainable jobs in addition to the target of 65 from the 2015-19 Plan?
2. What impact is expected from the Rural Payments Agency extending the deadline i.e. expected % boost to applications?
3. Why have they chosen to extend at this stage given that we had already exceeded the previous target of 65?
4. What is the projected number of jobs from the Expressions of Interest received to date?

Officer Response;

1. The Corporate Plan BNED LEADER jobs target is for the lifetime of the programme which ends in December 2020. The target of 40 is a replacement for the 65 – it is not an additional target.

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The provisional target was set at 65 jobs by the Rural Payments Agency which was later changed to 40 upon formal 2015 commencement of the programme. However, this change only occurred after the production of the 2015-19 BDC Corporate Plan, which therefore had to publish the provisional 65 target in lieu of the formal target of 40 jobs.

2. The impact will be the greater likelihood of allocating the full programme budget and maximising the benefit of the programme within the Districts. The RPA does not want funding to be returned from localities. The original deadline for applications was September 2020 which allowed for a more measured approach to considering applications, but this was set before Brexit was confirmed. The original Brexit deadline was 29th March 2019, so LEADER deadlines were brought forward to match that and therefore created time pressures, but as Brexit has delayed, extensions have been granted, first to the end of June and now to the end of September 2019. Subject to their approval, the time extension has ensured that BNED LEADER has received sufficient applications to enable the programme to fully allocate its budget.
3. As above, for first element: to ensure all the funding is allocated in the BNED area, to maximise the benefit in Bolsover and North East Derbyshire. Whilst job creation is the major aim for BNED LEADER and the one incorporated in the BDC Corporate Plan, it is not the only measure of success for the programme, which also includes increased productivity, tourism, heritage and access to rural services. Projects meeting these measures, which are less likely to create jobs, have been the more recent beneficiaries of BNED LEADER funding.
4. This is not recorded as the EOI stage is only based on estimates rather than the detailed calculations required at the Full Application stage; most applications reduce the expected number of jobs created by the time Full Applications are completed. In addition, many EOIs do not proceed for a number of reasons (e.g. not endorsed due to ineligibility or withdrawn by applicant due to deliverability problems [e.g. planning problems or not securing match funding]), so EOI forecasts are simply speculative and therefore not a useful barometer. 59 projects worth almost £2.9m did not proceed for various reasons and counting their projected jobs would add no value.

G 08 - Process all major planning applications 10% better than the minimum for special measures per annum

Quarter 1 - 100% (4 out 4) major applications determined within deadline or agreed extension of time.

G 10 - Enable the development of at least 272 new residential properties within the District by March 2020

Quarter 1 - This was an annual target and currently awaiting the monitoring figures for quarter 1.

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A query had been raised at the Scrutiny pre meeting by the Chair and Vice Chair and a response to the query was circulated at the meeting as follows;

Will this figure be available for the 7th August meeting?

Officer Response;

This is an annual figure so will not be ready for the meeting on 7th August.
We will have an indication of some completions but most likely in Quarter 2.

G 11 - Through a programme of targeted refurbishment bring 10 empty private sector properties back into use per annum.

Quarter 1 - Action Housing are in the process of leasing a long term empty property in Carr Vale and also an empty commercial unit in Whitwell. This will result in 7 units of affordable accommodation being brought forward - it is expected that these will be brought back into use by the end of the year.

The empty property officer is supporting an owner to sell their empty property through an auction. Due to a number of issues, the owner did not have the skills to deal with the sale and therefore sought help and advice through the Council. It is expected that the property will be sold by the end of the next quarter. The empty property officer has referred the owner of an empty property in Bolsover; to an energy company who have a number of different incentives; to help owners bring their empty properties back into use. It is expected that this property will be occupied by the end of the next quarter.

The Annual Landlord event was held in May 2019 at The Tangent in Shirebrook and was attended by 35 landlords from the area. The event itself received positive feedback due to the relevant topics covered in the presentations and the wide number of organisations in attendance who support the private rented sector.

At the end of Quarter 1 no empty properties have yet to be brought back into use, however, there are 4 properties in the process of being brought back into use and it is expected that this number will increase through promotion of the empty property service.

In response to a Member's question, the Joint Housing Strategy & Growth Manager advised the meeting that Action Housing had access to empty housing properties funding via Homes England at approximately £17k per unit. The Council also facilitated a Landlords Forum where landlords were encouraged to pick up empty properties and also via a property matching service on the Council's website. The Council had secured an award for its partnership work with Action Housing in relation to the Station Hotel in Creswell. However, this was a challenging target and labour intensive and partnership working was key with other ways of working being looked at, for example, a trial with Eon was being carried out in the NEDDC area to look at bringing 100 properties back into use and something similar was being looked at for the Bolsover District area.

In response to a Member's question, the Joint Housing Strategy & Growth Manager advised the meeting that there were currently approximately 200 core empty properties in the Bolsover District, which were an issue and that the Joint Empty Properties Officer focused his work on. There were also other empty properties in the District and the

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Joint Empty Properties Officer would contact these owners by letter and site visits carried out with Environmental Health. If a charge could be put on a property with the help of Environmental Health this provided an opportunity to carry out enforcement work.

In response to a Member's question, the Joint Housing Strategy & Growth Manager explained that the trigger for a long term empty property was 6 months.

G 13 - Work with partners to deliver an average of 20 units of affordable homes each year

Quarter 1; 3 affordable units in quarter 1. The total for the year is calculated after year end. (For 2018/19, 66 affordable housing units were completed, of these 55 properties were constructed through B@home).

G17 - Procure new partner for building next generation of council housing by 2020

Quarter 1 - Procurement on target to meet November deadline. Specification currently being drawn up.

A query had been raised at the Scrutiny pre meeting by the Chair and Vice Chair and a response to the query was circulated at the meeting as follows;

Could further detail be provided on the potential specification and procurement process? Given existing arrangements for B@Home and the completion of the original target, is procurement required as this goes beyond existing arrangements? Could further detail be provided to explain the need for a procurement process?

Officer Response;

We are currently deciding on the procurement route for this framework. The amounts spent in the last framework (over £12.5m) means that we will need to meet current procurement rules. We have a comprehensive pricing document and a scheme for pricing. The current framework ends in November 2019 and we are aiming to have the new framework in place in late 2019 to ensure continuity of building programme.

Moved by Councillor Jim Clifton and seconded by Councillor Jen Wilson
RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The Information, Engagement & Performance Manager left the meeting.

0223. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

Committee considered their Work Programme 2019/20.

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Members agreed the content of the scoping document for their Review of Current and Future External Funding.

Moved by Councillor James Watson and seconded by Councillor Jim Clifton
RESOLVED that (1) the Work Programme 2019/20 be noted,

(2) the scoping document for the Review of Current and Future External Funding be agreed.

The formal meeting concluded at 1040 hours and Members then met as a working party to continue their review work. The working party concluded at 1204 hours.