

**PLACE, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY BOARD**  
**03/10/2024 at 6.00 pm**



**Present:** Councillor J. Hussain (in the Chair)  
Councillors Ghafoor, Kouser, Malik, McLaren, Moores, Murphy,  
Sharp, Shuttleworth, Wilkinson and Williamson

Also in Attendance:  
Councillor Taylor – Statutory Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder  
for Decent Homes  
Paul Clifford – Director of Economy  
Nasir Dad – Director of Environment  
Peter Richards – Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and  
Housing Delivery  
Sophie Turner – Economy Directorate  
Alex Vogel – Muse Place Ltd.  
Peter Thompson – Constitutional Services

1           **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence received.

2           **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

3           **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

4           **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions for this meeting of the Scrutiny  
Board to consider.

5           **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS PLACE, ECONOMIC GROWTH  
AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY BOARD MEETING**

Resolved:  
That the minutes of the meeting, of the Place, Economic Growth  
and Environment Scrutiny Board, held on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2024, be  
approved as a correct record.

6           **BUILDING CONTROL**

The Scrutiny Board received a report of the Director of  
Environment that provided Members with an update on the  
latest position regarding the national changes that have directly  
impacted on the Building Control profession and to inform  
members on how these changes had impacted on the Council's  
building control service, the current pressures, challenges, and  
of options for addressing the varying issues.

The Council's Building Control Service continues to operate in a  
challenging environment and unlike most regulatory services,  
both individuals and commercial developers have the choice  
and option to decide on whether to engage the services of the  
local authority or a private provider for any work that requires  
building regulation approval.

The Council is often referred to as the “inspector of last resort” as the Council has no choice over the work it receives, either by exercising its enforcement powers, or by having to receive work when a private provider can no longer complete the inspections and the work is “reverted back” to the Council to resolve.

Many other functions of the service, classed as statutory in nature, such as maintaining various registers and carrying out formal enforcement action where necessary, are not chargeable functions. The service also has to maintain an out of hours response to respond to concerns of dangerous buildings.

During the period 19<sup>th</sup> September 2023 to 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024 (1 year) the Council received 300 requests to carry out the full Building control function for a client/ homeowner. During the same period, the Council was informed of 570 initial notices from private building control providers who were acting on behalf of homeowners/ contractors carrying out works in Oldham. This showed, that in 12 months, the Council was only acting on 34% of all applications requiring Building Control supervision across the Borough, with the other 66% being supervised by the private sector.

Following the Grenfell tragedy, in 2017 and the independent review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety by Dame Judith Hackitt, published in May 2018, the Government established the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) as the Building Control Authority in England. The inquiry and the resulting changes strive to deliver improvement of the various building standards as well as to implement a new, more stringent, regulatory regime, introduce more powers to order remedial works and the use of enforcement ‘stop notices’.

The journey to change the way building control and construction projects are delivered continues; further changes will inevitably follow as the recommendations and actions outlined in the phase 2 enquiry report are introduced. There was an expectation that the Building Control function will return to a regulatory role, stop operating in the commercial world as well introducing a clear expectation through statutory reporting indicators, that the Council is taking appropriate enforcement against non-compliance.

In considering the report, in some detail, Members of the scrutiny Board commented that the new regime imposed, via legislation, more stringent requirements on individuals who practice as registered Building control officers and the local authority like others across the region is struggling to recruit fully qualified officers. There was a reliance on agency staff at the moment to deliver the service and this comes at an increased cost to the Council.

It was noted that more far-reaching enforcement powers were available with an expectation that they will be used. The current

staffing structure has three FTE Building Control Officer vacancies that are backfilled with agency staff and although the Council is looking to employ a trainee it is this immediate resource issue together with the changes to the legislative requirements that are causing concern as the service tries to respond to the issues it faces.

The meeting was advised that there is a national shortage of qualified building control officers with many leaving the profession and it is how the Council responds to this with attractive conditions, remuneration so that the structure in place can be fully staffed and the reliance on agency support reduced. Therefore, members sought to consider alternative approaches for additional recruitment of substantive officers, reduce reliance on agency staffing, reduce the overspend and ultimately, provide a viable service that is able to meet the new regulatory regime and the needs of local residents and developers.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the alternative approaches, to successfully recruit staff to the Council's Building Control Service, be supported.
3. That the Director of Environment be requested to submit a report to the Scrutiny Board, in approximately six months, updating Members on the Building Control Service's staffing arrangements.

7

## **OLDHAM TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

The Scrutiny Board considered a report of the Director of Economy regarding the emerging Oldham Town Centre Development Framework ('Creating a Better Place'), the programme to transform Oldham Town Centre, which included the delivery of 2,000 new homes. The Cabinet had previously approved the appointment of Muse Place Ltd as our long-term Strategic Delivery Partner at its meeting in June 2023, following an extensive OJEU compliant competitive procurement exercise. Representatives of Muse Place Ltd were in attendance at the Scrutiny Board to answer questions relating to the submitted report and the associated presentation.

Since this time, a Master Development Agreement (MDA) between the Council and Muse has been entered into in September 2023 and a Detailed Business Plan for the partnership was approved by the Council in March 2024.

A key element of the Detailed Business Plan covers how the core Town Centre housing sites, including the Civic Centre, Former Leisure Centre and Former Magistrates Court will be taken forward. The first stage of this is the production of a draft Town Centre Development Framework, which will help to guide future planning and development proposals in the Town Centre. A draft Town Centre Development Framework was consulted upon from 24<sup>th</sup> July until 11<sup>th</sup> September (seven weeks in total).

The draft Development Framework itself and the full range of consultation material was available to be viewed at <https://oldhamtownliving.co.uk>. The Scrutiny Board received a presentation which outlined some further detail of the Development Framework Community Conversation that took place over the seven-week period and provided a summary of the feedback received on the proposals through the public consultation.

The Scrutiny Board noted that a report on the feedback from the consultation exercises would be presented to the Council's Cabinet, seeking authorisation to proceed with the next stage of the works.

Members of the Scrutiny Board were supportive of the proposals detailed in the report and the presentation noting the improvements that would be seen across the Borough as a consequence.

Resolved:

1. That the Director of Economy's report be noted.
2. That the proposals detailed in the Director of Economy's report and the results of the consultation exercise be endorsed by the Committee and accordingly are recommended for the Cabinet to approve.

## 8 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny Board considered its Work Programme for 2024/25.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

## 9 **KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

The Scrutiny Panel gave consideration to the Key Decision Document which outlined key decisions that the Cabinet was due to take at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2024 and at future meetings.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

## 10 **RULE 13 AND 14**

The Chair advised that there was nothing to report in relation to this agenda item.

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 7.10pm