

Working Group on School Buildings

Notes of Meeting held on Friday 23 September 2005 at 6.00.pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Bird	(Lead Member)
Councillor Cassidy	
Councillor Chambers	
Mr. A. Butterworth	
Councillor Hughes	(Portfolio Holder)

ALSO PRESENT

Helen Denton	(Education Walsall)
Susan Lupton	(Education Walsall)
Annie Shepperd	(Chief Executive)
Pat Warner	(Scrutiny Officer)

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest identified at this meeting.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 10 MAY 2005

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 May 2005, copies having been previously circulated to each member of the working group be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

LATE ITEMS

Councillor Bird expressed concern at the report on the Priority One Condition Backlog being tabled at this meeting despite officers being given adequate notice of the date of the meeting.

The working group agreed that no late items would in future be accepted except under exceptional circumstances.

ADDRESSING PRIORITY ONE CONDITION BACKLOG

Having read the report Councillor Bird said it was clear that cabinet had not released the funds previously allocated for the priority one backlog schemes which should have commenced over the summer holidays as expected.

Susan Lupton explained that an emergency report had been taken to EMT on 11 August to explain the decision taken by the Executive Director of Finance and Law to

utilise emergency powers in the allocation of £911,000 funding within the schools capital programme.

This had come about as a result of the realisation that many of the outstanding schemes were of an urgent nature and there was a high level of risk to the council associated with not undertaking the remedial work as soon as practicable. The risk was recognised as being of the health and safety nature and could have led to the ultimate temporary closure of schools concerned to enable the works to be completed.

Members expressed concern, however, that of the urgent schemes referred to in appendix one to the report now submitted only one scheme had commenced over the summer period and the remainder were out to tender.

The working group wished to be informed of the reasons behind the delay in processing the commencement of the urgent work.

Councillor Cassidy and Councillor Bird confirmed that at the working group's last meeting in May they had expressed apprehension that schemes might be delayed and had asked that action be taken by the Asset Management Team to ensure that the most urgent priority one schemes were commenced over the summer holiday.

They expressed their dismay that the working group finds itself in the same position with only one scheme being commenced over that period of time.

Councillor Bird said that the working group must address the issue of the allocated funds not being spent speedily. He further expressed his concern that no client side officer had attended this meeting to explain the reasons behind the delays.

He continued that following a conversation with the Chief Executive he had been assured that an officer would be present at this meeting.

He requested that on Monday morning the Chief Executive's office be contacted to ascertain the reasons behind an officer not being in attendance at this meeting.

Mr Butterworth expressed concern that contract figures were not available and that it would have been helpful to the discussions at this meeting had they been provided.

Susan Lupton explained that the figures were not yet available because only the project at Greenfield Primary School had commenced; the remainder of urgent works which had been earmarked for commencement as part of the £911,000 finance commitment were currently out to tender. She proceeded to advise members of the contents of an e-mail she had received from the Establishment Team prior to the commencement of this meeting which set out the details of schemes commenced and also those being tendered as set out below: -

1. Greenfield's boiler is being fitted; all other boilers have been designed and are currently out to tender.
2. All lighting/alarm schemes are currently being specified and will be out to tender shortly.
3. All window schemes are with building control and out to tender.

4. All roofing schemes are with building control and out to tender but following roofing surveys it would appear that some roofs are worse than expected, in particular, Delves Infants and Juniors which is likely to cost £140,000, Elmore Green £60,000, Old Church £100,000 (asbestos roof). If inadequate funding is available we will have to phase works although there is a contingency of £100,000.
5. All ground works are currently being assessed by engineers department.

Councillor Bird reiterated his disappointment that nothing had been done over the summer period.

Councillor Cassidy again questioned the reasons behind the delay and surmised that it could have been as a result of delay in the tendering process.

Helen Denton said Education Walsall were not able to comment or speak for the Council on the reasons behind the delay and whether it had been caused by capacity or other issues.

Susan Lupton confirmed that there were a number of other schemes that had commenced that were not financed by the capital programme.

Councillor Bird said that the source of funding for schemes commenced was irrelevant. The working group had requested information on all priority schemes which had not been forthcoming.

Councillor Cassidy added that the working group should be advised of the full picture within the borough as previously requested. The working group must also be advised of how these schemes have been financed.

Councillor Bird confirmed that the aim of the working group is to ascertain how much of the two million pounds previously allocated for priority one schemes had been achieved during the summer holidays.

Councillor Hughes, portfolio holder said it was clear some explanation was required as to what went wrong and agreed that the Head of the Establishment Team should attend the next meeting to explain to this working group the reasons for delay in the commencement of schemes.

Members agreed with Mr Butterworth's suggestion that the working group should be supplied at its next meeting with a list of projects that had been tendered and to whom.

Councillor Cassidy confirmed the necessity for this working group to receive details of a robust financial process to enable the working group to scrutinise the tender list to ensure the best price is achieved.

Councillor Chambers said that a PowerPoint presentation by procurement officers must be available at the next meeting to take members through the procurement process.

Councillor Bird agreed that no further action could be taken at this meeting due to the lack of information to members: -

RESOLVED: -

That the working group's concerns be expressed to the Chief Executive's office at the lack of information presented to the working group and requesting that a chief officer be available at the next meeting to provide the following information:-

1. Details of all schemes already commenced within the borough; the costs involved and the contractor involved and details of how these schemes were financed.
2. A list of all projects already out to tender including details of when the projects were put to tender and the date when tenders are due to be returned.
3. Details of the contingency arrangements which are in place if the tender when returned is at a higher price than expected.
4. The project management arrangement which is in place to ensure value for money and to ensure that the work tendered is completed in time.
5. A PowerPoint presentation of the procurement process at the next meeting of the panel including the method used and details of how capital programme is managed.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Councillor Cassidy referred to the site visit which had taken place to the Mary Elliott School in May. She confirmed that very good work was being done at the school despite the very poor facilities there. It was clear that better facilities were urgently required on that site.

PRIORITY ONE BACKLOG

The Chief Executive having arrived at 6.30 p.m. to the meeting room proceeded to advise the working group that she had attended as the "client" representative. She advised members of the reasons behind the failure of cabinet to release the funds for all of the priority 1 backlog schemes.

Councillor Bird explained the concerns which had been earlier expressed by the working group particularly that only one scheme had commenced over the summer period.

Annie Shepperd said that a meeting had been arranged with Serco to discuss who has the client role and who has the responsibility for the project team.

She said that cabinet had not been confident that the contents of the capital programme were secure enough to enable the priority 1 backlog capital to be agreed.

Of the target £12 million capital bid, 2.4 million i.e. 20% would need to be found and it was not clear as yet if sufficient capital was available within the programme for this.

Councillor Bird said that the working group had been under the impression that priority 1 schemes would be completed over the summer holidays.

Annie Shepperd confirmed that priority 1 schemes far exceeded the finances available in the budget. The funds had been allocated in the capital programme but that other things within it needed to bottom out first.

She said it was not possible at this stage to indicate when the schemes which are not already out to tender would be done.

Mr Butterworth expressed his concern that those priority 1 schemes identified as being urgent due to the health and safety issues had not commenced.

Annie Shepperd commented that the working group should be provided with all the information it has requested to allow members to scrutinise the situation. She undertook to ensure that all the information requested by this working group is provided to members via a letter from her before the next meeting which was scheduled for 10 November. This would prevent the working group from setting up a special meeting to consider the information prior to that date.

Annie Shepperd further confirmed that the delay in the commencement of the schemes had not been due to capacity issues but one of getting the capital programme under control. She reiterated that the priority one repairs exceeded the budget allocations.

Councillor Bird commented that cabinet had agreed the funds for some schemes but the tenders had not been sent out. He referred again to the e-mail which had been received today by Education Walsall from the Establishment Team which indicated that only one scheme from the emergency monies which had been agreed by EMT on 11th August had actually commenced over the summer holidays.

Annie Shepperd said that members should have been told of the project planning process relating to all the schemes.

Councillor Chambers said that as a new member of the working group it was clear that insufficient information had been provided to the group to enable members to exercise any meaningful function at this meeting.

Annie Shepperd said the responsible officer should be asked to provide information to the working group explaining how the capital programme is managed; what procurement methods are used; what processes need to be used for procurement needs etc.

She confirmed that she would answer all the questions from the working group via a letter following the receipt of the working group's requests. She continued that a certain amount of money had been allocated to these schemes and that this would be rolled out.

She concluded that she would be happy to meet with members again if necessary after the information is issued from her office.

Members thanked the Chief Executive for attending the meeting.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 6.55 p.m.