

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

22ND AUGUST 2011

A MEETING of the REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the MANSION HOUSE, DONCASTER on MONDAY 22ND AUGUST 2011 at 11.00 A.M.

PRESENT :

Chair – Councillor Jane Kidd
Vice-Chair – Councillor Richard Cooper-Holmes

Councillors Joe Blackham, Deborah Hutchinson, Barry Johnson J.P., Ted Kitchen, David Nevett and Yvonne Woodcock.

Also in Attendance :

Paul O'Brien (GMB)
Peter Davies, Mayor of Doncaster
Councillor John Mounsey, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (Agenda Item 6 only)
Councillor Chris Mills, Chair of the Schools, Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 6 only)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jill Arkley-Jevons, Marilyn Green and John Sheppard.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made at the meeting.

13. MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING HELD ON 21ST
JUNE 2011

In relation to Minute No. 7 (Presentation by Councillor Cynthia Ransome, Cabinet Member for Communities), the Assistant Director of Environment took the opportunity to update the Panel that there had been no increase in incidents of fly tipping. In addition, she reported that the proposal to close two recycling centres had now been withdrawn as efficiencies had been established from elsewhere. Members were pleased to note the update.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel Meeting held on 21st June 2011, be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

14. PUBLIC STATEMENTS

No Public Statements were made at the meeting.

15. PETER DAVIES, MAYOR OF DONCASTER – UPDATE ON PROGRESS ON PRIORITIES WITHIN HIS PORTFOLIO (DEVELOPMENT, TRANSPORT, EQUALITIES AND COHESION, CHANGE AGENDA) – VERBAL REPORT

The Chair welcomed Peter Davies, Mayor of Doncaster to the meeting for the purpose of providing an update on his priorities within his portfolio.

The Mayor stated that he had recently outlined his priorities at a meeting of Full Council and invited questions from the Panel on issues of interest or concern. The issues raised by the Panel focussed on the following issues:-

At the outset, thanks were expressed to the Mayor for reconsidering the proposal to close two recycling centres within the Borough

Car Parking

Concern was expressed at an apparent lack of car parking spaces within the Town Centre and the Mayor was asked whether he had any intentions to increase the number of spaces available. The Mayor acknowledged that parking was an issue within the Town Centre but reminded Members that a number of spaces had been lost as a result of the development around the Civic and Cultural Quarter (CCQ), but he was open to suggestions if Members were aware of land available for such a purpose.

Local Economy

The Panel discussed a number of issues associated with the local economy.

Firstly, some concern was expressed with regard to smaller businesses and market stalls which some Members believed were struggling to survive during the current economic climate and questioned what the Mayor was doing to address this. In response, the Mayor said he was confident that the public were still coming to Doncaster to shop and informed Members that Doncaster was 4th best regenerated town in the country. In addition, he said that the Markets were key to the town and upon which significant funds had been spent in order to improve them

and believed it was evident the investment had been worthwhile. The Mayor also asked Members to bear in mind that all other towns were facing similar issues as a result of the slow-down in the economy nationally. Scott Cardwell, Assistant Director for Regeneration also gave clarity on the role of Town Centre Manager which he said had recently been redeveloped to enable the role to become more commercially focussed with capacity to speak on a regular basis to Town Centre retailers. In addition, it was proposed that a Retail Forum would be established.

Secondly, the Panel discussed the growing number of disused commercial premises within the town and asked whether there was anything planned to enable such premises to be brought back into use or to improve their appearance. The Assistant Director for Regeneration stated that the Council did have the right in accordance with Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act to request shop owners to improve the appearance of such empty premises. The Panel also received information about a planned initiative entitled 'Love Where You Live' which was currently being developed with the Cabinet Member for Communities, Street Scene and Environment Protection and in conjunction with Keep Britain Tidy with the aim of encouraging local communities to take pride in their local area.

It was questioned whether the Lakeside area could be further developed, and whether a boat yard at the complex was a viable option and also whether the problem with algae had been resolved. The Assistant Director of Regeneration confirmed that the algae problem had now been resolved and stated that the Lakeside was now starting to be marketed where the option of a boatyard could be explored further.

Housing

The Panel discussed issues associated with unused privately owned properties which had either fallen into a state of disrepair or had problems with infestations and questioned whether the Mayor had any plans to address such issues. The Mayor was supportive of the Council encouraging landlords to improve the external appearance of their properties by providing advice where to access grant funding but did not believe the Authority had the right to intervene about the internal state of their properties. Members took the opportunity to remind the Mayor that the Council had the Authority to take action where their homes were causing an environmental health hazard, such as rats.

Members were concerned that there continued to remain a shortage of housing within the Borough, but were of the view that this did not only relate to a lack of social housing but also Council houses and affordable homes. The Panel asked why local developers were choosing to build in other locations as opposed to Doncaster and

sought clarification as to what the Mayor believed the barriers were. In response, the Mayor supported the Panel's concerns and acknowledged that there were wider issues other than social housing. Additionally, the Assistant Director of Regeneration stated that the Council was now working closely with local developers and financial bodies with a view to encouraging them to invest in building locally, both residential and commercial properties, but asked Members to bear in mind that the current economic climate was a contributing factor. Members emphasised the importance for Elected Members to be given an active role in such discussions. It was also reported that early signs were positive that there was an interest in building in the area. The Panel also discussed the need for the Council to ensure all possible sites which were suitable for development were given full consideration as Members believed that this would provide employment opportunities across the Borough as well as addressing the housing shortage.

Transport

Some Members of the Panel had recently undertaken site visits to Opportunity Centres in several areas across the Borough, at which a number of concerns had been raised about the affordability and accessibility of public transport. The Mayor was asked whether he would give consideration to establishing a Quality Bus Contract. In response, the Mayor acknowledged that he was averse to such a contract, and asked Members to bear in mind that there were a number of difficulties associated with this. It was agreed that the options should be discussed in greater detail with all Members at a later date.

The Chair thanked the Mayor for attending the meeting and answering the Panel's questions.

RESOLVED that the update provided by Peter Davies, Mayor of Doncaster on his priorities within his portfolio, be noted and received with thanks.

16. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL WORK UPDATE AND PROGRESS WITH THE 2011/12 WORK PLAN

The Panel received a report outlining progress made against its 2011/12 Work Plan which also contained information and updates together with copies of correspondence with the Executive since its last meeting held on 21st June 2011. The purpose of the Work Plan was to enable Members to monitor progress and reprioritise issues where it was felt appropriate.

As part of the report, the Panel also received a summary of the Affordable Housing Acting Plan, to which the Chair welcomed Adrian Robertshaw, Policy and Partnerships Officer (Affordable Housing) and Adam Goldsmith, Housing Investment Strategy Manager

to the meeting with a view to answering the Panel's concerns/questions.

The Panel discussed what it believed were key priorities for the Council in relation to the Affordable Housing Agenda, which were:-

- Empty properties – bringing back into use
- Encouraging local development
- Better partnership working

A Member expressed the importance for there to remain synergy with the Borough Strategy and emphasised the importance for the Council to engage with the private sector which was in a good position to assist in delivering affordable housing which the Authority needed to embrace. Furthermore, the Council needed to build its working relationship with its partners to ensure work progresses. The Assistant Director of Regeneration supported the need for the Council to engage with the private sector in order to ensure economic growth in the area. He also informed the Panel that work was continuing with a view to building a network between Council officers, developers and heads of financial bodies to better understand the barriers to developing in Doncaster. Furthermore, Members were urged to contact the Assistant Director of Regeneration if they became aware of any such problems within their wards.

The Panel discussed the possibility of selling unused garages/properties or land in local areas and the Assistant Director of Housing gave his assurance that all Members' views were currently being sought about local priorities.

The Chair requested that the Panel have an input into discussions between the Authority and developers in order for Members to be kept abreast of issues.

To conclude, the Chair referred to the Panel's recent mini-review of Opportunity Centres, and provided an overview of the methodology used for carrying out the review, including a number of site visits, questionnaires to service users and evidence gathered from officers. In addition, Members were asked to consider the recommendations to the Executive arising from the review, a copy of the outcome report had been circulated prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the progress made against the Panel's 2011/ Work Programme, be noted;
- (2) the notes of the informal meeting held on 26th July 2011, be noted;

- (3) the Terms of Reference for the Panel's mini-review of Opportunity Centres, together with Itinerary for 8th August 2011, be noted;
- (4) the future dates for the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel, be noted;
- (5) the contents of the Briefing Note on the current national work programme, be noted;
- (6) the Panel consider at a future meeting what are the barriers to developing additional private sector housing;
- (7) authority be delegated to the Chair to finalise the Panel's recommendations to the Executive in respect of its review of Opportunity Centres; and
- (8) in relation to Opportunity Centres, it be recommended to the Executive that:-
 - (a) the awareness of the service should be raised by creating a co-ordinated Marketing and Communications Strategy in conjunction with the Council's Communications Team, and consideration be given to using the following methods:-
 - Websites (e.g. Jobs Doncaster)
 - A stand at Job Fairs
 - Working with the Invest Team and Success Doncaster
 - (b) available resources should be identified and utilised within local communities and the third sector;
 - (c) the Council should engage in a joined up approach to working with prime contractors and partners including making more referrals through organisations such as Job Centre Plus;
 - (d) consideration be given to the feasibility of moving Opportunity Centres under the Neighbourhood Management model or establish closer links with the Neighbourhood Management Team, and the involvement Neighbourhood Managers in writing the specifications for Opportunity Centres and future training of staff;

- (e) consideration be given to what other services could be offered as part of a wider service provision, including strengthening the support available for financial inclusion issues such as debt management and a Credit Union facility;
- (f) consideration be given to the development of a 'buddy' system;
- (g) a stock-take be undertaken of what facilities are available within existing and future locations which should be revisited every two years to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the clients;
- (h) the Council identify what volunteering opportunities exist within the Borough that could be offered to clients accessing the centres by developing closer links within the third sector;
- (i) the Council should encourage a more proactive role of local businesses and link into major developments;
- (j) the Council identifies and advertises training/apprenticeship opportunities with local businesses;
- (k) the Council encourages further links with schools and colleges and raise awareness of Opportunity Centres through links and supply of information. Identify how such establishments could become involved with the centres; and
- (l) the Council should improve consistency and ensure that there is dedicated support through minimising disruptions where possible, pursue alternative funding.