

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

4TH OCTOBER, 2011

A MEETING of the REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the MANSION HOUSE, DONCASTER on TUESDAY 4TH OCTOBER, 2011 at 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT :

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

Councillors Joe Blackham, Deborah Hutchinson, Barry Johnson JP, Ted Kitchen, David Nevett, John Sheppard and Yvonne Woodcock.

Also in Attendance :

Paul O'Brien – GMB
Councillor Mark Thompson, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, Environment, Trading and Support Services
Councillor Bob Johnson
Gary Wells, Assistant Director, Strategic Housing
Alan Lowther, CPPC Consultant, Finance and Performance
Judith Jones, Director of Housing Services
Ian Brittain, Performance and Improvement Service Manager
Scott Cardwell, Assistant Director, Development
Dave Wilkinson, Area Housing Service Manager
Gill Gillies, Assistant Director, Environment

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Marilyn Green and Paul Smillie – Unite Representative.

	ACTION
17. <u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</u> There were no declarations made at the meeting.	All to note
18. <u>MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING, HELD ON 22ND AUGUST, 2011</u> <u>RESOLVED</u> that the Minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel Meeting	All to note

held on 22nd August, 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

19. PUBLIC STATEMENTS

There were no Public Statements made at the meeting.

All to note

20. COUNCILLOR MARK THOMPSON - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES, ENVIRONMENT, TRADING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Councillor Mark Thompson, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, Environment, Trading and Support Services, gave a verbal presentation to Members, outlining his priorities as Cabinet Member which were:

- Environmental Strategy – promised two years ago, now scoped out and Feb/March time would be presented to Members for their views and opinions.

Most other priorities related to the Mayoral priorities in particular:

- 7. Continue to promote Doncaster as a tourist destination.
- 9. Continue to protect the environment from developers, decay and architectural vandalism. Prevent urban sprawl, while allowing beneficial development, preferably on brownfield sites.

The questions raised by the Panel focussed on the following issues:-

The Council's Communications Team not promoting or advertising events correctly or at the correct time. This appeared to be an ongoing issue that was being addressed as improvements were definitely needed. Councillor Mark Thompson informed the Panel that he would forward the number of staff within the team.

Asst. Dir.
Environment

Members were informed that the issue of Lottery funding and other grants that could be available were being looked at by Christian Foster's team and all avenues were being explored.

Councillor Thompson reported that more promotion within the Borough on Doncaster's own attractions was required, for instance, he was disappointed to note the lack of local school visits to Conisbrough Castle.

A Member held the view that an efficient and cost effective promotion for tourism and marketing was town twinning and was advised to address the Mayor with this issue as the Mayor had stopped all town twinning.

In respect of the 2012 target for carbon reduction, the Council were still deficient.

In light of information provided last year on the Fire and Rescue Environmental Policy, this had been looked at but Doncaster was unique and had a large land area with quite a few SSSIs to consider and another authority's remit could not be used.

Members were disappointed that Doncaster Council did not have an Environmental Policy. Members held the view that extensive work was undertaken by the Planning Department regarding environmental impact.

Members were also informed that in respect of Potteric Carr and the inland port, there had been no guidance on protection as Potteric Carr was totally enclosed by development which caused difficulties for wildlife. Councillor Thompson did not want the Council to be at the mercy of developers.

A Member expressed concern that as there was no Strategy, there was no Mission Statement, therefore no objectives and held the view that there should be a clear set of objectives over the next few years and that those would become Doncaster's Strategy. A clear set of action plans with resources and costs was required.

The Panel was informed that there were currently a number of separate planning policies but there would be an overarching strategy in years to come with action plans.

Councillor Thompson believed there to be a lack of vision and forward planning and that focus was required on where Doncaster needed to be in the future. He asked Members to support him and work with him.

The Assistant Director, Environment informed the Panel that officers were required to produce action plans under the Mayoral priorities and the Corporate Plan had environmental aims under these Mayoral priorities. The Panel was further informed that different policies needed tying together.

Councillor Thompson reported that there had been a number of upheavals, with the different Chief Executives and the restructure and that the Council's strategic direction ultimately rested with the Executive.

The Chair believed that a Working Group would be beneficial to work with officers and the Panel was informed that a Working Group had already been established in June and the Scrutiny Consultant would remind the Panel of its membership.

Scrutiny
Consultant

The Assistant Director, Environment undertook to update the Panel at its next meeting.

Asst. Dir.
Environment

As a Mayoral priority was to preserve green areas and not build, Members were interested to hear how this would work alongside the need to provide affordable housing in the Borough.

Councillor Thompson informed the Panel that work was being undertaken with the Assistant Director of Development and the Director of Regeneration and Environment and the need for both would be balanced.

The Assistant Director of Development further informed the Panel that the allocations policy around employment and residential land would soon be going to Council and then for public consultation. A Government Inspector would then have to approve the policy. It was noted that the policy would also be reported at Scrutiny meetings.

Councillor Thompson reported that the present concept was to build developments near to pavements so that motorists would slow down as they felt enclosed. He did not want residents to live in pollution traps and was of the opinion that the Council needed to allow plenty of space around roads.

The Panel noted that an Environmental Strategy would be reported at Scrutiny Panel meetings and through the Executive and it would include an action plan.

Councillor Thompson thought that the Government targets such as air pollution and CO₂ targets were somewhat aspirational. The Vice-Chair commented that the Council needed to strive to achieve these targets to save money and in response Councillor Thompson, who was also Chair of Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Board reported on a £½ million saving regarding energy costs.

The Chair thanked Councillor Thompson for his priorities and officers for their responses and requested an update on issues raised to be brought to a future meeting.

Cllr
Thompson

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the verbal presentation from Councillor Mark Thompson be noted with thanks;
- (2) an update on issues raised to be brought to a future meeting; and
- (3) the Working Group to meet soon and report back to the Panel.

All to note

Asst. Dir.
Environment

Scrutiny
Consultant

21. ST LEGER HOMES OF DONCASTER QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT- QUARTER 1, 2011/12

Judith Jones, Director of Housing Services, SLHD, introduced this item which informed the Panel of the first quarter St. Leger Homes of Doncaster (SLHD) performance information for 2011/12.

It was noted that Councillor Mark Thompson left the room for this item as he was a Board Member.

All to note

The report covered six strategic priorities, one key performance indicator was red, SLH_GNP120 and there was concern for one green, SLH_VL3 in its second quarter.

The SLH_GNP120 cumulative performance was at 86.22% against a target of 92%, though plans in place were showing fruition to get this back on target.

It was noted that there had been 80+ operatives lost in redundancies and this had changed the management and delivery of the service, with parts joined to become one holistic team. This had resulted in an improved monthly performance through July and August of 90.62% and 92.21% respectively.

The key performance indicator, currently at green, SLH_VL3, 'percentage of rent lost through dwellings becoming vacant', has had work done on realigning the Service and was back on track.

A Member raised the issue of key performance indicator SLH_RM25 'Private Landlord Scheme' that was amber, with a current value of 0 and a target of 1. The Director of Housing

Services, SLHD reported that SLHD were working closely with the Assistant Director, Strategic Housing and his team to bring properties back into use and were beginning to sign up private landlords to a five year scheme.

The Assistant Director, Strategic Housing reported an annual target of working to 75 with a bigger figure of 420 in the corporate plan.

In answer to a question regarding the sale of council houses, the Director of Housing Services, SLHD reported that there were 21,000 properties on stock and the exact figure to date would be given to Members. Members were also advised that an option could be to increase the discounts given to encourage more people to buy, as people were still experiencing difficulties in purchasing a house.

Dir. Housing
SLHD

A Member reported that at a past full Council meeting, it had been agreed to request an exemption from Central Government with regards to tenants exercising their right to buy in respect of new council houses built and as the Assistant Director, Strategic Housing reported that no reply had been received, the Member requested that the Council write again.

Asst. Dir.
Strat. Hsng

In respect of SLHD being the managing agency for private landlords, the Director of Housing Services, SLHD, reported that there were different levels within the scheme, eg. one was just to find a tenant, and that the offering of an out of hours repair service might suit some private landlords. The Panel was advised that the plan had been fully costed on all overheads and a break-even scenario was acceptable.

The Panel was informed that the key performance indicator SLH_RM13 Gas Servicing on amber, would always have some indicated, though were on track again. The environmental injunctions that had previously been used could not now be used and all properties were on a managed process. The Director would provide Members with the exact figure if requested.

The Panel was advised that the Performance Improvement Plan would ensure that the SLHD workforce were more flexible and the Service was looking to do fewer repairs, with the close monitoring of returns to properties to ensure that any repairs were fixed correctly the first time.

The Chair noted that the key performance indicator BV66a, 'Rent Collection and Arrears Recovery', was doing well at present but was concerned as to its continuing performance when affected by future benefit changes, which would happen in January 2012.

The Director of Housing Services, SLHD reported that there would be around an £11.00 per week loss of benefits if all bedrooms in a property were not used and that shared accommodation was being looked at for people under 35 years of age.

The Assistant Director, Strategic Housing further reported that the issue was families living in larger properties and younger people and options were being considered including housing in multiple occupation. The Council were currently working with the private sector to ensure good quality accommodation and good management standards.

Members were pleased to note that around 63 investors and private landlords attended the recent event at the Keepmoat Stadium in respect of SLHD being a managing agency.

A Member requested that the service level agreement for grass cutting be checked as in the Edlington and Warmsworth Ward it was not being undertaken. The Director of Housing Services reported that the new PI had shown good improvement and the validity of the service was being checked and a review on grass cutting and grounds maintenance services was to be undertaken.

The Chair thanked Officers for their report and answers to Members' questions.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the St. Leger Homes of Doncaster Quarterly Monitoring Report – Quarter 1, 2011/12 be noted;
- (2) Members be given the exact figure to date of housing properties on stock; and
- (3) a further letter be sent to Central Government requesting an exemption on tenants exercising their right to buy in respect of new council houses built.

All to note

Dir. Housing
SLHD

Asst. Dir.
Strat. Hsng.

22. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT REPORT
– QUARTER 1 2011/2012

Alan Lowther, CPPC Consultant, introduced this item which informed the Panel of the financial and performance information for the first quarter of the financial year 2011/12.

The Panel was informed that the general fund budgets in Regeneration and Environment were expected to under spend by £1m. This was largely due to under spends on waste budgets (£2.2m), which could be used to help address one-off in-year overspends. Members were advised that actions had been put in place to improve the position this year and should bring the budget in line for 2012/13.

The Panel noted that across the Regeneration and Environment Directorate, there were 15 priorities spread across 5 themes. Twelve of the priorities were on track with three that had some concerns.

Members were informed that a review had taken place regarding revisions to the corporate plan. In quarter 2 there would be an additional objective in respect of seeking to rebalance the priorities given to public transport over other modes of transport.

In answer to a query from the Chair regarding new build and affordable housing, the Assistant Director, Strategic Housing reported that the profile related to the resources available to deliver affordable housing.

The Panel was informed that there was a shortfall of 800 units over the next 10 years and the Council was under pressure from the Inspectors to increase the amount to around 300 a year, though there were no resources to achieve this and the amount did not compare to benchmarking with other authorities. It was noted that at present the Council were over performing in this area.

Members were informed that affordable housing was for people who were unable to meet their housing needs through renting or buying a home on the open market and this included social rented housing.

In relation to IA R&E Internal Audit – Implementation of Critical and Major Audit Actions being indicated as red, the Area Housing Service Manager reported that the Department of Energy had kept changing the way of collecting information so the indicator had to be red, though in quarter 2 would be either amber or green as by then the target would have been met.

The Assistant Director, Strategic Housing reported that the Government were looking to the Local Authority to change the criteria for housing which would be a Full Council decision. This would be all external funding, with little resource from the Council. The Assistant Director indicated that the focus would be on zero grant options for affordable housing solutions and closer working with the Assistant Director, Development and the Planning Department.

The Assistant Director, Development identified that though the period of national planning policy was 15 years, an adopted plan would be regularly reviewed and changed for the needs of the market where necessary.

The Representative from GMB stated that the criteria was not just for mortgage provision, it was for investors and there was a need to increase jobs and make viable investment or the investor side would shrink. The Assistant Director, Development agreed and advised that it would be better to de-risk the up-front costs required and S106 money could be used later on in a program of work and not insist on all the money at the start. There was a need to work with developers to extract all the planning gain we can and be more flexible on timescales.

A Member was concerned that the building of new homes was of no benefit to the Borough when there were around 6,000 people living in substandard accommodation and questioned if resources would be better spent on upgrading current accommodation. The Assistant Director, Strategic Housing reported that there was no money available for housing regeneration, the resource was only available for building new houses.

The Panel was further informed by the Assistant Director, Strategic Housing, that political direction was required on how to proceed as there was a mismatch in supply and demand.

The Council and St Leger Homes were to try and encourage the under occupied properties to be given to those in sub-standard accommodation. It was noted that sheltered

housing for older people was also in a poor state. It was hoped that the event held recently for investors would bring more properties back into use. The Panel noted that the Council could borrow money but there was a limit to how much.

The Assistant Director, Strategic Housing, re-iterated that political input was essential as the reform would begin in April.

The Chair thanked Officers for their report and answers to Members questions.

RESOLVED

- (1) that the Finance and Performance Improvement Report – Quarter 1 2011/12 be noted; and
- (2) more in-depth information be sent to Members regarding partnership working

All to note

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

Members were provided with an update to the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel on progress with the work plan for 2011/12. The report allowed the Panel to monitor what developments had been made, work that had been undertaken in relation to the work plan, information, updates and correspondence since the meeting held on 22nd August, 2011.

The work plan was a live document that allowed the Panel to review it in order to develop and prioritise items where necessary.

The Chair fed back to the Panel following her attendance at Enterprising Doncaster and raised issues including: Sheffield City Region, an alliance for business support through raised issues including: the partnership working, which is an alignment solution for businesses of a one-stop-shop, updates regarding FARRRS, and a skills review which was being undertaken by Doncaster Chamber to identify what businesses need. A request was made for more in-depth information to be sent to Members.

<p>The Panel was reminded of two meetings to be held on 21st October, an informal meeting with users of the Keepmoat Stadium, followed by a formal meeting on SMC Financial Update.</p>	<p>All to note</p>
<p>The Scrutiny Consultant to circulate an email to Members with a request for any questions that required an answer at either the formal or informal meeting to be sent to her in advance of the meetings.</p>	<p>Scrutiny Consultant</p>
<p>It was noted that invitations to the informal meeting had been sent to Doncaster Belles, Doncaster Athletics and Doncaster Rugby Football Club and for the formal meeting, representatives from the SMC Board including Councillor Ford and D Wilkinson and Colin Harker, Financial Manager from SMC. Members were informed that positive responses had been received from all the tenants apart from Doncaster Rovers.</p>	
<p>A request was made that the Chairman of Doncaster Rovers be invited to attend.</p>	<p>Scrutiny Consultant</p>
<p>Members expressed concern over the amount the Council was paying for the Stadium and the cost of the utility bill. Members were assured that the more information would be given at the informal meeting.</p>	
<p>The Scrutiny Consultant brought Members attention to the Opportunity Centres – DMBC Review listed as being held on 15th November, 2011, as this was now to be held on 19th December, 2011. It was also noted, regarding the new Work Programme, that a site visit could be undertaken next year to visit the premises of Prime Contractors including Serco, A4E and Job Centre Plus.</p>	<p>} All to note }</p>
<p>Members were informed that the Gypsy and Traveller Policy would be presented at a future Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Meeting.</p>	<p>All to note</p>
<p><u>RESOLVED</u> that the Panel:</p>	
<p>(1) received and commented on the progress made against the work programme;</p>	<p>All to note</p>
<p>(2) received feedback regarding the informal meeting the Panel had with Prime Contractors including Serco, A4E and Job Centre Plus held on the 22nd September 2011;</p>	<p>All to note</p>

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| (3) noted the Opportunity Centre's Outcome Report including the recommendations agreed at its meeting held on 22nd August, 2011 – an update of which would be given at the next meeting; and | All to note
Scrutiny
Consultant |
| (4) Questions for either the informal or formal Stadium meeting to be sent to the Scrutiny Consultant in advance of the meetings to be held on 21st October, 2011. | All to note |
| (5) more in-depth information be sent to Members regarding partnership working. | Scrutiny
Consultant |