

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

5TH MARCH, 2012

A MEETING of the REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the MANSION HOUSE, DONCASTER on MONDAY 5TH MARCH, 2012 at 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT :

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

Councillors Joe Blackham, Deborah Hutchinson, Ted Kitchen, John Sheppard and Yvonne Woodcock.

Also in Attendance :

Councillor Andrew Bosmans  
Mayor Peter Davies  
Scott Cardwell, Assistant Director, Development  
Gill Gillies, Assistant Director, Environment  
Alan Lowther, Principal Officer, Regeneration & Environment  
Elaine Reeson, CPPC Support Officer  
Judith Jones, Director of Housing Services & Deputy Chief Executive  
Ian Brittain, Performance and Improvement Service Manager  
Dave Wilkinson, Area Housing Service Manager  
Gary Wells, Assistant Director, Strategic Housing  
Nick Stopforth, Libraries Services Manager  
Roy Barnes, Work and Skills Client Manager of Success Doncaster

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors David Nevett and Margaret Pinkney.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Members Code of Conduct, Councillor Deborah Hutchinson declared a personal interest in Item 7, St. Leger Homes Quarterly Monitoring Report, as she had been appointed by Mayor Davies to the St Leger Homes Board.

**ACTION**

All to note

40. MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING HELD ON 19TH DECEMBER, 2011

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel Meeting held on 19th December, 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

All to note

41. PUBLIC STATEMENTS

There were no Public Statements made at the meeting.

All to note

42. MAYOR PETER DAVIES – VERBAL UPDATE RE PRIORITIES

A discussion took place in respect of updated reports not being provided on Sterefibre and the Stadium Management Company. Members were extremely concerned that these issues did not appear to be being dealt with and no information had been provided.

The Mayor reported that there had been no further updates since the last Regeneration and Environment Meeting on 19th December, 2011 and that negotiations with the Stadium were still ongoing.

The Chair informed the Mayor that the Panel would like to be able to input their views regarding the Stadium and the Mayor asked that any queries be sent directly to him.

The Mayor further stated that the Panel would be informed before anything was finalised and the paperwork should be ready in May.

The Chair noted the comments made by Members and reported that an informal meeting had been held at the end of last year with Simon Wiles, Director Finance and Corporate Services regarding the Stadium and another one could be arranged.

Scrutiny  
Consultant

The Mayor reported to Members that White Rose Way, FARRRS and the Inland Port were well on track and would reach fruition.

Members raised issues around empty properties that the Council owned, including Cantley Depot and Cantley Sycamore School. It was considered that if the properties were not going

to be used they should be sold. Members also agreed that the decision on the outcome of empty properties should be made before they were left empty.

With the agreement of the Chair, Councillor Bosmans informed the Panel that Peglers Club was going to be run by a Leisure Trust for 18 months with community use and this had not been undertaken, though there were community groups waiting to use the facilities. The trial run should have begun in October 2011.

Councillor Bosmans further informed Members that there was a bungalow on Weston Road, Balby that Balby Carr School would like to take over but had been unable to do so. In his opinion the bungalow could simply be handed over to the School. Councillor Bosmans had written to Peter Dale, Director, Regeneration and Environment and was awaiting a response.

The Mayor sympathised with Members and agreed that it took too long for issues to be resolved.

A Member noted that under the Localism Bill, Councillors could override officers in respect of work requiring action. It was noted that a 'Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)' could be undertaken.

The Chair commented that the asset management process could be looked at as a future issue, although scrutiny would not be able to look at individual ward issues.

The Mayor declared that he had not been informed previously of the issues raised by Councillor Bosmans and that Members could inform him directly of any Ward issues.

The Mayor identified that in respect of the lease at Cantley Community Centre, the Assets Department had not included wages as part of the cost (profit). The Mayor had not been happy with this decision and had ensured that the wages were part of the lease. He reiterated again that he was not happy with the amount of time taken for matters to be resolved.

Scott Cardwell, Assistant Director, Development, informed the Panel that officers had followed through the adopted Policy of 2004 for non inclusion of wages and that this had now been looked at differently.

A Member informed the Panel that at one time there were two Elected Members on the Assets Group and they were able to keep other Members better informed.

It was also noted that there were no Elected Members on the Youth Centres Committee now and although Members had been asked to re-join them it was not as Committee Members.

A discussion took place regarding the lease of allotments. The Mayor noted that it had been passed at Cabinet last week that there would be no animals allowed for grazing purposes, only birds and only one allotment was allowed per individual.

Gill Gillies, Assistant Director, Environment, reported that notice would be sent out for the removal of animals and that though Members were raising concerns, the allotment societies had been consulted last year on the proposals.

The Mayor asked Members to look at the policy on the Cabinet papers and if they considered anything to be missed, to let him know direct.

All to note

In answer to a question from the Vice-Chair regarding the changing of temporary allotments to become permanent, the Mayor undertook to locate the information and inform Members accordingly.

Mayor Davies

A discussion took place regarding the Archives building in Doncaster as it was in a state of disrepair. The Mayor considered the history of Doncaster to be a great priority and an asset to the Borough. He informed Members that the job of the Community History Manager, in the Archives Section, had been saved and he considered that the Manager could also give talks to the communities because of his vast knowledge. The Mayor hoped that in future the Archives would be moved to better accommodation.

Members considered various options for the Archives to move to, including the Nexus Centre and either the CCQ or the Mansion House once the CCQ was in use.

The Assistant Director, Development considered that Assets did require improvement though they head up work from other teams and delays in other areas reflected badly on them. He also informed the Panel that the bungalow in Balby mentioned by Councillor Bosmans, had only been signed over to the Assets Team on 23rd February this year and a full response to his query was in the process of being sent by the Director of Regeneration and Environment.

The Chair considered that if issues were properly scrutinised then Members should be able to see where the hold-ups were.

A Member considered that the Mayor and Chief Executive could write to departments where delays were causing concern.

The Assistant Director, Development, informed the Panel that a list of assets was available to Members.

A request was made of the Mayor to use his influence to ensure a response regarding the chemical analysis of Sterefibre was reported to Members. The Mayor noted this request and undertook to locate the information.

Mayor Davies

The Chair requested an update in respect of the Markets as there had been an article in the news recently.

The Mayor informed Members that at present it took £200k to keep Mexborough Market open. The rent was set at the rate of RPI, around 5.6%. The Mayor had concerns as traders in the Wool Market were struggling, the rent amounted to approx. £50 per week, this equated to a £2 rise. It was hoped that assistance could be given to those traders that were struggling and had been in discussion with Roy Dean, Town Centre Manager. The Mayor stated that he would vary the rent if necessary and Members were informed that at Mexborough Market, no rents had gone up in 15 years.

The Mayor reported more news as follows:

- the Don Valley Power Project at Stainforth was a leading Power Station in Europe and had £140 million Euros of funding secured. Once all the funding was in place, it was hoped that this would open in 2015;
- the Battle of Britain Heritage Society would be bringing a memorial to the Aero-museum in Doncaster, which was good for tourism. This was one of five in the country and the opening day would be the Sunday of the Battle of Britain in 2013.

A Member requested that better signage be put in place for this museum.

The Chair thanked the Mayor for his attendance and verbal report and Officers for their assistance in answering Members questions.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) a meeting be arranged with the Director of Finance and Corporate Services and Members to discuss the Stadium;
- 2) information be provided to Members on whether temporary allotments had been made permanent; and
- 3) a response regarding the chemical analysis of Sterefibre be reported to Members.

Scrutiny  
Consultant

Mayor Davies

Mayor Davies

43. ST LEGER HOMES OF DONCASTER QUARTERLY  
MONITORING REPORT – QUARTER 3 2011/12

Members received a report informing them of the latest St Leger Homes of Doncaster (SLHD) performance information. The report highlighted the main areas of performance that in quarter three 2011/12 were either off target or of concern.

Councillor Kitchen reported that he had been unable to attend a Housing meeting at Bentley last week and requested that his apologies be submitted. This was noted by Judith Jones, Director of Housing Services & Deputy Chief Executive.

Dir. Hsg. Serv.  
& Deputy CX

The Chair noted that the SLH\_RM25 Private Landlord Scheme was a red indicator. The Director reported that the bond guarantee scheme and the desirability of accommodation had both moved forward and the Director was confident that in the first quarter of the next financial year the indicator would change. It was noted that this was a huge area of work and the whole process was to be scrutinised.

The Vice-Chair noted that the unpaid rents collected were particularly good at present and asked if there was any contingency in place for bad payments.

The Director reported that the bad debt provision now up to £400k would be £1 million from April 2013. It was intended, from the closure of some cash offices, to up-skill staff for the purpose of those clients needing help once the housing benefits were paid directly to them and Credit Unions would be utilised to assist with that help also.

Members were also informed that the Housing Service would not always recommend clients to use direct debit, individual needs would be looked at and some clients did not have a bank account. One way was for clients to have an account with a Credit Union and the Council/Housing Service would need to support this.

It was noted that in the short term, a team would be needed to administer this. The Panel was informed that there were welfare benefits presentations taking place at present and the Council would need to take a corporate view as this issue hits many areas.

The Director reported that clients would be informed of actions available to them, eg. the right to repair and that legal action could be taken if repairs were not undertaken. The Housing Service was happy to work with people in difficulty regarding rent arrears, but those just refusing to pay would be evicted.

The Chair considered that supporting the Credit Unions was very important as it was vital that a facility was in place to assist in the payment of rents, so that money did not get 'swallowed up' by other payments due.

Officers were thanked by the Chair for the information they had provided to the Panel.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) Members note the Quarter 3 performance information; and
- 2) Members note the actions to deal with performance issues.

All to note

All to note

44. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT REPORT: 2011/12 QUARTER 3

The Panel was presented with a report which provided them with the financial and performance information for the third quarter of this financial year 2011/12.

Members were advised that overall the Regeneration and Environment capital programme was progressing in line with estimates.

It was noted that despite the good work being undertaken and the achievement of many targets, the number of Job Seeker Allowance (JSAs) claimants remained high. The figures were

taken from the Work Skills and Enterprise programs being run. A cross agency and business partnership had now been formed to tackle skills in Doncaster. The focus now was more economic led rather than attainment led.

The concerns raised at the last meeting regarding actual business needs were now being addressed and the Chamber had been asked to assist with this to ensure Doncaster had a workforce that was not just academically qualified, but had other skills that were also required, eg. good interview techniques.

Members still considered there was a need for schools to be visited and informed of business requirements. It was noted that a school in Askern also had a night school for mechanics and brick-laying which was of benefit to students and the community.

A Member informed the Panel that the idea of sourcing business need was brought up when it was known Doncaster were going to have an airport and nothing appeared to have moved on since then.

The Assistant Director of Development advised the Panel that the Council were actively talking to key employers within Doncaster, including Helios.

The Panel was informed that Balby Carr School had taken advantage of networking with local businesses and had met annually and shared information, though it was believed the funding for this had now ended. It was considered that schools were results driven and some children become NEET – not in education, employment or training.

It was considered that a meeting was required with community employers and one Member would like the group to continue so that children could see what was required from the local industry.

The Principal Officer, Regeneration & Environment informed the Panel that of the JSA claimants, more than a third were in the 16-24 age group, the statistics were from the Department for Work and Pensions in January this year and he undertook to provide updated statistical information to Members.

The Assistant Director stated that the Council were trying to influence schools and businesses to be more pro-active and perhaps a note from this meeting should be sent to the cross agency and business partnership that had now been formed to look into future skills requirements.

Principal  
Officer R&E

Scrutiny  
Consultant/  
Asst. Dir.



RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Panel note the Quarter 3 Finance and Performance information;
- 2) a note should be sent direct to the cross agency and business partnership that had now been formed to look into future skills requirements with the Panels recommendation as follows: -  
  
further work should be undertaken to encourage and identify how local business can be involved in interacting with schools and pupils about the future requirements of the local economy; and
- 3) JSA claimant statistical information be provided to Members.

All to note

Scrutiny  
Consultant/  
Asst. Dir.

Principal  
Officer R&E

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

Members received a report that updated them on progress with the work plan for 2011/12 and any updates from the last meeting on 19th December 2011. As a live document the work plan allowed the Panel to review it in order to develop and reprioritise items where necessary.

There had been three main areas of focus for the workplan as follows:

- Delivery of Regeneration and the Environment across the Borough against the Localism Bill.
- Private Sector Housing Delivery
- Environmental Strategy (Policy Development)

The Scrutiny Consultant discussed the summary provided within the report, of some of the Panel's key outcomes during the course of the year, within each of those three areas listed above.

The Panel welcomed Nick Stopforth, Libraries Services Manager and Roy Barnes, Work and Skills Client Manager of Success Doncaster to the meeting.

The Libraries Services Manager brought Members attention to the responses that had been provided to the recommendations that were made by the Panel regarding Opportunity Centres during 2011.

Regarding outreach work, the intention was to develop more as a key mechanism of developing Opportunity Centres and to engage more with partners as well as businesses and the Opportunity Centre bus had now been deployed around the Borough.

The Assistant Director, Development reported that the Doncaster West Development Trust (DWDT) enterprise coaches had a modified programme to deliver more outreach work, so more focus would be on locality, through the DWDT contract.

Members were informed that a more co-ordinated marketing and communication strategy was being undertaken with the Communications Team, libraries and Opportunity Centres to maximise networking opportunities.

It was noted that more evidence was needed of a joined up approach to working with Prime Contractors and Partners.

The Vice-Chair queried recent press articles regarding Action for Employment (A4E) and the Libraries Service Manager informed the Panel that the situation was being monitored.

The Chair reported that she had an informal meeting shortly with the prime contractors of the new work programme including A4E and Serco as well as Job Centre Plus and if Members had any questions they wanted raising, could they contact her direct.

Members were informed that the library at Balby used to house the Opportunity Centre within it and a van was used for outreach work. However, the member of staff left and wasn't replaced so to re-engage someone else now would be like starting from scratch. The Work and Skills Client Manager explained that he would like to extend the use of a bus to link with the neighbourhoods and service more areas of the Borough. The Assistant Director, Development reported that there had been a difficulty in obtaining drivers.

The Libraries Services Manager concluded that services needed to be sustained and would be looked at and reviewed. He also undertook to look into the possibility of using the library mobile vehicles.

All to note

Lib. Services  
Manager

The Panel was advised that the development of a 'buddy system' could utilise those clients already working with the Opportunity Centres. The system was in use informally at present and the Libraries Services Manager would progress it further once confidentiality issues had been addressed.

It was noted that a stock take of what facilities were available within existing and future locations had been undertaken satisfactorily.

A more pro-active role was being encouraged with local businesses and linking with major developments. The Libraries Services Manager would utilise the Chamber of Commerce to highlight the Opportunities Centres. It was also noted that further links with schools and colleges would be encouraged, through the schools library service and by advertising for mentors for the Opportunities Centres.

Members noted that it was hoped that Opportunity Centres could be embedded into libraries to establish them within communities and sustain them for longer.

The Chair asked that the Panel re-visit the issue of Opportunity Centres and the Libraries Services Manager undertook to send a formal update for the Panel to consider.

Lib. Services  
Manager

In respect of the Neighbourhood Investment Plans, Members noted that a meeting would soon be taking place at some point in the future.

All to note

Members noted that a meeting to review the Stadium Management Company would be held on 27th March, 2012 at 9.30 am. Also, a meeting would be held on 8th May, 2012 at 2.00 pm to discuss the Gypsy and Traveller Review.

All to note

All to note

Potential areas for a future workplan were discussed as follows:

- Allocations Policy
- Environmental Strategy
- Private development and affordable housing
- Opportunity Centres
- Bringing properties back into use
- Asset function
- Work Skills Team

A Member requested that the Panel look at all that underpins Asset Management, an overarching strategy from neighbourhoods to final disposal and not just the Asset function.

The Assistant Director explained that there was an Asset Management Plan which would be a good place to start and he reiterated that the Asset Team could only go as quick as other teams, like Neighbourhoods, allowed.

RESOLVED that:

- |    |   |                            |
|----|---|----------------------------|
| 1) | the Panel received and commented on the progress made against the work programme since June 2011;                               | All to note                |
| 2) | the Panel received and commented on correspondence made between the Panel and the Executive as well as the updated action plan; | All to note                |
| 3) | the Panel received a briefing note on Neighbourhood Investment Plan;  | All to note                |
| 4) | the Panel were still awaiting written feedback from the Enterprising Doncaster meeting that took place on 2nd March, 2012;      | Scrutiny Consultant        |
| 5) | the Panel noted the future workshops regarding Allocations Policy, Community Infrastructure levy and Neighbourhood Plans;       | All to note                |
| 6) | the use of library mobile vehicles for use by the Opportunity Centres to undertake outreach work be looked at further; and      | Libraries Services Manager |
| 7) | a formal update be sent to the Panel regarding Opportunity Centres.   | Libraries Services Manager |