

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

17TH OCTOBER, 2012

An EXTRAORDINARY MEETING of the REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the MANSION HOUSE, DONCASTER on WEDNESDAY 17TH October, 2012 at 10 AM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Tony Revill
Vice-Chair - Councillor Richard Cooper-Holmes

Councillors Monty Cuthbert, Bob Ford, Ken Keegan, Ted Kitchen, David Nevett and John Sheppard

Invitee: Paul Smillie (Unite)

Also in Attendance:

Councillors Andrew Bosmans and Pat Knight

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from the Councillor Deborah Hutchinson, Stuart Hardy and Nuala Fennelly.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

23. PUBLIC STATEMENTS

There were no public statements made.

24. VERBAL REPORT FROM COUNCILLOR PAUL
CODDINGTON - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE &
CORPORATE SERVICES, ENVIRONMENT, TRADING AND
SUPPORT SERVICES.

Councillor Paul Coddington updated the panel on the key priorities and challenges within his portfolio which continued the work of the previous cabinet member with responsibilities for the environment and work towards developing an environmental strategy.

ACTION

It was explained that the priorities continue to focus on the following themes, captured in the councils draft Environment Strategy, which builds on the approach set out in the Borough Strategy.

Theme 1: Managing Our Environmental Resources And Services

Priority 2: Deliver more energy efficient housing

Achievements within this theme and priority were outlined including: -

The Panel was informed that the past 12 months have seen a great deal of activity contributing towards the Council's corporate targets; CP3a. Reduce no. of households in fuel poverty and CP3b. No. of homes receiving energy efficiency improvements. Members were informed that the outcomes for domestic energy efficiency have included: -

- substantial levels of external funding in to Doncaster:-
 - Wheatley has in excess of £4m of investment
 - Askern has in excess of £800k of investment.
 - Mexborough has in excess of £500k of investment.
 - Hexthorpe has in excess of £7m of investment.
 - Dunscroft has in excess of £4m of investment.
- improving housing energy efficiency at no cost to the Council and at no cost to the resident, including focusing on "hard to treat" housing.
- working with Doncaster contractors who employ Doncaster residents including local trainees out of Bentley Training Centre.
- regenerating housing and communities.
- adding value to private sector and council owned homes.
- reducing fuel poverty.
- improving health through warmth, by working in partnership to provide "cold weather" services for the most vulnerable and hard to reach local residents.

It was reported that current priorities will build on those achievements to seek and secure further investment and deliver key outcomes, for example:-

- new areas for rolling out free external wall insulation.
- negotiations with energy companies for further investment in housing.
- Community Energy Saving Programme - 1,800 households (150 council and 1,650 privately owned)

receiving works in 2012-13, bringing in excess of £14m of external investment into Doncaster in 2012-13.

- up to £5m of capital and revenue to be drawn down from external sources as a result of energy efficiency works undertaken on Council owned properties, to be made up of: -
 - £1m ERDF
 - Up to £4m from energy companies.

Priority 3: Effective Flood Mitigation

Achievements within this theme and priority were outlined including: -

It was explained to the Panel that the extreme weather in summer had put the Council's emergency flood response to the test. It was stated that the Multi-Agency Flood Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and the role of community flood wardens have proven extremely effective in dealing with flood events.

An outline was provided on the implementation of the Floods and Water Management Act which has enabled the Flood Risk Team to accurately record and investigate fully all flooding incidents where internal flooding to properties and critical infrastructure has occurred. It was noted that this information gained from the investigations will greatly assist in understanding how the flooding has occurred and how the risk of flooding can be mitigated in the future.

It was further explained that the act has also enabled DMBC to establish partnership working between all risk management authorities (Internal Drainage Boards, Environment Agency, Water Authorities etc) which promotes joint working towards mitigating flood risk. Members were informed that Doncaster MBC was now the Lead Local Flood Authority for local flood risk, which provides greater clarity on who was responsible for the co-ordination of flood risk management.

Priorities within this area were outlined which included: -

- Ensuring that knowledge of flood risk was retained and all staff responding during a flood event were trained to the appropriate level. Annual reviews of all the flood plans will be undertaken to ensure Doncaster provides an effective response to flooding.
- Ensuring that all instances of internal flooding to properties and critical infrastructure were properly recorded and investigated.
- The production of a Local Flood Risk Management

Strategy for Doncaster. Members were informed that the main aims of the document were to: Maintain and improve the standard of flood protection, increase the overall level of investment in flood risk management, ensure fast and effective responses during a flooding event, help the community better understand and manage any flood risks they face and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all organisations involved in flood risk management.

- The establishment of a memorandum of understanding with all risk management authorities on who has responsibility for what.
- Ensuring the ongoing maintenance of drainage systems and defences which Doncaster was responsible for.

Theme 2: Ensuring A Quality Environment

Priority 4: Protect our air and water quality and address contaminated land issues

Achievements within this theme and priority were outlined including: -

It was outlined to Members that Doncaster is a member of the Care4Air partnership of the four South Yorkshire local authorities funded by the South Yorkshire Local Transport Plan. It was explained that its aim was to raise awareness of air quality issues and ways for improvement and that its flagship scheme was the Efficient and Cleaner Operations Fleet Recognition Scheme (ECO stars), the aim of which is to positively approach the air quality impacts of road transport. It was noted that the scheme was very popular with operators and had received national recognition and praise from Defra and Dft.

With respect to Sterecycle, Sterefibre and Hampole landfill – Members were informed that Sterecycle has gone into administration. Advice from the Environment Agency had suggested that this has no impact on the issues around sterefibre at Hampole CAT Plant as the operators of the landfill remain liable for the material on their site and will still be regulated by the EA with respect to the conditions of their EPR permit. Members were told that similarly the 15 month planning requirement to remove the sterefibre also remains in place.

Priorities within this area were outlined which included: -

- Using the contaminated land regulations working in conjunction with the Planning department and developers to bring “Brownfield” land into safe and effective end use.
- Working in conjunction with the Planning department and

developers to ensure that air quality issues were considered during the planning process; and also as part of the Local Transport Plan.

- Protecting people and property enhance the gas control systems at the Council's closed landfill sites.

Theme 3: Valuing Our Environmental Assets

Priority 6: Protect and promote our historic environment –

Achievements within this theme and priority were outlined including: -

The protection and enhancement of Doncaster's Heritage assets that was being achieved through the;

- Provision of advice on planning/listed building applications, pre-application advice, and advising owners over repairs and appropriate alterations to heritage buildings.
- Conservation area appraisals for our 46 conservation areas. Members were informed that to date we have undertaken 16 appraisals at a rate of 3 per year and in the interim provided summaries of the character of these conservation areas on the council's website.
- The production of criteria and identifying parks and gardens of local importance. There were 13 on the existing list but no explanation or description of their special character. It was noted that consultation was being undertaken with English Heritage, the Civic Trust and others on an expanded list of 47 parks and gardens of local interest which will be completed by December 2012 and will be adopted alongside the Sites and Policies DPD.
- Making available on the Council's website information about heritage assets such as listed buildings, conservation areas and historic parks as well as sources of information and expertise about the historic environment and the borough's heritage available in Doncaster's Museums, Libraries, and Archives.

Future priorities were outlined which included:

- Producing a similar list of buildings of local historic or architectural significance to complement information about listed heritage assets.
- Improving guidance and advice preserving and enhancing the historic environment, for example, by making guidance on alterations to heritage assets and best practice for their preservation accessible on the council's

website.

- Producing and implementing a Heritage at Risk Strategy. This will identify those heritage assets at most risk, why they were at risk and the most appropriate strategy for conserving those assets. Members were informed that this could be through urgent works notices to encourage owners to look after their properties e.g. currently The Grand Theatre, and Thorne Vicarage.
- Crime and vandalism posing a significant threat to heritage assets and a priority for this and next year will be for Doncaster to sign up to the national Heritage Crime Initiative and encourage local community and parish councils to participate in this.

Priority 7: Protect and promote our natural environment –

Achievements within this theme and priority were outlined including: -

Members were informed that 2011 saw the publication of 'The Natural Choice' – the Government's first Natural Environment White Paper for 20 years and 'Biodiversity 2020: It was explained that this was a strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services'. It was further explained that together they set out a new strategic direction for biodiversity policy, focusing on delivering landscape scale conservation from a sound evidence base and recognising the need for partnership working.

It was outlined to the Panel that contributing to this approach, successes included;

- supporting the establishment of South Yorkshire's Local Nature Partnership, and two Nature Improvement Area's (NIAs - 2 of England's 15 were wholly or in part within the Borough).
- the 2012 resurvey of designated Local Wildlife Sites which boosted the evidence base by 28,042, to 342,516 records (between 1st Oct 2011 – 30th September 2012). the Local Records Centre's reintroduction of a charging policy also saw £6000 of income generated over the same period, for use of its services.
- the Council reported a borough-wide increase in the number of Local Wildlife Sites in positive management (based on available data) from 22% - 25% through the combined efforts of conservation partners.
- the Council was selected by DEFRA to take part in an innovative Biodiversity Offsetting Pilot (1 of 6 in England) to explore how targeted offsite conservation can be delivered through developer contributions, and has

produced an Offsetting strategy.

Members were made aware that the following priorities for 2012/13 will contribute to the goals of the UK Biodiversity Strategy: These included: -

- the continuation to develop the role of the Local Nature Partnership, to promote the value of the borough's assets and ensure that the natural environment and the products and services it provides were taken into account in decision making.
- the support of the delivery of capital conservation projects, focusing on adding value to the NIA's activities and complementary initiatives.
- the review of Doncaster's Local Biodiversity Action Plan to reflect national and local priorities, consolidate local action and refresh targets.
- the Local Records Centre to continue the rolling Local Wildlife Sites resurvey, to maintain sound evidence of the borough's designated wildlife assets, and use this resource to inform appropriate site management and to enthuse and engage Doncaster residents.
- work undertaken to ensure that the Council manages its own (designated and non-designated) sites in a positive way to conserve their features of interest and abide by its duties under the NERC act, 2006.

It was explained that the Countryside Service will be applying for grant aid for the management of its woodland estate over the next few years, which included: -

- improvements to public access, biodiversity and woodland character and structure. Members were informed that this will prioritise Kings Wood, Cantley Woodlands and Melton Wood, with the following round focusing on Howell Wood, Campsall and Daw Wood.
- the renewal/achievement of Green flag status on key sites that have held this accolade in the recent past.
- exploring opportunities to enhance transport routes (verges etc) to provide green corridors, supporting the connectivity of fragmented habitats and movement of species through the wider countryside.
- where appropriate, promote Biodiversity Offsetting as a flexible and innovative approach for developers to discharge their biodiversity obligations.

Priority 8: Ensure access to high quality green spaces and the countryside –

Achievements within this theme and priority were outlined and

included: -

- that the Public Rights of Way Section work closely with volunteers from the Doncaster Branch of the Ramblers Association. It was explained that their members inspect every Public Rights of Way on an annual basis and submit a detailed report describing its condition. This enabled the Section to respond in a proactive manner to issues that arise. Members were also informed that in addition, some members of the association carry out voluntary maintenance work on a monthly basis.
- building on the good relationship between the Public Rights of Way Section and volunteers from the Ramblers Association, to use their collected information to help prioritise maintenance and improvement works.

Trading Services

The priorities for Trading and Support Services were outlined to the Panel and included the:

- implementation of the Transport Services review comprising of the.
- implementation of the Construction Services Review comprising of the.
- review of how Cleaning Services are delivered.
- review of Printing Services
- increasing take-up of school meals across the Borough whilst meeting savings targets.
- reducing fuel poverty through the work of the Energy team.

The Cabinet Member concluded whilst economic pressures and associated challenges remain a foremost priority, the willingness and dedication of partners and volunteers in protecting, sustaining and improving the natural environment remain a real asset. Members were informed that public interest and participation in the natural environment was also rising and the Council's future actions, decisions and opportunities should reflect and build upon that.

Following, the detailed presentation, some of the areas raised and discussed by the Panel included: -

- Roads flooding - what actions had been taken to address this issue especially in those areas prone to flooding.
- Removal of flood warning signs – Members were informed that when roads need to be closed there were instances of people ignoring signs and so consideration

was being given to physically blocking flooded roads, e.g. with stone, to prevent vehicles becoming trapped in flood water

- Work of Doncaster Energy Efficiency team which was complimented by a Member.
- Biodiversity Offsetting Pilot – An explanation of what this means was provided to the Panel and Members were informed that further information in a report on this area considered by the Panel Committee would be circulated.
- Renewable Energy
- Grand Theatre – Some Members were concerned about the worsening condition of the building and what protection was being provided. One Member was particularly concerned about vandals accessing the building and causing further damage and asked for an update on what action was being undertaken.
- Demolition of the Market Tavern – the Director of Regeneration and Environment informed Members that they would be made aware of the results of a current investigation into why the listed building was knocked down. An outline of the Duty of Care of Listed Buildings was provided to Members.
- Future of Metroclean.

Planning Policy
Manager (Natural
Environment)

Members were informed that responses would be provided on the relevant areas as outlined above.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for attending the meeting to outline his priorities and responding to the Panels questions.

RESOLVED that the Panel

- 1) Note the contents of this report;

25. WORK, SKILLS AND ENTERPRISE PROGRAMME GOING FORWARD AND UPDATE ON OPPORTUNITY CENTRES

The report was outlined to Members of the Panel which summarised the current position with regard to the future work and skills support offer within the Work, Skills And Enterprise Programme (Success Doncaster) and also provided an update on Opportunity Centres. Members held a comprehensive debate on the issues raised in the report and the responses provided to the action plan.

In regards to performance information, Members were informed that some Opportunity Centres were used far more than others and it was reported that 2.8 people per Opportunity Centre per

month were supported into employment. It was acknowledged that there was a significant variance with the lower performing centres to the higher ones and it was felt that some of the reasons behind this included better connections, engagement and a good Customer Services Adviser (CSA). The absence of staff and trained staff, it was felt, was the main contributory factor for the lower performing ones. Members believed that there was a lack of attention to what made the better ones perform so well and questioned why lessons hadn't been learnt from the stronger centres to improve the others that weren't.

Concern was expressed over the figures presented to the Panel which showed a downward trend in the outputs achieved for people into jobs and those supported into education and training at some Opportunity Centres. Members felt that these did not reflect how much the top performing centres, such as Rossington, had achieved and did not take into account the reasons behind the centres with the lower performances.

One Member believed that the links between the performance of the Opportunity Centres and outreach work was integral and that perhaps some could be improved with the appointment of Outreach Workers. It was reflected upon that the positive outreach work that was previously undertaken at Denaby Opportunity Centre was why it performed with the historical highest outputs.

It was acknowledged that the network of employment organisations and their own performance targets were influencing the outcomes of the Opportunity Centres and Officers believed that this provided an indication that this newly established model was having more of an impact. Members later expressed concern about the lack of contribution and engagement from Work Programme providers and Job Centre Plus.

It was emphasised to Members that in light of the current economic climate, it was necessary to ensure that future work and skills support has Value For Money (VFM) and was sustainable. The model established for the library service was referred to and it was acknowledged that improvements still needed to be made, in particular about the training of staff working within Opportunity Centres. Members also commented that training was a key issue that was in need of addressing. The Assistant Director for Customer Services and ICT explained to the Panel that coaching was taking place from other Customer Service Advisers and that there were talks with Doncaster College about accessing a NVQ qualification.

Members were made aware of potential ideas including utilising

council staff working in front facing positions such as health workers/youth workers as well as others stakeholders within communities to provide training for them to identify and signpost.

In response to a query made about the role of Doncaster Chamber. It was explained that the Chamber has been contracted to work with business start-ups and support had been made available to residents as well as information being available in Opportunity Centres, however, it was noted that there was sometimes an issue with the lack of available space within some centres.

One Member queried a budget underspend that was agreed from Success Doncaster for Outreach Workers to be appointed and it was asked where this money was and whether it could be taken to the following year to be utilised. One Member proposed that the money not spent on providing Outreach Workers was spent keeping the stand alone Opportunity Centres open and that efforts were made to find suitable Outreach Workers. Members were of the opinion that this underspend should be rolled over and further discussions held.

Reference was made by Officers to the introduction of new work and skills support provision funded through central government and other external sources provided a further opportunity to make more use of these resources. Examples of new provision were referred to the Panel in the report which included:

- Work Programme
- Youth Contract
- Apprenticeship Hub
- The DWP funded Support Contract which operates across Doncaster
- DWP Skills Support for the Unemployed
- DWP Skills Support for Redundancy
- The National Careers Service
- National Apprenticeship Service
- Adult Skills Budget providers

Reference was also made to the review that had been undertaken by the Panel in 2011 and Members were reminded that the aim of the review was to establish why people weren't using the centres and how this could be improved. Members requested to look at the action plan which outlined the responses to the recommendations made within the review as part of the 2011/2012 action plan.

Members were presented with the current picture of what had and what was taking place in response to each

recommendation made. Members of the Panel were dissatisfied regarding the lack of progress that had been made taking forward most of the recommendations within the Action Plan. They were also disappointed at the length of time it had taken to bring the response to the scrutiny review that has been undertaken over a year ago to the Panel's attention.

The following comments were made: -

- Outreach Engagement Model – Regarding the Outreach Service, it was acknowledged that there was a need to link more effectively with the provision that was already out there. It was recognised that the mobile bus service is a service that was underused and Members were keen to ensure that actions will be taken to look into using a second bus that may be available, maximise the buses potential and ensure that it is promoted and targeted in the most effective way. One Member questioned the effectiveness of the busses and asked how many people had found jobs. Another Member expressed concern that Community Safety Advisers were unable to engage with who they would like to, in particular those individuals that were in need of additional support.
- Marketing and publicity - The Panel was informed that a stronger marketing campaign for libraries was being looked into which could incorporate Opportunity Centres but was difficult as the future was unclear. Members expressed disappointment that this hadn't progressed very far and one Member commented that he had not seen any publicity at all.
- Work Programme Providers/Job Centre Plus - There was concern over the performance of the Work Programme Providers namely A4E, and Serco. Some Members expressed concern that such organisations made no appearances at Opportunity Centres. Regarding Job Centre Plus, a Members commented that they did not engage with clients thus not providing a suitable level of support to those in need of assistance in finding work. It was noted that perhaps further pressure needs to be placed on work programme providers. There was concern over the performance of the support they provided and it was commented by one Member that the list of work programme providers was long and most providers had never been heard of.
- Opportunity Centre Staff Training – Members felt that the training of Opportunity Centre staff to undertake their role was a key issue in need of addressing in order for them

to carry out their role to the best of their ability. Some Members felt that this was a key reason behind those centres which showed lower performances.

It was reported by one Member that staff operating within Balby library were aware that funding was available and suggested that this could be used in order for them to carry out their role in regards to Opportunity Centres.

- Neighbourhood Managers - Regarding Neighbourhood Managers, Members were informed that discussions never took place although it was noted that there were officers within the Communities team developing area plans which were taking forward key priorities. It was commented that there may be an opportunity to link into area plans although one Member raised concern over the fact they were not truly local.
- Engagement with those from more disadvantaged communities - In respect of engaging, helping and supporting those from more disadvantaged communities Members questioned how much this had progressed. The group was updated on the establishment of multi stakeholders Steering Group (as recommended through the Officer Review of Opportunity Centres in November 2011) comprising of key partners and others to oversee and provide advice, support and challenge to the opportunity centres. Members were told that this group had not been created, but still could be considered to look at this area collectively and that there was still a need for some sort of function to exist. Members were informed, however, that there was information and support available through external partners.
- Role of Businesses and Links to Major Developments - The group had a short discussion about the role of local businesses being linked in with major developments in the Borough. Members were informed that work was being carried out to ensure that more vacancies were going straight to opportunity centres

Members were reminded that the landscape in which work and skills support was provided has changed dramatically through the introduction of new work and skills support provision and therefore the funding that was once available was no longer there. Members were informed that it was about looking to the future with a new model, reaching into different communities and finding a way of getting people into work.

Further experiences of Opportunity Centres were relayed to the

Panel and a Member told the Panel Members about the Opportunity Centre in Balby. The whereabouts of the bus used for outreach in the community was questioned and regarding staff, it had been observed that there was no Customer Service Adviser and that volunteers were doing their best to service the Opportunity Centre within it.

It was acknowledged by Officers that there were vacancies within the Balby Opportunity Centre and that in general Opportunity Centre staff had a very high turnover. It was further commented that the reasons behind the high level of turnover was generally due to lack of job security and finding more secure positions.

An e-mail from a Member not at the meeting was referred to and the comments made were outlined to the Panel. In addition to remarks made and noted at the meeting, they included concerns about the work programme providers not being able to provide the level of support required as well as the lack of consistency and community engagement in the services that the Council provides.

Overall, Members felt that with regard to the future work and skills support offer, it was about ensuring that those unemployed received the necessary support and assistance to get them into employment and recognised that there needs to be some kind of mechanism which was sustainable and consistent.

Some Members from the Panel expressed the positive merits of Opportunity Centres and felt that they provided important community engagement but more importantly, an essential service for supporting people back into work, particular those who were most vulnerable and who were financially deficient and cannot afford to go to the Job Centre Plus in Doncaster on a daily basis to look for work.

RESOLVED that the Panel;

- 1) Note and comment on the proposed direction for future WSEP support.
- 2) Note the update on the Opportunity Centres.
- 3) That a response be provided following a Members enquiry made on a budget underspend from the 2011/2012 budget allocated for Outreach Workers and why it was not spent.
- 4) That consideration is given to utilise those volunteers

operating within the new library model more, in order to carry out their role within Opportunity Centres (those located in Libraries) by providing them with available funding and complete training.