

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

19th, NOVEMBER 2012

A MEETING of the REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the MANSION HOUSE, DONCASTER on MONDAY 19TH NOVEMBER, 2012 at 10 AM

PRESENT:

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

Councillors Monty Cuthbert, Nuala Fennelly, Deborah Hutchinson, Ken Keegan, Ted Kitchen, David Nevett, Yvonne Woodcock and Paul Wray.

Invitee: Paul O'Brien (GMB)

Also in Attendance:

There were no other Councillors in attendance.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from the Councillor Stuart Hardy and Bob Ford.

26. ACCEPTANCE OF URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS

In accordance with Section 100(B)(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair accepted an urgent item of business being the minutes from the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny meeting held on the 17th October 2012 which had not been included on the Agenda. The reason for urgency was to enable the Notes to be approved before the Panel's next meeting on the 22nd January 2013.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

28. MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 3RD SEPTEMBER, 2012 AND 17TH OCTOBER 2012

RESOLVED that: -

ACTION

The minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel Meeting held on 3rd September, 2012 and 17th October, 2012, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

29. PUBLIC STATEMENTS

There were no public statements made.

30. VERBAL REPORT FROM COUNCILLOR BARBARA HOYLE - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

Councillor Barbara Hoyle updated the panel on the key priorities and challenges within her area.

It was reported that in 2009, Doncaster's Housing Services was highlighted as part of the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Area Assessment as a service where there was a need for certain elements to be improved, specifically around services for vulnerable people and empty homes. As part of the Mayor and Cabinet's commitment to improving the Council's housing services, Housing Cabinet portfolio holders, officers have worked to create a programme of work to successfully drive improvements in the service.

A number of areas were presented to the Panel as part of the update which included: -

Local Investment Planning

The Panel was informed that there were extensive housing investment needs such as building new housing, improving existing homes and meeting the shortfall in affordable housing. It was explained that the cuts in public sector funding requires innovation and creativity to think of new ways to do things differently to turn the challenges into opportunities. The following looks at the priorities for the Local Investment Planning team and achievements made to date:

- New Sites Delivery
- New Build Council Housing

Members were told that the team is looking to use the Cantley garage site as a site for the next Local Authority new build. Work is planned to commence on this site by the end of March 2013.

Updates were provided on the following areas: -

Sheltered Schemes

- Woodlands Way and Victoria Court

Demolition

- Granby Estate
- Trafalgar House, Carcroft
- Grange Way, Denaby
- Thrybergh Court, Denaby
- Howard Properties, Wheatley

Environmental Projects

- Six Streets, Hyde Park
- Windhill, Mexborough

Neighbourhood Investment Plans

- 21 plans to be completed and forward to Area/Neighbourhood managers to align with area plans.

Gypsy and Traveller Sites

- Start on site approximately April 2013 which is out for consultation at present. Delivery of site extension to Lands' End Thorne and White Towers in Armthorpe. Duration of programme to be confirmed.

HRA Land and Asset Review

- Work is underway on the disposal of 104 undevelopable sites – contamination and undesirable sites.
- Work on recommendations of HRA shops and flats.

Delivery of Extra Care Facilities

- Delivery of extra care facilities on former Thompson and Dixon site. Programme length estimated 2 years for extra care facility and further period for the delivery of outright sale units on the same site.
- Work has begun on the extra care programme with future sites being discussed from a financial viability point of view.
- Ongoing dialogue with Registered Social Landlords (JSL's) which is required in order to find a model which can be delivered and acceptable to all parties involved.

HCA Delivery Programme

- Continuation of work on the HCA 2011- 2015 and 2015 and 2019 delivery programme.

New Delivery Model

- Work continues on finding new ways to deliver new build site within the current financial climate. This will be work that will be on-going and will need to take into account the housing market at the time of releasing sites.

Other Projects

The Panel was informed that the Local Investment Plan team are involved in various other on-going tasks and these include:

- Best Use of Stock
- St Leger Homes Doncaster Liaison
- Allocations Policy
- Tenancy Strategy and Associated Research
- Vulnerable Groups (Children and Young People/ADULTS/ARTS)
- Service Transformation

Private Sector Housing

Members were told that the vast majority of housing in Doncaster is in private ownership and that most of it is in good condition. It provides decent homes in popular neighbourhoods for Doncaster's communities although some homes are in poor condition.

2012/13 Priorities aim to continue to build on this and include;

- Cat 1 Hazards (including caravan sites) – The team aim is to resolve 40% of hazards brought to the services attention within six months. Members were informed that a recent systems thinking review of the Service has recommended to look at this target and remove the barriers to resolving complaints, such as properties becoming empty and formal action processes, and commit to resolving 100% of Cat 1 hazards within a reasonable period. It was reported that over the next six months, it is hoped that the target will be refined to better reflect what the team is trying to achieve and therefore more accurately reflect performance.
- Caravan site inspections per year - The team will be reviewing the current license conditions within the next six months and 10 sites will be inspected by the end of the year.
- 85% complaints have been resolved through informal processes – it was noted that the team has worked hard to ensure that this consistently has been around the 90% level and that they will endeavour to keep it this way by working positively and proactively with the sector to raise standards. However, in the next six months they will

develop processes and systems that will allow for clear enforcement of the most uncooperative and troublesome landlords including the landlord support and promotion of an accreditation system.

- 100% of Licensable Housing of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) licensed – The team successfully licensed all (total 116) HMOs that applied for a licence, 100% last year. It was outlined that this year they are aiming to maintain 100% of any new applications that come in although they will be less in number. It was pointed out that this year they will be looking to proactively inspect unlicensable HMOs to raise/maintain standards in this sector.
- 300 no proactive Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) inspections completed - Members were informed that this is to ensure that private homes meet the relevant legislative standards in the targeted areas selected as part of the Hit Squad approach, there is a multi-agency focus on areas of decline. It was noted that the next six months will be spent ensuring that the target will be reached and will report back any improvements.

The following achievements were reported to the Panel: -

Landlord Liaison

- Proactive work with landlords, quarterly forum meetings, regular focus groups.
- Meetings and open days in Doncaster Market.

Empty Properties

- As a key priority it was reported that the team have worked extremely hard on this target and have improved systems and understanding to bring 250 (as at 31 October 2012) back into use against a half year target of 150 (300 for the year).

The following initiatives have been developed were noted as:

- Dedicated Empty Homes Team, HOTLINE and website
- Advice and Assistance Service
- Empty Property Toolkit
- Housing Options Referrals Service
- Managing Agent Scheme through our ALMO, St Leger Homes.
- Free property inspections and work schedules
- Empty Property Grants

- Empty Home Loans
- Area Based Pro-active Work
- Stemming the Flow of Empty Properties
- Enforcement

Members were informed that the next 6 months and beyond, will be used to develop new initiatives and/or further refine those that are currently being delivered.

Housing Options 2012/2013

It was reported that one of the main priorities with strategic housing was to develop an Enhanced Housing Options Service and continue delivering on the Council's statutory duties under homeless legislation.

The main areas of work include:

- Value For Money (VFM) - to continue to explore ways to provide increased VFM and deliver services at a lower cost especially in terms of the Gypsy and Traveller service and temporary accommodation.
- Enhanced Housing Options Service - Further embed options within service including key elements such as worklessness, financial inclusion, health, education and skills.
- Working with key partners to develop solutions to deal with the changes under Welfare Reform and the Localism Act including increased access into the private sector.
- Integration of the customer interactions with the customer service 'One Stop Shop' to deliver a more streamlined approach for the customer.
- Implementation of information technology systems to work more efficiently.
- Continuing to deliver performance against Key Performance Indicator's to ensure positive outcomes.
- Developing a sub-regional approach and a number of new initiatives to work with rough sleepers.
- Developing key partnerships and pathways to meet the needs of our customers in the Borough.
- Achievement of Level B in the Quality Assessment Framework for our floating tenancy support service.

The following achievements were reported to the Panel: -

- Proactive work to target those customers affected by the shared accommodation rate, including visits to customers across the Borough to tackle non engagement from this client group and reduce footfall to housing options. This

has included the aim of avoiding crisis and the need for temporary accommodation.

- Joint project with housing benefit to jointly assess customers who apply for discretionary housing payments for the implementation of early intervention.
- Meetings with colleagues in housing benefit, the financial team in St Leger Homes to horizon plan for the customers affected by the bedroom cap in social tenancies. In addition a separate meeting has been held including the Job Centre Plus to review those customers affected by the benefit cap.
- It was noted that the Interim Assistant Director Strategic Housing attends a newly configured sounding board, including local authorities in the North of England to share good practice, look at pressure points and looking at Housing options service going forward.
- Attendance of the Financial Inclusion Group, which includes both internal and external partners as well as the third sector. From this there have been discussions with the South Yorkshire Credit Union and how joint working is developed especially in preparation for the introduction of universal credit.
- Creation of an operational group which has been set up with social services to look at how a streamlined approach can be created to address 16/17 year olds, i.e. joint working protocol, leaving care, more accommodation - strategic action plan across two services.
- Development of a pilot project in conjunction with Doncaster YMCA to expand their private rented scheme. This includes pre tenancy training and tenant matching and is specifically aimed at under 35's. It is felt that this provides an excellent solution to meeting some of this need in Doncaster.
- Joint working with St Leger Homes to reduce barriers to accessing their private landlord scheme for Housing Options customers.
- A full service review has been undertaken of the Gypsy and Traveller team which has included a set of recommendations to be implemented which include new ways of working e.g. area based working, outreach/surgery work.

- Work has been carried out on temporary accommodation units to bring them up to standards and robust procedures are in place to ensure maximum income is received back into the service. In addition, crash pads have been developed and piloted to work towards the elimination of Bed and Breakfasts.
- Introduction of Electronic Document Management (EDM) and a paperless office to improve efficiencies within the service.

Following the presentation there was a further discussion about a number of related areas. Firstly relating to Gypsy and Traveller sites, a Member asked whether revised estimates had been produced of the cost to provide each additional pitch. Members were informed that the final costings were being waited for and that a briefing note would be provided to Members of the Panel.

Also, regarding Gypsy and Travellers, a Member enquired about the number of caravans owned by members of the gypsy and traveller community that were owned and rented out. The Panel was informed that the Council was liaising with the Police and reviewing sites with vacant pitches and looking at shortfalls.

The issue of social housing was briefly discussed and a Member expressed concern that there were not enough 2 bedroom houses. Members were reassured that the future programme for social housing will ensure that there are more 2 and the occasional 4 bedroom houses being built.

Concern was also raised about the numbers of homes that were empty as indicated in the Empty Homes Strategy. It was confirmed that at the beginning of the year the number of empty homes had risen from approximately 4,500 to 5,000 but that there is now a 'Stemming the Flow' initiative in place bringing a number of properties into use. Members were notified that numbers were now around 4,700 and had followed a downward trend over the last 5 months. Members were informed that a graph showing the downward trend would be provided.

A member of the Panel enquired about the ratio of properties that were brought into use for those with disabilities. Comments were made that there were a number of incentives available for empty properties that were adapted that and would be more sustainable in the long term. Information was also requested on the percentage of properties that were being brought back into use for landlords who already had a portfolio of houses. Concern was raised as there are still a number of people who can't afford to bring properties back into use. The Director of

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Regeneration &
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(Interim Assistant
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Regeneration and Environment offered to find the information to respond to the query.

(Interim Assistant Director Strategic Housing)

Regarding contaminated land, some Members expressed concern over land in the Borough that had been contaminated and requested a list to be forwarded to them identifying the land and its purpose. Members were informed that there is a register available and it will be reviewed how the information can be distributed to Members in a suitable format. Members were reassured that the register is taken into account as a statutory consulting tool when planning decisions are made. The Panel was informed that a briefing note would be provided on the process.

Assistant Director of Environment

31. QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT – ST LEGER HOUSING

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 one 2012/13 were either off target or of concern. Panel Members were informed of an error in the report under Paragraph 3. Performance Exceptions Quarter One 2012/13 Theme 1: Value for Money which should have stated that Q2 Target was 1.88% and Q2 Performance: 2.1% and not the other way around.

It was noted that of the 14 Key Performance Indicators contained within the St Leger Annual Delivery Plan, 2 are data only, 1 is an annual indicator, 2 are on target (green), 5 are within tolerance (amber) and 4 are out of target (red).

Regarding SLH KPI 1% of Current Arrears against Annual Debit, Members were informed about the challenges being presented by the new IT system. The Director of Housing Services and Deputy Chief Executive reported that it was necessary to ensure that the IT system is implemented properly and that training is undertaken alongside necessary changes to the system. It was noted that it had not been identified that arrears are changing in light of the new system. There was also a brief discussion around what can be done to tackle those with rent arrears as opposed to anti-social behaviour.

Concern was raised over the closing of three cash offices where payments could be made. Members were informed that the situation had been monitored at Rossington and more recently at Bentley where it had been observed that there had not been any long term impact. It was also reported that there are a number of people calling up the area office to make payments

over the phone and that it would be necessary to wean people off of this method. Overall, it was commented by the Officer that it had been the right decision and that it had not resulted in any overall rise in arrears. It was also commented that more people are going into Libraries to make payments which is positive in terms of increasing the footfall. Concern was raised by a member of the Panel that these new methods of payments were taking away a persons choice. It was noted that although there were fewer alternative methods to pay there were still a number of options but decisions had needed to be made.

Regarding the performance measure, SLH KPI 3 Void Rent Loss (% of rent loss), the Officer reported that although the performance was below target, they were confident that it would be well within the year's target. There was a discussion around the pilot and it was confirmed that it had been successful and would be rolled out to the rest of the Borough by the end of the year.

Finally, there was a discussion about void properties and whether there were any exemption clauses in place. It was commented that there were no exemption clauses but that it was a pure way of reporting figures.

There was a brief discussion around Theme 6; Performance Measure Proportion of Planned Repairs against Responsive an improvement was anticipated before the year end. Concern was expressed that as an initiative about creating decent homes they should be no maintenance or at a least a reduction in repairs. It was responded that there had been no indication of reduction to number of repairs due to a change in the size and nature of updates made to homes. It was also commented that where there are larger families there will be an increased potential number of repairs to be made.

RESOLVED that the Panel

- 1) Note the Quarter two performance information.
- 2) Note actions to deal with performance issues.

32. STATEMENT OF POLICY – GAMBLING ACT 2005

Members were informed that the purpose of report was to update the Panel on the adoption of the 2013 – 2015 'Statement of Policy - Gambling Act 2005' following its triennial review.

It was explained that the Licensing Authority is required, under the Gambling Act 2005 (The Act), to produce a Statement of Policy and to review the Policy every 3 years. Members were

informed that the reviewed Policy must be effective by the 31st January 2013 and that there are three licensing objectives set out in the Act which must be addressed within the Authority's Statutory Gambling Policy.

A Member of the Panel who is also Chair of the Licensing Committee confirmed that the Licensing Committee had considered the Policy and was satisfied with the content.

The Panel was informed that in order to meet one of the licensing objectives set out in the Act, the Council will need to nominate body to protect children from being harmed or exploited by gambling which has been identified as the Safeguarding Children's Board.

There was also a brief discussion about allowing casinos within Doncaster and that the Policy included that there would be no ban on having a casino in Doncaster there has not been a desire for one either.

RESOLVED that the Panel

- 1) Note the reviewed 'Statement of Policy – Gambling Act 2005' with a view to it being adopted by Full Council.

33. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PLAN REPORT 2012/13

Members received a report that updated them on progress with the work plan for 2012/13 and any updates from the last meeting on 3rd September 2012. As a live document the work plan allows the Panel to review it in order to develop and reprioritise items where necessary.

The Panel was informed of some minor changes to the workplan including omission of Gypsy and Travellers Review and potential addition of Empty Properties as part of January's meeting. The Panel was also informed that due to removal of the Tenancy Strategy, Tenancy Policy and Allocations Policy from the November meeting, it had been arranged for a meeting to take place between the Chair and Vice Chair of the Panel and relevant officers in the following week.

Regarding the Environmental Strategy, the Panel was reminded that following a meeting of the working group and recommendations that were made and had been agreed by the Panel, all been accepted and incorporated into the final version of the strategy. An outline of the responses made to the recommendations and how they were addressed were circulated to Panel Members at the beginning of November

2012 but no further comments had been made by Members. The Panel was informed that the strategy would be taken to Cabinet on the 5th December 2012.

The Panel was also reminded of the Careers And Guidance Review that was currently being planned. It was confirmed that a review meeting for the joint working group would be taking place on the 11th December 2012. A scoping form for the review was circulated to the Panel Members at the actual meeting and was duly noted.

The Panel was further reminded about a piece of work being undertaken around housing and that it had been agreed for a working group is established to consider the following piece of work, "How can we improve access to finance for developers to meet our housing target and to assist buyers to purchase their own homes within Doncaster?". Members of the Panel were informed that further scoping work will be undertaken in the near future with a view to undertaking the review early 2013.

RESOLVED that the Panel:

- (1). Note and comment on the revised work plan.
- (2). Note the Annex to Appendix A detailing outcomes and impacts of the Panel's work.
- (3). Receive an update on activities undertaken since the meeting held on 3rd September 2012.
- (4). Note the correspondence between the Executive and the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel including the Environment Strategy and Work and Skills Update.
- (5). Note the scoping form for the joint review being undertaken by Members from the Regeneration and Environment and Schools, Children and Young People 'To Understand And Address Careers Advice And Guidance To Children And Young People Within Doncaster Pre And Post 16' to be circulated at the meeting.
- (6). Note the agenda for the last Enterprising Doncaster meeting that was held on the 29th October 2012.