

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

18TH MARCH 2013

A MEETING of the REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the MANSION HOUSE, DONCASTER on MONDAY 18TH MARCH 2013 at 10 AM

PRESENT:

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

Councillors Monty Cuthbert, Nuala Fennelly, John Shepherd, Monty Cuthbert, David Nevett, Yvonne Woodcock, Ted Kitchen, Bob Ford and Paul Wray.

Invitee: Paul Smillie (Unite)

Also in Attendance:

Peter Davies, Mayor of Doncaster, Councillor Barbara Hoyle and Councillor Cynthia Ransome.

Adam Goldsmith - Head of Service (Local Investment Planning), Julie Crook - Director of Corporate Services and Company Secretary, Ian Brittain - Performance and Improvement Service Manager, Alan Lowther - Policy and Performance Manager, Gill Fairbrother - Assets Manager, Chris Fairbrother - Property Manager, Dave Hazard - Head of Service Major Projects and Assets and Peter Dale, Director of Regeneration and Environment.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from the Councillor Stuart Hardy, Ken Keegan, Deborah Hutchinson and Paul O'Brien (GMB).

ACTION

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

42. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18th MARCH, 2013

RESOLVED that: -

The minutes of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel Meeting held on 18th March, 2013 be

approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4, the Panel agreed to the variation of the order of business that Agenda Item 7 be considered prior to Agenda Item 6 on the agenda. This was in order to accommodate a change of arrival time of Mayor Peter Davies.

43. CAREERS ADVICE AND GUIDANCE REVIEW

Members received an overview of the Careers Advice and Guidance Review that had been recently undertaken by a joint working group consisting of Members from the Regeneration and Environment and Schools, Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

It was explained that the review had been undertaken to 'Understand and Address Careers Advice and Guidance to Children And Young People Within Doncaster Pre And Post 16'.

A recap of the review was provided including that Members of the joint working group were tasked to consider the issue through a site visit on the 6th December 2012 and further detailed discussions on the 11th December 2012 and 11th February 2013.

The Panel considered the draft report and recommendations as detailed below. The recommendations included that: -

1. A report is presented to the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel in autumn 2013 detailing progress with apprenticeship programmes and progress of the Work and Skills Board, following consideration of the proposed Cabinet decision entitled Investing in Apprenticeships, Skills and Jobs.
2. The action proposed for Careers Advice and Guidance School Governor Champions be supported and propose that co-ordinated support package/guidelines be developed to assist all appointed Governors, including local authority Councillors in their role.
3. The programme, actions and priorities of the Work and Skills Board, be supported.
4. The proposed Cabinet decision; Investing in Apprenticeships, Skills and Jobs, be supported.
5. Further investigation is carried out into how the parental role can be further utilised and access can be increased to

career advice and information through the Work and Skills Board programme and actions.

6. The work of the Children and Young People's Management Team in holding the remaining Local Education Authority (LEA) and Academy schools to account with regard to the quality of careers advice and guidance being provided, be supported.
7. The development of a Doncaster Council quality mark to be awarded to trainers/employers, be considered.
8. Consideration is given to what could be applied from the Barnsley IAG network to support Doncaster's programme, bearing in mind the differing landscapes.

The group was further informed that in relation to Recommendation 4. Investing in Apprenticeships, Skills and Jobs, that the decision had since been approved by Cabinet on the 27th February 2013.

RESOLVED that:

- i. The proposed Careers, Advice and Guidance Review recommendation as detailed, be approved; and
- ii. The draft Careers, Advice and Guidance Review Report be approved.

37. VERBAL REPORT FROM MAYOR PETER DAVIES, DEVELOPMENT; TRANSPORT; EQUALITIES AND COHESION; THE COUNCIL'S CHANGE PROGRAMME

Following a briefing note that had been circulated to Panel Members, Mayor Peter Davies, Development; Transport; Equalities and Cohesion; the Council's Change Programme attended the Panel meeting to respond to questions regarding the key priorities and challenges within his area.

As part of the discussion, the following issues were raised: -

- Progress made with Finningley and Rossington Regeneration Route Scheme (FARRRS).
- Don Valley Power Project.
- Expected take-up regarding apprenticeships.
- Promoting tourism through the use of social media.
- North Bridge/bus flows/Park and Ride.
- Progress with developing a world class golf destination in Doncaster.
- Opening of New Performance Venue.
- Current Railway Archiving Projects.

- Dennison House.

In response to a query about when the New Performance Venue would be open, the group was informed that they would be made aware of the planned dates.

Scrutiny Officer

RESOLVED that the Panel:

- Note the update of the priorities as presented by Mayor Peter Davies.

38. COUNCILLOR BARBARA HOYLE, CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

Following a briefing note that had been circulated to Panel Members, Councillor Barbara Hoyle, Portfolio Member for Housing attended the Panel to respond to questions regarding the key priorities and challenges within her area.

Regarding the allocations of pitch costs the Panel was advised that the Council will have to go out to market and that once the submissions are returned then an outline of costs could be provided. It was anticipated that costs will have been reduced that the previous figure of £100,000 has referred to in previous reports. The group was informed that if the new revised costings exceed a certain level then it will need to go back to Cabinet. Regarding the number of large number of gypsy and traveller sites within the Borough, the group was informed that the Mayor had written to the Minister about the approach for Boroughs such as Doncaster with large number of gypsy and traveller sites.

Concern was raised regarding properties that had been empty for a number of years. Reference was made to a property that had been empty for several years where the Council had to spend time chasing the owner to reimburse the costs of cleaning charges etc. It was commented that Section 215, powers have not been used effectively enough in the past but Members assured that this was now being looked into.

A Member complimented the Doncaster Council 'app' but commented that when submitting a report for an empty property it was found that it was already on the system. A request was made for a list of empty properties that had already been recorded in each ward.

Head of Service
(Local Investment
Planning)

It was asked of the 327 empty homes brought back into use (against a target of 300) whether they will be monitored so that they remain in use. It was noted that it is not properties back in use that it's the other properties that are becoming vacant that

are being watched. Reference was made to 'Stemming the Flow of Empty Properties' initiative where information was being disseminated to landlords about what is available to help them.

It was clarified that there were currently 4,700 empty properties which has not significantly changed although there was a downward trend.

Reference was made as to how owners could now be identified very quickly through exemption codes and could now be signposted to suitable schemes such as the St. Leger Landlord Scheme. Through work that had been undertaken with the owners, it was recognised that although landlords would like to do it they do not have the money to do so.

Members were informed that following changes in council tax from the 1st April 2013, by July/August there will be an indication of the number of empty properties/bringing properties back into use and how what impact there will be in the future.

Regarding comparisons with other local authorities the Performance Officer was not aware of any benchmarking data that was available. It was commented that Doncaster Council was not the worst performing council in this area but that it was difficult to compare all local areas as they will have different local issues.

Some of the other issues raised included: -

- Trafalgar House, Carcroft – clarification was provided that it was due to bats as to why the demolition due to be completed by March 2013 has been delayed.

RESOLVED that the Panel:

- (i) Note the update of the priorities for housing presented by Councillor Barbara Hoyle.

39. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT (QTR. 3) 2012/2013 – ST LEGER

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.

It was noted that of the 13 Key Performance Indicators contained within the ADP, 2 were data only, 1 was an annual indicator, 2 were on target (green), 3 were within tolerance (amber) and 5 were out of target (red).

Regarding Rent Arrears, one Member commented that they would expect an increase in rent arrears from April 2013 as a result of the Government Universal Credit Scheme. It was commented that it would be expected to have a massive impact but that the implications cannot be fully realised until the scheme had been rolled out and therefore it had not been built into the targets yet.

Regarding Planned Repairs, it was established that at present, emergency repairs are carried out within a short period of time and other repairs are undertaken on a responsive basis. It was clarified that urgent repairs and scheduled repairs are not done currently done at the same time. A new scheme using the Systems Thinking approach would be rolled out from April 2013 and a booklet will be made available detailing the scheme. The new approach would involve reorganising the work into smaller areas reducing waste such as travelling time.

In respect to 'Bedroom Tax' it was confirmed that foster carers and families of armed services personnel will be exempt from controversial changes to housing benefit

RESOLVED that the Panel:

- i. Note the Quarter three performance actions; and
- ii. Note actions to deal with performance issues.

40. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT (QTR 3) 2012/2013 – DMBC

The Panel was presented with a report which provided them with the financial and performance information for the third quarter of this financial year 2012/13. The report highlighted the main areas of performance that in quarter one 2012/13 were either off target or of concern.

There was a short discussion which made reference to the following issues: -

- Clarification that Metroclean was not overspending but not meeting their targets.
- That employee sickness was good.
- Don Valley Power Park.
- Capital spending and clarification of White Rose Way funding.

A Member of the Panel congratulated the Director of Regeneration and Environment and his team of the excellent work demonstrated through the performance and information reports that contained no reds.

RESOLVED that the Panel:

- i. Note the Quarter 3 Finance and Performance Information.

41. DONCASTER COUNCIL'S ASSETS PORTFOLIO

The Panel received a report on 'Doncaster Council's Assets Portfolio' which was presented to the Panel. The follow areas as included in the report was outlined to Members: -

- A breakdown of the Assets Doncaster Council currently owns.
- Valuation information in respect of the portfolio.
- Opportunities for realisation of asset value.
- Long leaseholds and clawback/overage.

As part of the discussion, a number of issues were raised including: -

- Clarification of whether long term leased properties goes into assets registry.
- Clarification of who owns unadopted roads in the Borough.
- The Councils approach regarding the disposal of its assets (in view of challenges faced from the current economic climate).
- Progress made regarding the final decanting of council buildings such as Council House and Blue Buildings in order to maximise potential cost savings.

A Member of the Panel questioned the availability of such information in an accessible format to Councillors and when it would be available. Although it was understood that the register was a work in progress that would not immediately available it was felt by Members that this is an important resource to Councillors.

RESOLVED that the Panel:

- i. Note the content of the report.
- ii. That an up-to-date register of assets is made available on the Doncaster Council website and intranet as soon as possible.

38. 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 18th January 2013. 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 additions to the workplan including: -

- 19th April 2013 – Waste Depots.
- 25th April 2013 – Doncaster Racecourse Management Company.

The Panel considered the draft recommendations as detailed below that were circulated at the Panel meeting. These were as a result of the informal meeting looking at Access to Finance for House Buyers and Developers that was held on the 28th February 2013 to consider the following questions: -

1. How as a Council can we improve access to finance for developers to meet our housing target; and
2. How as a Council, can we assist buyers to purchase their own homes within Doncaster?

The draft recommendations included: -

1. That further consideration is given to planning policy and land values in order to encourage more development in the Borough.
2. That further investigation should be carried out by Officers as to what is being done by other Local Authorities nationwide, which schemes are proving successful and what could be applied by Doncaster Council.
3. That consideration should be given to raising further awareness and establishing a dedicated resource to provide specialist advice on mortgages and related financial advice.
4. That we review the feasibility and level of risk of Doncaster Council providing mortgages and loans to enable residents within the Borough to purchase their own homes or to act as a guarantor.
5. That a report is brought back to a formal Panel meeting in June 2013 as part of the 2013/2014 workplan outlining various options for proposals and schemes that Doncaster

Council could become involved in. For example, providing 106 free land, purchasing repossessed properties and providing mortgages etc.

There was a short discussion around the 2013/2014 workplan and whether there should be an additional scrutiny panel with the remit of 'Communities' and 'Housing'. Although Members recognised the comprehensive workplan that had been achieved during the current year, it was not supported by some Members that this should be taken forward as a recommendation of the Panel. Regarding suggestions for the 2013/2014 workplan, it was suggested that an e-mail be circulated to Members seeking proposals to be considered.

Scrutiny Officer

RESOLVED that the Panel:

- i. Note and comment on the revised work plan including the extraordinary informal meeting on the 19th April 2013 for the Panel to consider Waste Depots and on the 25th April 2013 regarding the Racecourse Management Company;
- ii. Note the Annex to Appendix A detailing outcomes and impacts of the Panel's work;
- iii. Receive an update on activities undertaken since the meeting held on 22nd January 2013;
- iv. Receive an update on the progress of the workplan of the Panel during the 2012/2013 year;
- v. Note the correspondence between the Executive and the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel regarding Local Development Framework Sites and Policies Development Plan Document;
- vi. Note the minutes of the joint review meeting 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' that was held on the 11th February 2013; and
- vii. Approve the Access to Finance for Housing recommendations as detailed above.