

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

5th DECEMBER, 2013

A MEETING of the REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the CIVIC OFFICE, DONCASTER on THURSDAY 5TH DECEMBER, 2013 at 2.00 PM

PRESENT:

Chair – Councillor Tony Revill

Councillors Bob Ford, Jane Kidd, Ted Kitchen, Chris McGuinness, David Nevett and John Sheppard.

Also in Attendance:

Councillors Mick Jameson and Bill Mordue, Cabinet Member for Highways

Peter Dale (Director of Regeneration and Environment)
Neil Firth, (Head of Service, Transport and Accessibility)
Ian Brittain (St Leger Homes Performance and Improvement Service Manager)
Judith Jones (St Leger Homes, Director Housing Services and Deputy CEO)
Alan Lowther (Policy and Performance Manager)

David Young, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport
Ben Gilligan, First Bus Company
Paul Lynch, Stagecoach Bus Company
Colin Newbury, Arriva Bus Company
Keith McNally, CPT (Confederation of Passenger Transport)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Paul Wray, Richard Cooper-Holmes, Deborah Hutchinson, Ken Keegan, Eric Tatton-Kelly and Yvonne Woodcock.

63. <u>ORDER OF BUSINESS</u>	ACTION
In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4, the Chair proposed that the agenda order be changed to accommodate the late arrival of officers and partners, who had been held up due to the adverse weather conditions.	

<p><u>RESOLVED</u>:- that the agenda order be amended, to the following order:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance and Performance Improvement Quarter 2 2013/14; • Work Plan; • St Leger Homes of Doncaster Quarter 2 Monitorig Report 2013/14; and • Bus Partnership Agreement. 	<p>All to note</p>
<p>64. <u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest were made.</p>	<p>All to note</p>
<p>65. <u>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30th SEPTEMBER, 2013</u></p>	
<p><u>RESOLVED</u> that:- the minutes of the meeting held on 30th September, 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.</p>	<p>All to note</p>
<p>66. <u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS</u></p> <p>There were no statements made.</p>	<p>All to note</p>
<p>67. <u>FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2013/14 QUARTER 2</u></p>	
<p>In support of the written report, the Policy and Performance Manager highlighted the key finance and performance information issues.</p> <p>Finance:</p> <p>It was noted that the revenue projected outturn for 2013/14 would be an underspend of £577k.</p> <p>Housing Revenue Account – was projecting a favourable variance of £4.1m, an increase of £1.2m due to the projected expenditure from the welfare reform fund budget which had received a limited take up. There was also a reduction in the provision for bad debt held for former tenants’ arrears, which currently had not seen a significant increase.</p> <p>Capital: The current outturn position had reduced by £8.49m on the quarter 1 projection. Scheme updates and risks were set out in detail in the report.</p> <p>Performance:</p>	

<p>The key priority progress against the Corporate Plan was addressed in the report with the following areas requiring improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of apprenticeships; • Increase in the number of additional homes to achieve the annual LDF target. It was stressed that it had been expected for property completions to be consistent throughout the year, however, it was lower at the beginning of the year. The issue would continue to be monitored. • Unclassified roads network where maintenance should be considered was 5% higher than the target. • Savings on asset disposals was substantially below what it should ideally be before this period. <p>It was noted that a full review of the Council's enforcement functions was underway and would include services relating to anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>In response to a query by a Member of the Panel, the Policy and Performance Manager confirmed that he would provide data on potential empty property level using the Electoral Roll.</p>	
<p><u>RESOLVED</u> that:- the report, be noted.</p>	<p>All to note</p>
<p>68. <u>WORK PLAN</u></p>	
<p>The Scrutiny Officer outlined the following areas relating to the Panel's work plan:</p> <p><u>Strategy Working Group</u> – the Panel's recommendations and Mayor's response relating to the Cycling Strategy were noted.</p> <p><u>Enterprising Doncaster meeting 24th October, 2013</u> – Councillor Revill explained that this was the first meeting he had attended due to a clash of commitments and outlined how the group was addressing international relations and promoting the Doncaster area, particularly in China. The Scrutiny Officer outlined that the minutes the meeting would be circulated as soon as they had been agreed.</p> <p>In response to a query from a Member, the Panel was advised that Business Doncaster had been launched and had been working successfully for the last 6 months, and highlighting who was investing in the Doncaster area.</p> <p><u>Informal Panel meeting 14th October – Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)</u></p> <p>It was proposed that representatives from Serco, A4E, Job</p>	

<p>Centre Plus and North Doncaster Development Trust be re-invited to address the Panel at an informal meeting on 21st January.</p> <p><u>17th March Panel Meeting</u></p> <p>Members were advised that waste and recycling collection contract was not being considered by the Executive Board until mid January, and it was proposed that the issue be considered by the Panel at it's 17th March, meeting or on an appropriate date to be arranged.</p> <p><u>Strategies</u></p> <p>The following strategies still required consideration and would look to be programmed as follows:</p> <p>Housing Strategy - March Homelessness Strategy - March Local Flood Management – February Food plan – to be advised of progress by the Director of Regeneration and Environment</p> <p><u>Update on Access to Housing Finance Review</u></p> <p>The Panel noted the response on the Housing Finance review from Councillor Glyn Jones.</p> <p><u>Informal Panel meeting</u></p> <p>An informal Panel meeting to consider areas that would be appropriate as in-depth reviews for 2013/14 has been arranged for 7th April, 2014 at 11.00am.</p>	
<p><u>RESOLVED</u> that:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The update, be noted; 2) The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) issue be considered at an informal meeting of the Panel scheduled for 21st January, 2014; and 3) Waste and Recycling collection contract be considered at the Panel's 17th March, meeting or alternative appropriate date; 	Scrutiny Officer
<p>69. <u>ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING</u></p> <p>In accordance with Council Procedure Rule (16)(1) the meeting stood adjourned at 2.15pm to await the arrival of officers from St Leger Homes of Doncaster.</p>	All To Note

70.	<u>MEETING RECONVENED</u>	
	The meeting reconvened at 2.17PM.	All To Note
71.	<u>ST LEGER HOMES OF DONCASTER QUARTER 2 MONITORING REPORT 2013/14</u>	
	<p>The Director of Housing Services outlined that out of the 9 performance indicators contained within the Annual Delivery Plan, 2 were off target.</p> <p>With regards to current rent arrears against annual debit, it was highlighted that it had been difficult to set targets due to it being a new indicator. It was acknowledged that the indicator was off target but in line with other Housing companies across the country. Void rent loss had seen a month on month improvement following developments made with planned viewing and sign-ups and internal communications as a result of moving to a single depot.</p> <p>In response to a query, it was agreed that further details would be provided on the value of void rent loss and how much Council Tax has had to be paid on empty properties.</p> <p>It was acknowledged that the Authority had more 3 than 2 and 1 bedroomed properties which were not currently creating rental problems, however, work was being undertaken to address issues with age designated properties. It was noted that the Welfare benefit support fund was helpful and had proved to be very useful.</p> <p>It was outlined that with regard to sharing tenancies, it was explained that tenants could let a spare bedroom but not sub-let the whole property. It was stressed that if tenants did let a spare room they were responsible for this person's actions whilst in the property and would always recommend that it be discussed with St Leger Homes before doing so. Members noted that there were currently very few formally agreed sub-lettings but probably many informal arrangements being agreed by tenants.</p>	
	<p><u>RESOLVED</u> that:-</p> <p>1) The report, be noted; and</p> <p>2) Information relating to the value of void rent loss and how much Council Tax has had to be paid on empty properties, be provided to Members following the meeting.</p>	Director of Housing Services, St Leger Homes of Doncaster
72.	<u>ADJOURNMENT OF THE MEETING</u>	

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule (16)(1) the meeting stood adjourned at 2.25pm to await the arrival of officers from South Yorkshire Passenger Transport.	
73. <u>MEETING RECONVENED</u>	
The meeting reconvened at 2.30pm	All To Note

74. DONCASTER BUS PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

To support the report circulated with the agenda, two presentations were made to the panel by Neil Firth, Head of Service for Transport and Accessibility and Ben Gillian, Managing Director First South Yorkshire, on behalf of bus operators including Stagecoach, Arriva and Confederation of Passenger Transport.

Areas covered included:

- Developing a voluntary Bus Partnership Agreement to co-ordinate investment by increased priority, higher quality vehicles, more affordable ticketing and better marketing;
- Key requirements including guaranteed journey times and timetable reliability;
- Counter Measures – town centre car parking and price, disruption management e.g. events and road works and winter maintenance;
- Working with operators – traffic management liaison, scheme specific projects, major schemes and pump prime services;
- Existing Bus Priority Measures – North Bridge, Quality Bus Corridor, Park and Ride schemes, tackling hotspots and Balby Road initiatives;
- Partnership Experience;
- Fares and Ticketing – First week ticket reduction, introduction of Amber/Green zones achieving better value for money on regular short journeys, 5% increase on stagecoach network day and week tickets. There was angst amongst young people as they viewed fares as being too expensive. The marketing of good value tickets required improvement, for example the Dearne Valley ticket at a cost of £11.
- Marketing and Promotion – Sheffield experience identified what can be achieved;
- Network – commercially sustainable services, limited duplication between operators, potential growth in the market; and
- Infrastructure – investment requirement by Doncaster MBC, inconsistent and attractive journey times, opening of North Bridge, Opportunities on Thorne Road and Enforcement issues.

Members addressed the following areas in more detail:

Voluntary Partnership Agreement - The political drive had altered following the election of a new Mayor, who wished for a

Bus Partnership Agreement to be developed to create a much stronger and better value bus service in Doncaster. It was noted that operators could not legally agree fares between themselves but changes and innovation could be pursued through Travel Master with Frequency Qualifying Agreements being established under certain circumstances.

It was stressed that Doncaster required investment in all areas including cheaper fares, improved services, an increased rural service whilst being honest about what would make routes commercially viable whilst bearing in mind that available funds were constantly under pressure.

Tackling car parking pricing and taxi fares – this was an extremely sensitive area to address and one that would not be welcomed by the community.

Section 106 monies – the number of additional bus services established through this method was questioned and the period they ran for was something that required investigating. It was noted that operators may choose to remove the service if it was not being utilised. Monies available in the fund had reduced considerably with that for housing, infrastructure and highways being almost used or allocated.

Travel Master tickets – take up was proving to be good whilst they were free but continuation take up was poor.

Park and Ride – a Member of the Panel stated that in relation to the site at Woodhouse being wrongly placed, his opinion remain and stressed that Redhouse should have been used instead. Unfortunately, there was no evidence to support if the facility had been developed at Redhouse, it would have been more frequently used by commuters.

Waiting times and timetabling – concern was expressed that some people were unsure which bus they were actually using due to services either running late or early. It was explained that there were many reasons for timetable fluctuation including roadworks, events, breakdowns and general build up of traffic during rush hours. For example, the opening of North Bridge had increased the amount of traffic using the route and in turn, journey time. It was stressed that when a bus timetable was developed it was very difficult to be exact when programming journey times due to the current road usage and infrastructure and would never be perfect. Strong enforcement would obviously assist with the reduction of car usage in bus lanes. With regard to electronic timetabling at individual bus stops, it was advised that these had an approximate cost of £3,000 per stop.

<p>New Technology Apps – First buses had recently introduced an App for smartphones and was used by some of the Borough’s population but it was a tool that perhaps required a little more marketing.</p> <p>In response to a question by a Member of the Panel, the partners explained that unfortunately they had not been able to use public transport to get to this meeting, however, this was for a variety of reasons including travelling from Northhampton and having to attend a number of meetings across the Yorkshire region. However, they all used public transport when at home and where possible for work purposes ensuring they regularly received the passenger’s perception, which in turn was used to improve services.</p> <p>To conclude it was noted that Doncaster had a high average of non-car users and ensuring the right provision was imperative, whilst understanding the cost of running a bus service to car usage and the challenges faced by Doncaster MBC, SYPTTE and the bus operators.</p> <p>It was considered appropriate that a further update be made available to the panel in the New Year.</p>	
<p><u>RESOLVED</u> that the move to develop a Voluntary Bus Partnership Agreement, be supported.</p>	<p>All To Note</p>

Signed _____

Dated _____