

Minutes of: POLICY TASK GROUP

Date of Meeting: 9 October 2006

PRESENT: Councillor H Steen (in the Chair)
Councillors D Barnes, Entwistle, Hancock,
Thorne, Starkey (substitute for J Pawson)
Mike Lee and Mike Christie (co-opted)

IN ATTENDANCE: Stephen Jackson, Housing Market and Restructuring
Manager
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Barnes and J Pawson

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions were raised under this item.

4. CHAIRS UPDATE

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting explaining that this was the first meeting of the task group within the new pilot arrangements and she explained that as with all of the Task Groups, a report would be presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee.

She informed members that both the Scrutiny Support Officer and Committee Services Manager had been asked to present the new pilot arrangements to the Improvement Board and that feedback had been very positive.

The Chair then updated Members on future reports that would be taken to the Group.

5. STRATEGIC HOUSING SELF ASSESSMENT

The Chair welcomed Stephen Jackson, Housing Market Renewal Manager to the meeting who provided Members with information on the forthcoming Audit Commission Inspection on the Strategic Housing Self Assessment process which was due to take place in December.

The self assessment would be undertaken in 4 parts.

Context which would look at the Council as a whole

Service Area description which was a 20 page report on the different service areas within the Council ie housing strategy, environmental health

Prospects for Improvements which would look at past records of the Council to evidence changes over the last few years

Action Plan to take forward the continued improvements.

The inspectors would be looking at access and customer care through accessibility, opening hours, Council's website etc. Other areas include equality and diversity, value for money, strategic housing and enabling, homelessness and housing advice and all aspects of private sector housing.

There would be a presentation on the draft report to Members and Senior Management. The final report would be presented early-mid January 2007.

A question was raised about whether the report would be presented to the Council and the Housing Market Manager responded by stating that once the report had been presented to the Council it would become a public document. If the Council wanted to challenge the report then there were mechanisms in place. The report would also have a bearing on the CPA which was to be undertaken next year.

Other questions were raised by members in relation to disability grants and homelessness, to which responses were given.

The Chair thanked the Housing Market Renewal Manager for his informative presentation.

Members asked for information on empty homes in the Borough which had previously been provided to Members some time ago.

Resolved:

That the Private Sector Renewal Manager be asked to provide Members with a list of empty homes in the Borough.

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Scrutiny Support Officer tabled Terms of Reference for the Task Group for consideration.

It was agreed that the word 'Monitor' be replaced with 'Review', which was more relevant to the nature of the Task Group.

Resolved:

That subject to the amendment detailed above, the Terms of Reference be approved.

7. FORWARD PLAN

The Task Group considered the items detailed in the Forward Plan and whether they wished for any Policies to be submitted to the Group prior to a decision being made by the Cabinet.

Members requested that the following reports be presented to the Task Group for consideration:-

- i) Environment Strategy
- ii) Enforcement Strategy
- iii) Play Strategy
- iv) Open Spaces Strategy

Resolved:

That the appropriate Heads of Service be invited to future meetings of the Group to present their reports.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 and finished at 8.15pm