

**Minutes of: POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Date of Meeting: 23 February 2010**

**Present: Councillor H Steen, (Chair)  
Councillors Dickinson, Farrington, Forshaw, Morris, Milling  
and C Pilling**

**In Attendance: Steve Jackson, Head of Regeneration  
Stephen Stray, Planning Unit Manager  
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer**

**Also Present: 2 Members of the public**

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No Apologies were submitted.

**2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

**Resolved:**

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 25 January 2010 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

No urgent items were raised.

**5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No questions were raised by members of the public. The Chair agreed to allow the member of public present to raise questions as the reports were discussed.

**6. CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair informed Members that in relation to Item 9 of the minutes of the last meeting – National Statement Policy, the Principal Planner, Forward Planning provided members with a copy of a letter sent to the Government in response to the consultation, which included comments made by Members at the meeting.

Item D1. Enforcement Policy Review – Licensing had been withdrawn from the agenda and would be presented to the next meeting in June, along with the Enforcement Policy Review of Revenue and Benefits.

## 7. DRAFT ROSSENDALE VACANT PROPERTY STRATEGY

The Head of Regeneration presented the report of the initial draft of the revised Vacant Property Strategy.

Although much progress had been made in addressing the number of long term vacant properties within the Borough, the level of empty homes remained above the average for the North West. Officers had been working on the development of a pro-active approach to reducing the number of empty properties which would also include actions to address the growing number of empty commercial properties.

The Strategy outlined the new approach which was based on providing a more co-ordinated approach to instigating direct action, working in partnership with external agencies to find appropriate solutions and raising awareness amongst those services that were active within the wider community.

It also outlined the options for direct action, either through the use of s215 powers or compulsory purchase, where owners of a vacant property were not responsive.

An Empty Homes Task Group had been established with Officers from the Communities Team, Legal and Regeneration to work on the Strategy.

Members suggested that it would be beneficial if they had a list of empty homes in their ward and the Head of Regeneration agreed to look into setting up a database to enable Members to receive the information.

A number of questions were raised by both Members and the public to which the Head of Regeneration responded, as follows:

- Obligations of Estate Agents to notify the Council of long term empty homes
- Available funding
- Delays in s215 actions
- Frustration of not always being able to have the information needed on owners of properties

There was a suggestion that the timescales of 21 days for property owners to respond to letters sent by the Council should be reduced to 14 days.

Members welcomed the Strategy as a much needed document for the Council.

### **Resolved:**

1. That Members send their comments on the Strategy to the Head of Regeneration by the end of April in advance of its wider circulation.
2. That a further update be presented to the Committee in September, to include homes that have been vacant for 2 years and the actions being taken.
3. That the final Vacant Property Strategy be presented to the Committee in June prior to Cabinet in July.

## **8. ADOPTION OF SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD) – CONVERSION AND RE-USE OF BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

The Planning Unit Manager explained that the SPD was intended to provide guidance to applicants, agents and all others involved in the preparation and submission of planning applications for the re-use and conversion of buildings in the countryside. Approval was sought from Cabinet in July 2009 to consult on the draft version of the SPD.

Following the period of consultation the Council received 23 representations from numerous statutory bodies. Although no significant changes had been made as a result of the representations, there had been some word changes and inclusion of information.

Comments had also been received on the Sustainability Appraisal, indicating that no changes were required to the policies.

A number of questions were raised which the Planning Manager responded, including:

- Length of time from start to finish for the adoption of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

The Planning Manager requested Members to ask Council to recommend that future minor amendments to this SPD be delegated to the Planning Manager. Members asked for clarification on the definition of 'minor amendments'.

### **Resolved:**

1. That the information contained in the report and accompanying documents be noted.

## **9. UPDATE ON THE EVIDENCE BASE FOR THE CORE STRATEGY**

The Planning Unit Manager provided an update on the progress of the studies undertaken to inform the Core Strategy, which were as follows:

- Strategic Flood Risk Management
- Retail and Town Centre Study
- Employment Land Study
- Wind Energy in the Landscape Study
- Renewable Energy Potential Study
- Tourism Study

All these studies were in the final stages and would be ready soon for publication on the Council's website. It was not expected that other studies would need to be commissioned from outside consultants, unless advised to as the Core Strategy progressed or directed to by the Planning Inspectorate.

The Planning Manager indicated that the Committee received regular updates on the different stages of the Core Strategy.

The Planning Manager agreed to send Members a revised timetable for the Core Strategy.

**Resolved:**

1. That Members note the information.
2. That a further report be presented to the Committee in June when the results of the studies have been published, prior to presentation to Cabinet in July.

**10 FORWARD PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1<sup>ST</sup> MARCH TO 30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2010**

The Scrutiny Support Officer indicated that the following policies were being presented to the next meeting in June 2010 and asked Members if there was any other specific Policies they would like to see before they were presented to Cabinet/Council.

- Cemetery Policy
- Enforcement Review Policies – Taxi and Revenue and Benefits
- Redundancy Policy
- Green Travel Plan
- Core Strategy

Members asked that the Tourism Strategy and the Homelessness Option Review be considered at a future meeting, time permitting.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.55pm

Signed .....  
(Chair)

Date .....