

## **POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Date of Meeting:** 12 September 2011

**Present:** Councillor J Oakes (Chair)  
Councillors Essex (substituting for Driver), Kenyon, McInnes,  
Milling, Pilling and Smith (substituting for Steen)

**In Attendance:** Rachel Fletcher, Conservation Officer  
Rebecca Lawlor, Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager  
Cathy Lord, Strategic Housing and Partnership Officer  
Janice Crawford, Finance Manager  
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

1 Member of the public

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### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Driver, Steen and Keith Pilkington (co-opted Member) and Councillor MacNae, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration.

### **2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

**Resolved:**

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 1 August 2011 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Councillor Essex asked for clarification on the reason why the Rawtenstall Conservation Area Appraisal was not taken to Cabinet in August. The Chair confirmed that she had asked the Portfolio Holder the same question who responded by saying that, as Rawtenstall and Bacup are our two candidates for a townscapes heritage initiative bid, then it makes sense to bring them forward at the same time and to consider the plans in that context.

### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Smith declared a personal interest in item D2 as his mother lives in Chatterton.

### **4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

No urgent items were raised.

### **5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Chair agreed to deviate from the Procedure for Public Speaking and allow the member of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

## 6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair asked Members if they were in agreement to Emma Hussain providing an awareness session on the policy development and community impact assessment process and what Councillors need to be looking at. This session would commence at 6pm prior to the start of the next meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> October. It was agreed to send a reminder of the new start time to all Members.

In relation to the concerns raised at the last meeting about the amount of money owed to the Council, it was agreed that the Committee receive details of the process for debt collection, particularly in relation to how the Exchequer office deal with overdue charges for Work in Default.

The Chair welcomed the Finance Manager to the meeting to explain the process in more detail. A briefing paper had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Concern was raised by Members that the Council are owed £300k which they found very difficult to understand within the current financial climate.

The Finance Manager explained that those debts written off were from many years ago, with £134k before January 2000.

Officers were confident that detailed costs were collated accurately to support debt collection and billed to house-holders promptly on completion of work. In cases where officers fail to identify owners of the property, invoices cannot be issued and recovery relies on the Local Land Charges Register searchers if the property is ever sold in the future.

It is the legal department who determine whether the value of a debt is worth pursuit through the courts. Where a course of action is not cost-effective the debt is written off in the financial system but the charge would remain on the land charges Register awaiting future sale.

It was agreed that all departments within the Council should be working to the same process and therefore a working group should be established, made up of officers from each department so that they are aware of the process and the right notice to be served.

The Finance Manager indicated that a joint meeting was to be held between finance and legal. The Committee asked that an Officer from legal attend the next meeting to explain the legal process and provide details of the outcome of the joint meeting.

Resolved:

That an Officer from Legal be invited to the next meeting in October to explain the legal process for collection of debts.

## **7. IMPACT OF HOUSING REFORMS ON STRATEGIC HOUSING**

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager and the Strategic Housing and Partnership Manager gave a presentation on the impact of housing reforms on strategic housing.

Members were informed of the changes which had occurred since May 2010 and the impact these changes had made on strategic housing, including the loss of Single Capital Housing Budget.

There was a discussion on the Supporting People element which focuses on preventative services (sheltered housing, community alarms, homelessness support services). Since April 2010 the money for the Supporting People budget had not been ring-fenced.

A question was asked about Governance arrangements for Clare House (now known as 1 Queen Street) and the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager explained that the Council would be the landlord with the Support Provider (currently Stonham, part of the Home Housing Group) being responsible for the Housing Management and day to day maintenance and repairs of the scheme. Landlord Rossendale would have greater influence over the Support Services contract and the Housing Management element which would improve the scheme going forward. It is anticipated that quarterly reports will be presented through Covalent on the improvements at Queen Street and the team have implemented 6 weekly meetings with the Support Provider, Police and Lancashire County Council to drive this improvement forward. It was agreed that an update on this new building would be presented to Overview and Scrutiny in the future.

The Strategic Housing and Partnership Manager explained that the homelessness service had now been brought back in-house and 301 clients had had a face to face interview in the One Stop Shop. The Council had previously received £40,000 of ring fenced funding for preventative measures from Central Government and while Central Government had identified that homelessness was still an issue and had raised the funding element to £80,000, the ring fencing element had been removed and this £80,000 had gone into a wider corporate budget. Homelessness prevention was currently being undertaken through “rolled forward funding” from previous homeless directorate funding, however it was anticipated that these reserves would be depleted next year and funding would be required to support the work of the service.

Resolved:

That the Committee note the information received and the Officers were thanked for their informative presentation.

## **8. CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL, BOUNDARY REVIEWS AND MANAGEMENT PROPOSAL PLANS**

The Conservation Officer presented a further four Conservation Area Character

Appraisals and the Management Proposal Plans associated with the Appraisals which included proposals for the revision of Conservation Area boundaries.

There is a duty on local authorities to determine which parts of the area are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance and to designate them as conservation areas.

The Council lacked the necessary Appraisals and Management Proposal Plans and in 2009 a successful application was made to English Heritage for financial support towards the preparation of the documents. It was a condition of the grant that these were prepared by a specialist consultant who was appointed through a competitive tender process.

The four documents presented to the Committee were, following a period of consultation, ready to present to Cabinet for adoption. Boundary changes had been recommended for Cloughfold, Chatterton/Strongstry and Irwell Vale.

As part of the 6 week consultation there were launch events but the Conservation Officer indicated that Fallbarn consultation was different because it had been designated in 2007, and in 2008 a conservation appraisal had been undertaken with the associated engagement and consultation with stakeholders. This was an opportunity for reviewing and revising the existing appraisal to bring it in line with the others being produced (in layout, topics etc) and targeted consultation was deemed sufficient.

Some changes had been made to the Conservation Appraisals since the last set of documents had been presented to the Committee. These changes were to words such as 'will', which were being replaced with 'should'.

A member raised concern that there were errors within the Chatterton/Strongstry Conservation Appraisal document which he felt were factually incorrect in many places and should not be for public release at this time.

The following questions were raised by Members to which the Conservation Officer responded.

- Whilst it was good to have these documents, they would need 'policing' and what support would there be?
- Clearer information about the control of satellite dishes and what this would mean to those who live in a conservation area to ensure that people are given the right messages

It was agreed that Councillor D Smith would meet with the Conservation Officer to go through the Chatterton/Strongstry Conservation Appraisal in more detail.

It was also agreed that it was important that the Legal Department knew of the concerns and that they should ensure that information and views are acceptable in all the documents.

It was also suggested that the Civic Trust and all Members in the particular wards where there are Conservation Appraisal Documents are given another opportunity

to comment on the contents of the documents.

Resolved:

1. That the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that the Conservation Area Character Appraisals for the Conservation Areas of Irwell Vale, Chatterton/Strongstry, Higher Cloughfold and Fallbarn be adopted as material consideration for development control purposes with effect from 27<sup>th</sup> October 2011, subject to further discussions with the Legal Department, Civic Trust and relevant Ward Members.
2. That the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that authorisation be given for the recommended actions within the related Management Proposals Plans to be developed, and where necessary, brought back to Council for specific approval for their incremental implementation as resources allow, including the re-designation of Conservation Area boundaries and serving of Article 4 directions, where these are recommended within these documents.
3. That the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that all future minor amendments to the Appraisal and Management Proposal Plans to be delegated to the Director of Business in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

## 9. FORWARD PLAN

The Scrutiny Support Officer presented the up-to-date Forward Plan, but it was agreed that there were sufficient items for the next meeting.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.55pm

Signed .....  
(Chair)

Date .....