

POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 15th October 2012

Present: Councillor J Oakes (Chair)
Councillors Ashworth (substituting for Hughes), Bleakley,
Creaser, Eaton (substituting for Milling), Kenyon, Pilling

In Attendance: Phil Seddon, Head of Finance and Property Services
Rebecca Lawlor, Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager
Councillor Barnes, Leader of the Council
Councillor Marriott, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources
Councillor Jackson, Portfolio Holder for Housing and
Environmental Health
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

3 Members of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Hughes and Milling, Keith Pilkington, Co-opted Member and Fiona Meechan, Director of Customer and Communities.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 10th September 2012 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

There were no urgent items of business

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

A question was asked about the location of Lodge Terrace which the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager responded.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair informed Members that a working group had been established, as agreed at the last meeting, in relation to the Commercial Enforcement business

plans and would be meeting shortly.

7. ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

The Head of Finance provided an interim update on options available to the Council regarding efficient use of its operational and surplus buildings. The current consultation regarding the relocation of the One Stop Shop to Future Park continues and would be subject to a separate report in November.

A report to Cabinet in June 2012, identified a number of surplus operational buildings which do not impact on current customer services. Officers had consulted with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources and Regeneration, Tourism and Leisure on the proposed course of action on each of the following buildings.

- a) Ex Town hall, Rawtenstall
- b) Liberal Club, Rawtenstall
- c) 29-45 Kay Street, Rawtenstall
- d) 3, 5 & 6 Lodge Terrace, Rawtenstall (ex CPO residential properties)
- e) Stubbylee Hall, Bacup

The Head of Finance informed the Committee that they would be seeking the transfer of Stubbylee to Futures Park in due course.

A copy of the potential layout of the one stop shop was circulated to Members and the Head of Finance explained the proposals in more detail, indicating that a scrutiny task and finish group had been established to look in more detail at the future proposals.

Members asked a number of questions as follows, which the Head of Finance responded.

- In relation to Stubbylee and the possibility of seeking a partner or tenant – where would the profits go? The Head of Finance indicated that any profits made would help the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- Would Barnfield be interested in the development opportunity? The Head of Finance indicated that they had not yet had a first operational meeting with Barnfield, but would be top of the agenda.
- Would it be possible to invite Barnfield to a scrutiny meeting? The Leader of the Council indicated that a Joint Venture Board had been established and it would be 12-18 months before the Council would know what was being taken forward, after full consideration by the Board. Information would then be filtered back to members.
- Promotion of STAN the van needed.
- Are the Council wanting to replicate what is already in the One Stop Shop? The Head of Finance responded that in the first instance they want to duplicate and enhance what is there. A private interview room would be an improvement.
- A member of the public asked for a copy of the covenant for Stubbylee and the Head of Finance agreed to seek advice on this.
- Could the Council's surplus buildings be utilised with the housing projects of the Council? The Head of Finance indicated that this could be a possibility.

In relation to the number of surplus buildings, the Chair asked if the Committee could have sight of the full list, which the Head of Finance agreed to send.

A question was asked as to whether the Council had considered using 'Property Guardian', which look after empty homes and commercial premises on behalf of owners, to which the Head of Finance indicated could be a possibility.

Resolved:

1. That Members note the proposed course of action as highlighted in the report, which will be presented to Cabinet on 17th November and recommend to Cabinet that delegated authority be given to the Head of Finance, and Director of Business in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.
2. That following the consultation on the One Stop Shop, a further report be presented to Policy Overview and Scrutiny, followed by Cabinet with their recommendations being presented to Council in December 2012.

8. LINKEDUP PROGRAMME

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager gave a presentation on the Linked Up Programme, with Rossendale taking the lead on the submission and receiving £4.8m funding for Pennine Lancs from the HCA.

The new scheme is headed up by Rossendale on behalf of the 5 Pennine Lancashire local authorities (Burnley, Pendle, Rossendale, Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn), plus 4 Housing Associations - Together Housing Group (Green Vale Homes, Twin Valley and Housing Pendle) and Calico. Together Housing Group also have a new rental product called My Front Door and manage the Pennine Lancashire Choice Based Letting System, "B-with-us". The funding is to bring 474 empty homes across Pennine Lancashire back into occupation within the next 3 years. The contract is yet to be signed to begin the scheme but this is imminent and work has started in contacting owners and undertaking valuations and survey work.

Rossendale Council were the lead Council, with Together Housing Group (the main delivery agent). There were 6,500 empty homes across Pennine Lancashire.

Each local authority have local contractors i.e plumbers, builders etc, which helps keep prices low and the aim of the scheme would be to utilise local authority suppliers list, rather than block contracting to a larger provider

Together Housing set up a social enterprise to deliver 300 empty properties back into use over Pennine Lancashire offering the following:

Leasing options for homeowners (5 or 10 year lease)

The programme offers to lease the property from the owner for 5 or 10 years and Together Housing invests up to £10k-£15k with the assistance of HCA grant funding. The property is brought up to a rentable standard and advertised for rent on the open market at 80% OMR. There may be a small rental income available for the owner throughout the lease period and the property is managed by the Together Housing Group for the duration of the 5 or 10 year period. At the end of the lease period, the property is returned to the owner.

Purchase and Repair

Together Housing Group purchase and refurbish the property to decent homes standards and then offer it for sale via My Front Door, or lets the property via B-With-Us choice based letting scheme.

The final option, is a Private Leasing Scheme

The Homeowner enters into a lease with a private sector leasing company that guarantees a rental income for the property and the rent collected pays off the cost of any works required in the first instance. The owner then receives the full rental income or part rental income (depending if they have received a loan from the funding pot). The leasing agent will undertake all maintenance and repairs; underwrite voids; source tenants and manage tenant issues such as housing benefit issues and ASB etc. The lease can be for 3-10 years.

As part of the 474 empty homes, Rossendale are committed to do 120 homes within the next 3 years, with money available to underwrite CPOs. The Council has sent letters to the 120 properties and 14 have currently been assessed for the linked up scheme.

The Council had already identified 25 homes that they can CPO and they are tendering with Solicitors to do these and the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager will have to provide a statement for each of these homes so the CPOs can go forward.

A number of questions were raised, which the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager responded.

Resolved:

That all Members welcomed the scheme and the Chair thanked the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager for the informative presentation.

9. FORWARD PLAN

The Scrutiny Support Officer informed the Committee that the following reports would be presented to the next meeting.

- Abolition of Council Tax Benefit and replacement with a Local Scheme
- Consultation Update including the One Stop Shop
- Gambling Policy Update
- Flyposting Policy

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.40pm

Signed(Chair)

Date