

HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMISSION

24 MAY 2012 AT 6.30 PM

PRESENT: Mr MR Lay - Chairman

Mr PR Batty, Mr MS Hulbert, Mr DW Inman, Mr K Morrell, Mrs S Sprason and Miss DM Taylor (for Mrs L Hodgkins)

Officers in attendance: Rebecca Owen, Steve Atkinson, Michael Brymer, Louisa Horton, Sharon Stacey and Simon Wood

21 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bessant, Mrs Hall, Mr Hall, Hodgkins, Ladkin and Nichols, with the substitution of Councillor Taylor for Councillor Hodgkins authorised in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.1.

22 MINUTES

RESOLVED – the minutes of the meeting held on 19 April 2012 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared at this stage.

24 CARE FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

Due to the invitee being unable to attend, it was agreed that this item be deferred to the next meeting.

25 SUPPORTING NEW HOUSING INITIATIVES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Members were advised of the opportunities and options with regard to improving services and supporting the provision of new and improved affordable housing in the Borough. Discussion was split into five areas.

In introducing the Housing Investment Strategy and Business Plan five key aims of the council house service were outlined. These included investment in existing stock, investing in new build schemes/acquisition of affordable housing, refurbishment of stock which no longer met needs, environmental improvements and investment in service delivery. Key pieces of work would take place during 2012/13 including validation of stock condition information and consultation with tenants and future tenants. The results of this work would enable members to make decisions on priorities and future investment.

With regard to the section of the report on Affordable Rent evidence base and Affordable Rent policy, the following points were raised:

- Developers were having problems engaging with RSLs, perhaps due to lack of available funding or the situation with affordable rent;
- There were opportunities for developers to build on plots of land as an alternative to rural exception sites;

- There was concern about how to prevent high levels of rent arrears due to the changes in the way benefits were paid. Whilst there were options which provided flexibility, officers shared these concerns;
- Although the housing waiting list was continuously increasing, this by itself was not a full reflection of need as not everyone in need registered onto the waiting list. Some work was needed to encourage people to register, particularly for housing in rural areas which gave precedence to local people;
- The number of requests for homelessness advice had increased by 180% over the last few years;
- The importance of Parish & Town Councils undertaking Housing Needs Surveys;
- The encouragement for communities to build property (ie the Government's 'Community Right to Build' scheme).

The Affordable Housing delivery plan was then discussed, including how council-owned sites were used and whether the authority should take on the role of 'builder' itself. Whilst some Members felt that there was no need for local authorities to build housing when developers were struggling to engage with RSLs to take on the housing they had built, the importance of considering all options was reiterated. The need to consider building bungalows and extra care schemes was also highlighted.

It was reported that an opportunity had become available through the Homes and Communities Agency to bid for an Empty Homes Grant. The private sector housing team, had been successful in securing £522,120 in order to bring 40 long term empty private properties back into use over the next 3 years.

With regard to the prevention of homelessness due to mortgage arrears, it was reported that due to the high performance of the team in preventing homelessness, a grant of £50,015 had been awarded, which was £20,000 more than had been awarded to any other authorities in the county. It was reported that the mortgage rescue scheme would continue. It was suggested that accessing the services of the credit union should be encouraged for people struggling to pay their mortgage.

Members felt that these current opportunities, which had for the most part been possible due to the performance of the housing team, should be maximised and work should be commenced on all areas as soon as possible.

RECOMMENDED – that the Council

- (i) works with developers to acquire properties for council housing as a priority;
- (ii) makes decisions and commences work as soon as possible on the Council Housing Investment Strategy to avoid the risk of funding being withdrawn by the Government;
- (iii) proactively seeks to make use of rural exception sites and the exploration of purchasing and building on agricultural land;
- (iv) ensures S106 monies are used to meet housing need;
- (v) becomes more active as a Registered Provider;
- (vi) explores which build types were required to meet need;
- (vii) fully supports the development of a private sector leasing scheme;

- (viii) considers the potential for and implications of borrowing more to bring more empty private sector properties back into use;
- (ix) explores the possibility of a partnership with the credit union to support people facing housing debt.

26 WASTE STRATEGY 2011

The Scrutiny Commission received a report which informed Members of the Leicestershire Municipal Waste Management Strategy (LMWMS) Update 2011. Concern was expressed with regard to the lack of progress in rolling out the collection of food waste. In response it was reported that it was not economically viable for Leicestershire County Council to roll out the collections, and it would not be affordable for this authority to do so by itself.

27 WASTE COLLECTION POLICY

Members received a report which sought support for the Wheeled Bin and Containers Policy. Aspects of the report were highlighted, for example changes to legislation, assisted collections, additional waste, educating users to avoid contamination, charging for damaged containers and the intention to include a requirement in the Community Infrastructure Levy for developers to pay for the cost of bins for new developments.

A Member asked whether wood could be collected and used for fuel or energy for power stations. In response it was noted that wood from voids was re-used, but that insufficient wood was produced to make kerbside collections worthwhile. However consideration would be given to providing a large container in certain locations once a month. It was also suggested that the same approach could be taken for metal, although the potential for theft of such material prior to collection was also highlighted.

Discussion ensued regarding inconsistent provision in some areas of red bags for clothes recycling, and it was agreed that the contractor would be requested to distribute further bags throughout the Borough.

28 ANNUAL RURAL AREAS REVIEW

Members received the annual rural areas review report. It was requested that future reports contain only items relating to the rural areas.

Two points were highlighted – dog fouling and sale of cars on the roadside. It was stated that these were major problems and that progress was difficult, but that further efforts would be made to address these issues.

29 SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2012-13

It was agreed that consideration of the future work programme be deferred to the following meeting when more Members would be present.

30 FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE AND COUNCIL DECISIONS

Consideration was given to the latest Forward Plan.

31 MINUTES OF MEETING MONDAY, 26 MARCH 2012 OF FINANCE, AUDIT & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

The minutes were noted.

32 MINUTES OF THE BARWELL & EARL SHILTON SCRUTINY GROUP

The minutes were noted.

(The Meeting closed at 8.29 pm)

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CHAIRMAN