

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 9th February, 2016

Present: Councillor A Robertson (Chair)
Councillors Janet Eaton, Haworth, Kenyon, Lythgoe, McMahon,
Oakes, Sandiford and Smallridge

In Attendance: James Sommerville, Cosy Homes in Lancashire
Heather Mullins, Housing Team Officer
Bethan Frost, Conservation Officer
Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager

Councillors Ashworth and Lamb
1 member of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Bleakley (Councillor Oakes sub), Hughes (Councillor Smallridge sub) and Steen.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

4. 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.

5. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair informed the Committee of the following:

The minutes from the previous meeting held on the 1st February were not available at the time of the agenda being published. Therefore they would be going to the next meeting on 29th February for approval.

6. COSY HOMES IN LANCASHIRE PRESENTATION

James Sommerville, Cosy Homes in Lancashire (CHiL) Development Manager gave a presentation and updated members on the CHiL project. In addition, he brought their attention to the following:

- Blackpool was the lead authority on the CHiL project.

- All authorities in Lancashire had signed an agreement to participate in the project.
- It was a 1 year pilot.
- The aim was to reduce energy bills, create warm homes, reduce carbon emissions, but the main focus was on health and wellbeing.
- Each authority has at least one person involved.
- Cold homes were a big issue.
- 3069 homes in Rossendale were classified as being in fuel poverty.
- Rossendale Council were 124th in the fuel poverty listings.
- There was quite a narrow definition of fuel poverty mainly around not being able to afford to heat your home if it was maintained between 18-21 degrees, but there were other aspects as well.
- Many had issues around fuel bills.
- Cold could exacerbate medical conditions especially with the elderly.
- NHS keeps statistics on this.
- Approx. 20 elderly people in Rossendale die each year according to those statistics.
- There are other conditions as well such as asthma, mental health problems, depression, etc.
- For some there is a choice between eating and heating.
- There have been a few schemes in place such as the Energy Company Obligation scheme (ECO) and Green Deal.
- Everyone has a bit of money taken out of their electricity bill which goes towards schemes such as these.
- A percentage is added to the bill and the total is around £700 million a year. It was 1.3 billion but this has dropped.
- There was funding for first time central heating systems.
- There was support for tariff switching and energy advice.
- Local authorities were at the front end in terms of advertising.
- A managing agent (Firefly Energi) was taking calls and instructing installers.
- ECO funding was specific: it had to be classed as in fuel poverty, claiming certain benefits and there was a carbon element for each property.
- They would be moving away from the carbon element towards affordable warmth.
- Energy providers tended to cherry pick work, but they were trying to avoid this and make it as accessible as possible.
- Energy providers could generate a surplus from cherry picking works, but the aim was to balance this out, so they could help more people.
- Firefly Energi was the point of contact for members of the public.

Members and members of the public discussed the information presented as follows:

- How much came off each bill towards the schemes, how is it worked out?
- How do you target people and how can they access it?
- How is it being monitored?
- Do they do any cold calling?
- Would they not be eligible if they were not on pension credit?

- Who monitors the quality of the work, or what happens if the treatment creates more problems than it solves, who is responsible?
- Is everything documented, even day to day records?
- How long had the project been running?
- Does anyone check whether callers are eligible for pension credit?
- Is insulation not free for everyone anyway?
- The figures in Rossendale showed only 4 had enquired and there had been no installations.
- We've got to get out and tell people about it.
- How does this work when someone has a private landlord?
- What about informing doctors surgeries as GPs need to be on board?
- There would be a Health and Wellbeing meeting on Friday where they would be able to promote it.
- It had also been promoted at STIR last week.
- Can we not promote it through the Council Tax letters that go out?
- There were extra costs to adding information to the Council Tax information.
- Was the project time limited?

In response to questions from members and members of the public, the Development Manager responded as follows:

- Not sure how the money taken from electricity bills was worked out, but this would be looked into.
- There had been a lot of work done around trading standards and installers had to sign up to a certain level of quality.
- Funding would only be released if installation was done properly.
- There was no cold calling.
- ID badges were arranged and workers would not turn up unannounced as appointments were made.
- They were working with partner authorities and organisations to raise awareness of the scheme.
- To check eligibility they would have to phone up and go through the criteria with them as they could mix and match, and blend funding.
- Sometimes the funding doesn't cover the full cost.
- The guarantee depends on the type of work carried out, but there is a guarantee for all work. For the phone scheme Blackpool Council has the ultimate responsibility. In relation to the work, the standards are high and checked by the scheme and Ofgem.
- SSE, energy companies and Ofgem had the legal oversight.
- The customer service and softer side were responsibility of the scheme, but installers and energy companies had the responsibility for the rest.
- A customer service exercise would be undertaken.
- The project started 1st September, but they had only been installing from December onwards.
- Age UK and CAB would check the whole package including other benefits, but this wouldn't be checked if they rang straight through to the call centre.
- Under energy company and other projects, insulation was only free if the property was right e.g. not had any insulation before, cavities weren't too narrow etc.

- If someone had a private landlord they would need the home owner's permission if they were eligible for the project.
- Referrals could be tracked through the back office system.
- Some Councils were advertising through their magazines.
- It was expected that the project would continue after September for possibly 2 years then funding would change, but it was likely that there would be something for the next 5 years.

The Housing Team Officer informed that she was currently going out to other agencies to make them aware of the project such as CAB, Credit unions, Children's Centres and Homestart. They were also trying to promote to vulnerable people and looking at how Blackburn were targeting specific areas using information on eligible properties. Information was currently on the web site with the referral form and contact number for Firefly Energi. Environmental Health were working with the Housing Options Team and Private Sector to come forward with referrals and pass them to the managing agent. The project would be promoted at the Health and Wellbeing Meeting as this was important to the NHS in improving health, as it cost them billions.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

7. CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The Conservation Officer provided members with an overview of the report and requested Overview and Scrutiny Committee to recommend Cabinet approval of the Conservation Strategy 2016 -2021, along with delegating any future minor amendments to the Planning Manager in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

The following information was brought to the committee's attention:

- The Conservation Strategy 2016 -2021 was an update of the 2010 strategy.
- The 2010 strategy had been part funded by Historic England and identified their expectations and what they wanted the authority to cover.
- This information had been fed into the new strategy where it was still relevant, and ensured we were fulfilling our statutory duties.
- The Council must have access to conservation-based planning advice.
- There was a duty to contribute to the formulation of conservation-based planning policies in the Local Plan.
- Other documents alongside the Conservation Strategy would be updated if required to ensure they were in line with conservation needs e.g. Shopfront design, Historic Windows and Doors Guidance.
- Conservation Area Appraisals were used when submitting planning applications and were used by officers to make sure applications fell in line with conservation requirements.
- Local Authority Owned Heritage Assets had been omitted from the strategy, and members were asked to include this information (which was circulated at the meeting).

Members and members of the public discussed the report as follows:

- How much match funding was there for Bacup THI?
- What happens when things go wrong subsequently? Can grant funding or match funding be held back for further repairs or emergencies?
- Projects are short term and don't work like that.
- Some premises owners will have paid 10% of the costs for repairs and received a 90% grant for the rest of the work, they should therefore take responsibility for any ongoing maintenance and repairs to their property.
- They have had a good deal using tax payers money, practically free of charge.
- Appendix 2 page 6 action not being taken forward, would we always be a consultee even on Lancashire County Council (LCC) applications?
- Advising members on the borough's at risk assets is ongoing, but how do you determine whether it is at risk and what is at risk?
- How do we define what's worth keeping?
- Do we also have a list of locally important buildings?
- Where do we go to look at the Grade II listed at risk register and the other important buildings?
- It's not just buildings, there are things like free standing graves as well.
- Civic Trust has concern over war memorials.
- Chapels and gardens were listed.
- Can you tell what garden features to look for?
- Maintenance of old graves?
- Graves belong to the family.
- Some monuments are listed.
- Graves have local history relevance.
- Is it possible to see the local list as well?
- If something is a listed building or on the local list, it is a material planning consideration.
- There are also bridges, cart tracks on the moors, gas heads, gate posts etc.
- There is an action in the strategy for the register to be in the One Stop Shop, is it available?
- Historic England was keen to come up with the list, but not maintain anything.
- Heritage open days were good for looking round buildings of interest.
- Bacup centre has an Article 4, how do we communicate this?
- What about a sign into Bacup?
- Could signs be done at the end of the THI project?

In response to questions from members and members of the public, the Conservation Officer responded as follows:

- LCC provided match funding for Bacup THI as well as Rossendale.
- With projects all funding, including match funding, must be spent within the timescales of the project, and all physical works must have taken place before the project end date.

- Projects have certain criteria that must be met, they will want to see a visible change and all funds accounted for before of the project deadline.
- Conditions for agreeing to project work included the requirement of the owner to “maintain thereafter.”
- We would fulfill our statutory duties by providing a consultation response on relevant LCC applications.
- The Council submits data to Historic England once a year for their database on at risk Grade I and Grade II* buildings, Grade II listed places of worship, and conservation areas at risk.
- The Grade II at risk list is maintained in house and we could look into putting it online, however we would need to check with legal regarding identifying the owners.
- There are currently 270-280 buildings listed in Rossendale, but the strategy also proposes a local list.
- There is a need to know if a local list would be adopted, but access to the Grade II listed buildings is online.
- At the moment there is funding available for war memorials.
- Some designed landscapes are listed, such as deliberately designed Victorian gardens with romantic views.
- If anyone wants to view a designed landscape it could be arranged with an officer.
- Some monuments and graves are listed but some depend on whether they are consecrated or not. There would be a need to speak to Archeology for more detail about this.
- For determining assets at risk, there was a scale which ranged from being empty and not in use, to falling down.
- The local list was a substantial piece of work and the Civic Trust had applied for funding but had not been successful.
- There is access to the Grade II listed buildings register online in the One Stop Shop and a print out of the required description listing can be printed out on request.
- When Historic England developed the principles of the strategy they had funding, but his has now run out.
- The Heritage open days were a yearly event every September, and listed buildings not normally open to the public could be visited. Valley Heritage did a good open day last year.
- In relation to Article 4’s, if a property is bought or transferred, their solicitors should have checked and notified or any restrictions/requirements.

Resolved:

1. That Overview and Scrutiny recommend Cabinet to approve the Conservation Strategy 2016-2021.
2. All future minor amendments to the Conservation Strategy 2016-2021 to be delegated to the Planning Manager in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.
3. That strategy be updated to include the Local Authority Owned Heritage Assets information.

8. TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT: COUNTER FRAUD

The Chair of the Counter Fraud Task and Finish Group introduced the report and brought members attention to the following:

- A policy regarding counter fraud had been brought to the previous meeting, this had come out of the project work on counter fraud.
- The council had been given grant funding of £150k to pilot this work.
- The work had resulted in more finances being recovered than had been spent using the project funding.
- The recommendations were included in the task and finish group report, the main one being that the work should continue so long as the money recovered was more than the costs of the work.
- The appendix set out the recommendations to Cabinet and a response was required within 2 months.

Members and members of the public discussed the report as follows:

- Good piece of work.
- It was good the grant was available to get the resources in.
- Thanks to the project officer.
- Had anyone been prosecuted?

In response to questions from members and members of the public, the Chair of the Counter Fraud Task and Finish Group clarified that at present no one had been prosecuted but things were at the earlier stages of going through the system. Those identified were sent an invoice giving them the opportunity to pay back what they owed. In most cases it was not deliberate fraud and many were genuinely unaware. The exercise was more about raising awareness.

RESOLVED:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the recommendations of the Counter Fraud Task and Finish Group and request Cabinet to provide a response to the report recommendations within two months.

9. PROGRESS UPDATE ON TASK AND FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS – PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY (PROW)

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee informed members that this item was a progress update for noting.

Members and members of the public commented on the update as follows:

- PROW maps were online.
- Find it easy to use MARIO maps.
- Lancashire County Council (LCC) have done training for their members.

- Can get the maps from our web site, but not easy to find.
- The Corporate Officer was looking at the web link.
- There were still statutory PROW functions.
- The response doesn't address the issue of volunteer groups.
- Countryside Service will cease to exist after May.
- LCC were trying to co-ordinate volunteer groups as much as they could with the resources available.
- Users of Lee Quarry were trying to organise themselves.
- Rossendale has the most PROW in Lancashire.
- Dog fouling issues in urban areas could be picked up through the current task and finish group.
- Not sure what the response is about, or trying to achieve.
- The recommendations were still valid.

In response to questions from members, it was clarified that this was a task and finish group that took place a few years ago. A response had been provided at the time, but members of the committee had asked for a further update to come back at a later date to see if any other progress had been made on the recommendations.

Resolved:

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the progress update.
2. That a further update would not be required.

10. FORWARD PLAN

Members were asked to consider whether they wished to see any of the policies on the Forward Plan, prior to them going to Cabinet.

A member of the public asked how they could find out what was going to Council as part of the Constitution Review. The Committee and Member Services Manager confirmed that the Forward Plan identified the relevant officer to contact if there were any queries.

Resolved:

That no policies were requested to be seen and that the Forward Plan be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.55pm

Signed
(Chair)

Dated