

***Minutes of:** PERFORMANCE TASK GROUP

Date of Meeting: 11 October 2006

PRESENT: Councillor Sandiford (in the Chair)
Councillors Dickinson, Lynskey, Morris and Neal

IN ATTENDANCE: Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer
Jon Sharples, Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing
Gary Parsons, Housing Strategy Officer
Lynn Hurrell, Executive Director, Green Vale Homes

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Starkey

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Forshaw, Lamb and Councillor Challinor, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration.

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Pat Dickinson declared an interest in Green Vale Homes,

3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions were raised under this item.

4. CHAIRS UPDATE

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and informed Members that the LSP had been given the 'green light' in their performance.

The Chair informed Members that following a query raised at the last meeting regarding Bell Street Mill, Haslingden. Information had been provided indicating that the Mill was divided into separate industrial units and that these type of units are exempt from paying any non-domestic rates when unoccupied. The local authority has no discretion over this.

The Chair briefed Members on the future reports which would be presented to the meeting on 22 November and that a further special management meeting had been arranged for 9 November to receive the final report of the Car Parking Review Team.

5. HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

The Housing Strategy Officer presented an updated report on the targets/outputs and achievements of the Housing Strategy Action Plan for the last 6 months against the objectives included in the Housing Strategy Action Plan.

The plan would help revitalise parts of the Borough in need of regeneration, such as the Housing Market Renewal Area in Bacup, Stacksteads and Britannia. In addition, it will also assist residents of the Borough as a whole by encouraging the provision of different house type mixes and more affordable housing for local people.

It was considered that steady progress had been continued during the period. One of the key targets achieved within this second period of review had been the successful transfer of the local authorities housing stock to Green Vale Homes, together with the development of a monitoring system in place to assess the progress of Green Vale Homes against the 12 customer promises they would deliver as part of the transfer.

Based on the previous review of the Housing Strategy Action Plan, the strategic housing team had managed to achieve 9 more targets and reduce the number of targets not started yet or failed to achieve from 14 down to 8. Out of a total of 75 targets, 23 are priority targets of which 14 had been completed, 6 targets were not yet achieved and only 3 remain not started or failed to achieve and these are; minority ethnic housing strategy; supported housing strategy and improved and increased temporary accommodation for homelessness.

The Strategic Housing Team had continued to deliver its targets set within the Housing Strategy Action Plan.

Members raised a number of questions in relation to:-

- Need for additional staff for this service area
- Prioritisation of waiting lists
- Homelessness Policy
- Empty properties
- New build affordable housing

Councillor Neal raised the issue of already identified properties which have been empty for over 20 years of which the Council had been aware of.

A Member indicated that it would have been worthwhile for the Portfolio Holder to have been able to attend the meeting to hear the discussions and issues raised by Members.

In relation to the derelict building in Bell Street, the Chair explained that part of Haslingden came under Hyndburn Council in the European Parliamentary Elections and asked if these wards would benefit from the new European Funding eligibility areas recently announced in the press. The Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing agreed to seek further information on this and report back to the Scrutiny Officer.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Housing Officer and the Head of Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing for the report.

Recommendation

- i) That the report and achievements to date be noted.
- ii) That the Committee support the need for additional staff, as soon as possible, to assist with the workload in the Economic Regeneration and Strategic Housing Service Area.
- iii) That a further report be brought back to the Committee in six months updating on progress with the Housing Strategy Action Plan
- iv) That the Portfolio Holder and Head of Finance be invited to the meeting in six months time when the Strategic Housing Officer presents his next report.

6. GREEN VALE HOMES

The Executive Director of Green Vale Homes updated members on improvements to the service since 2000 when the Government Inspectors raised concern about the provision of Housing in the Borough.

She explained that in the last 2 years the Council was in the top 6 Housing providers in the North West and Rossendale was the only District Council in the North West.

The Executive Director of Green Vale Homes explained the process by which the Contract was established. In July 2005 a majority of tenants in Rossendale voted in favour of joining the Trans-Pennine Housing Group and 9 months later the new partnership began. Green Vale Homes would be an equal partner in the group and was set up on 27 March 2006.

Lynn Hurrell then briefed Members on the 12 commitments Green Vale Homes had made to tenants. An Occupational Therapist had been employed and over half a million pound was committed for aids and

adaptations to homes, since which waiting times had been reduced by 9 weeks.

Green Vale Homes are regulated by the Housing Corporation and are assessed by a traffic light system. In the first six months of operation they have been given 'top green'. They have also employed 24 new front-line staff and recruited two apprentices from Accrington and Rossendale College. An environmental team had been established to perform ground maintenance and the winter-works programme.

Green Vale Homes are performing well above their targets and have set aside £150,000 for community based projects.

A number of questions were raised by Members including:-

- Queries about improvements to tenants' homes
- The repairs helpline
- Responsibilities regarding rent arrears

The Executive Director responded to Member's questions, where possible.

The Chair thanked Lynn Hurrell for her report.

Resolved:

That a further report be presented to the Committee in 12 months.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and finished at 8.45pm