

POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 1 August 2011

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

K Pilkington (co-opted Member)

In Attendance: Joanne Smith, Elections Manager
David Hayes, Principal Conservation Officer
Rebecca Lawlor, Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer
Councillor P Roberts
Councillor G Morris

1 Member of the public (for part of the meeting)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor McInnes and Steen.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 13 June 2011 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Marriott declared a personal interest in Item 8 as this would encompass the area which a family member lives.

4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

No urgent items were raised.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A member of the public asked a question in relation to the plans for the Haslingden Pool and whether they had been sent to the Development Control Committee for approval.

A further question was in relation to the time limit on Kier's tender before it expires.

A question was also asked of Councillor Kenyon who responded to the Member of the public.

Resolved

That a response to the questions raised would be sent to the Member of the public when available.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair indicated that in relation to the Tourism Strategy, the Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration, the Chief Executive, Leader and Portfolio Holders would be meeting soon to agree the direction of travel for Tourism and Culture in Rossendale, following which further information would be available.

7. POLLING DISTRICT AND PLACES REVIEW

The Elections Manager presented a report to Members which highlighted the consultation process of the Polling District Review.

The Council has a duty to divide the borough into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district. It also has to keep the polling places and polling districts under review.

The Elections Manager explained the distinction between polling districts, places and polling stations. The designation of polling districts and places are a matter for the Council, whereas decisions regarding polling stations are the remit of the Returning Officer, who decides the arrangements and number of polling stations within each Ward.

The consultation began on 1st August until 31st August and the Elections Manager indicated that she had already received responses back from Members.

A cross-party review panel would meet to consider all responses received and a final report would be presented to Council on 28th September.

Resolved:

That Policy Overview and Scrutiny note the consultation process and Members to send their individual comments to the Elections Manager.

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

The Principal Conservation Officer presented the first four of a series of Conservation Area Character Appraisals and the Management Proposal Plans associated with the Appraisals which included proposals for the re-designation 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.

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 each of the Conservation Areas.

As part of the 6 week consultation there were walkabouts in each area and whilst public attendance and responses for the Whitworth, Goodshawfold and Loveclough areas were good, Rawtenstall only received limited attendance and a relatively small number of responses from the public, which the Principal Conservation Officer indicated was possibly due to Rawtenstall being more of a retail area with relatively few residents.

The final documents for a further 4 Conservation Areas were being prepared and should be available for the next cycle of meetings. Work is well underway on the final study, for Bacup Town Centre, and it is proposed that this is completed in time for public consultation shortly. The preparation of a consultation draft Appraisal, which would allow the designation of Haslingden Town Centre as a Conservation Area (a commitment in the Council's Open Space Strategy) is also part of the contract and must be completed before the middle of August.

The next round of documents would cover Irwell Vale, Chadderton and Strongstry, Fallbarn and Cloughfold (which has lately been known as Higher Cloughfold). Bacup was being prepared for consultation in September and Haslingden would need Council approval in October prior to consultation.

A further report would be presented in the future to agree other areas for appraisal, which had been identified in different studies/consultation exercises. Members requested that they be provided with the list of these areas and the Principal Conservation Officer agreed to send a copy.

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

- Whether there was a need for planning permission to demolish a building within a conservation area such as the Valley Centre
- Fitting of solar panels in conservation areas
- Discussion of actual boundaries which the Council would have to agree if there were any major changes
- A need to ensure that Haslingden Members are involved in the walkabout when work commences on the Appraisal for Haslingden
- Were residents consulted on the implications of extending boundaries?
- Need for clarity in the recommendations on boundary changes
- Concern that public may not understand what the consultation was about
- Clearer information about the control of satellite dishes and what this

would mean to those who live in a conservation area.

A member asked for a copy of the letter sent to the public informing them of the consultation regarding Rawtenstall and the Principal Conservation Officer agreed to send a copy.

Resolved:

1. That the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that the Conservation Area Character Appraisals for the Conservation Areas of Goodshawfold, Loveclough Fold, Whitworth Square and Rawtenstall be adopted as material consideration for development control purposes with effect from 1st September 2011.
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 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. ENFORCED SALES POLICY AND PROCEDURE

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager presented a report on the Council's proposed Enforced Sale Policy and Procedure for bringing vacant properties back into use and asked Members to recommend to Cabinet a threshold amount for undertaking enforced sales.

The Council's Land Charges Department show that there are over 500 charges lodged against properties for action taken by Council Officers. There was also a further 130 potential charges registered against properties where Notices requiring outstanding action had been served. Of these charges, 97 were related to empty properties and land. The debt outstanding to the Council from these 529 charges was £306,987.12p and the debt owed from empty properties and land was £62,768.59p.

Enforced sale policies had been used effectively by neighbouring Council's such as Manchester and Salford as an alternative to Compulsory Purchases and Empty Dwelling Management Orders. These allow authorities to deal with difficult long-term properties through acquiring ownership to sell the property or land at market value; discharging the debt to the Council, with the remainder of the cost paid to the owner/descendant, and ultimately bringing the property back to the Council. The owner would engage with the Council and this process would allow the owner a substantial period of time to engage with the Council before the sale is enacted.

Members raised concern about the amount of money owed to the Council and asked that the Head of Finance attend the next meeting to explain to Members the process for debt collection in more detail, particularly in relation to how the Exchequer Office deal with overdue charges for Work in Default.

Members discussed the threshold amount for undertaking enforced sales, which were either £300, £500 or £1,000. It was agreed that the threshold should be set at £1,000 as a principle sum of original work carried out in default.

Members asked the following questions to which the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager responded:

- Need to make it clear when sending out correspondence what we are actually saying and provide advice to the individual
- Need for better communication between Council departments
- Cost of management time and fees to undertake the procedure

Resolved:

1. That the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet the adoption of the Enforced Sales Policy and Procedure.
2. That the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that £1,000 be the agreed threshold amount for undertaking enforced sales.
3. That the Head of Finance and Property Service be invited to the next meeting to provide information on the debt collection process for money owed from empty properties and land.

10. PEER REVIEW ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager presented a report which was a conclusion to the peer review process undertaken by the Place Directorate predominantly focusing on Environmental Health in 2010.

The aim of the peer review was to provide support to the existing service and enable continuous service improvements through a number of avenues. Following the peer review a number of actions were identified through an Environmental Health Improvement Plan which were, as they had been addressed, reported through the Council's Covalent System.

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

Resolved:

That the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the contents of the report, as a conclusion to the peer review process.

11. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY SUMMARY

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager circulated a summary of the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2011-14, which would guide the work of the Council's Health, Housing and Regeneration Department in terms of the private sector over the next three years.

The summary covered the main points and key objectives included in the full version of the Private Sector Housing Strategy. The full document was currently being reviewed and would be subject to public consultation.

Section 5 of the summary provided details of the development of Area Based Initiatives and Officers would work with residents to help improve their area.

A member asked that information on the criteria for establishing Area Based Initiatives should be included in the Strategy.

There was also a suggestion to include as a priority the need to reflect the new build affordable housing scheme.

The Strategy would be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it remained relevant and achievable, as well as continuing to meet the broader aims and objectives of the Council and its partners.

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager asked Members to respond to her with any issues they felt were missing on the strategic priorities.

Resolved

That Policy Overview and Scrutiny note the summary report and ask the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager to include the comments of Members in the final Strategy.

12. FORWARD PLAN

The Scrutiny Support Officer presented the up-to-date Forward Plan and asked Members if they would wish to see any specific document.

It was agreed that, if available, the Committee would like to see the Irwell Vale, Chadderton and Strongstry, Fall Barn and Cloughfold Conservation Area Appraisals, Boundary Reviews and Management Proposal Plans at the meeting in September.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 9.05pm

Signed
(Chair)

Date