

Minutes of a meeting of the Regeneration and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 20 February 2018 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 6.00 pm
Concluded 8.10 pm

Present – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	GREEN	INDEPENDENT
Heseltine	Farley Jamil H Khan Nazir	H Hussain	K Hussain

Observers: Councillor Ross-Shaw – Portfolio Holder, Environment, Sport & Culture and Councillor Love

Councillor Farley in the Chair

37 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

38 INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted by the public to review decisions to restrict documents.

39 REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to this Committee.

40 UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE HOUSING STANDARDS TEAM

The Housing Standards Team (HST) delivered a number of statutory functions to address housing conditions across the district. The report of the Strategic Director, Place (**Document “S”**) provided an update for members on the housing conditions and the work undertaken by the HST.

The Principal Operations Manager with the Housing Standards Manager gave the Committee a synopsis of the report.

Following presentation, the question and answer session ensued:

- What was the reason behind the increase of 21% in service requests?
 - This was owed to more awareness through advertising on how people should deal with issues on housing conditions;
- In reflection of growing tenants of various backgrounds, was vital information being conversed in different languages?
 - The team employed staff of various backgrounds who spoke several different languages. However if the team could not accommodate a request for a particular language then an interpreter would be employed;
- Was the amendment to introduce a new section into the Act which established the legal basis for imposing civil penalties for specific offences under the Housing Act 2004 working efficiently in the context of failure to comply with an improvement notice?
 - Yes, but only for a period of time and if penalty was not paid then the case would progress towards a court criminal offence. On most occasions work was carried out in order to avoid the courts. The importance of this being was for the Council to bring properties back to living standards;
- Were properties ever referred to the Fire Service?
 - The Fire Service did not have a role but we would refer to the appropriate services if there was a potential risk. In addition, if someone was found to be vulnerable then the team's efforts would focus on the individual's safety;
- A huge amount of properties have problems associated with them and would it be correct to assume that the service was only scratching the surface because a significant amount of work was still ahead?
 - Prior to 2006, a few housing renewal schemes had been undertaken but since, government funding had seized, hence the need to utilise the enforcement procedures;
- What was an appreciation loan and how much had been loaned out?
 - Home owners who had properties that were in much needed repair could take advantage of the Council's equity release loan scheme. Around £5m had been loaned out;
- Were mostly grants or loans taken out?
 - Many people were reluctant in taking out loans but 1 out of every 3 were loan applications;
- What was the role of Civil Penalties work and how much money had come from this function?
 - This was a non compliance penalty for the prosecution of landlords in relation to conditions of properties following a Council assessment. There had been no financial gains to date as it was a new function nevertheless the landlord had a right to a tribunal following the issue of a fine by the Council. If the Council won the tribunal and the landlord refrained from paying the penalty then



- money could be pursued through the Civil Courts;
- How much time was allocated to landlords for putting things right before the issuing of a penalty notice?
 - Tenancy in a sub standard condition will not be tolerated and landlords were told to put standardise deteriorated housing conditions immediately;
- Following the approval of loans, did the Council offer further assistance?
 - The Council offered an agency service that recommended contractors who had insurances, offered advice on health and safety in order to ensure the quality of good work. The loan recipients also had the choice to progress matters with their own contractors but work was always checked by the Council before any money was paid out;
- For the 13 prosecutions of non compliance of legislation, how much money had come into the Council?
 - The cost for prosecution had been shared between the Council's legal department and the Housing Service. Costs had been returned to housing but no profit had been made as this money stayed with the courts. Only money obtained from the Civil Penalty Notices came directly to the Housing department;
- What was the level of equity per loan approved?
 - 20 per cent equity of the value of property concerned. If the property was later sold then the Council was returned its original loan amount even if the property was transferred to another name;
 - This was a loss maker for the Council especially in the current climate with limited resources;
 - These funds were for the sake of improving peoples lives;
 - Loans were approved on an extreme case basis and only as last resort;
- What if a property was owned outright?
 - Then the Council would be willing to approve a loan to the amount of £30,000; and,

Did officers find it easier to work with agents?

Agents were middle men on most occasions and we had to establish whether they were operating under the Licensing Scheme, if not, then they could be fined up to £5,000.

Resolved –

The Committee thanks officers, and welcomes the report and requests a further update on the work of the Housing Standards Team in a further 12 months to include details of the impact of the New Legislation.

LEAD: Strategic Director, Place



41 EMPTY HOMES UPDATE

The report of the Strategic Director, Place (**Document “T”**) provided an update on the Council’s empty homes programme of work.

The Assistant Director, Economic and Development Services explained to the Committee that the provision of quality and affordable housing, communities and neighbourhoods where people preferred to live was a key strategic priority within both the District Plan and Council Plan. Tackling empty homes in the district contributed towards the issues of housing supply, housing quality and creating neighbourhoods which were clean and where people felt safe.

Following introduction of the report, a question and answer session followed:

- Was there a specific reason as to the reduction of affordable housing?
 - Due to a growth in refurbishment of flats and apartments in the City Centre;
- Why the need for a Compulsory Purchase Order?
 - Officers had always utilised appropriate products from the full range of options available to them to try to encourage owners to bring their homes back into use but in some cases they had no choice but to use the ultimate sanction against uncooperative owners – compulsory purchase. Since 2010, the service had voluntarily acquired 30 properties and compulsorily purchased 20 properties. 26 cases were currently on going, of which 21 were Compulsory Purchase Orders and 5 being through a Voluntary Acquisition;
- How did Bradford Council compare with neighbouring authorities?
 - Bradford had proportionately more empty properties at this period than its statistical neighbours;
- What action had been taken to address the 10 years of 296 empty homes?
 - The reasons why properties are left to become long term empty could be many and varied. Detailed investigations were often necessary to identify legal ownership of properties before any action could be taken. For this reason one of the products developed and used by the team was to offer some owners legal assistance to help them to resolve ownership issues which were preventing them bringing the property back into use. The most problematic long term empty properties, considered to be of a higher risk (following a risk assessment by officers), were targeted more intensely by officers for action. There were currently 93 high risk long term empty properties;
- Was a particular criteria required to apply for a Compulsory Order?
 - If Council Tax was being paid and the property did not cause a nuisance then little could be done despite the number of years it being empty;
- What was the main block location of the 586 empty properties in the City Ward?
 - These were mostly houses spread across the ward or Incommunities flats in the City Centre; and,
- Has the issue of empty properties been discussed with Incomminties?
 - Yes, officers of the Council met with Incommunities on a regular



basis and it was advised that the properties had not yet been filled due to a final decision by a Strategic Director level.

The following comments were made. The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Planning and Transport highlighted that a significant number of jobs were needed in the City Centre in order for people move in to the centre of Bradford. The Council had invested into the empty homes initiative for the sole purpose of bringing properties up to date for use through Compulsory Orders. Preceding a successful Compulsory Order, the Council had to sell the property as opposed to keeping as Council stock.

Resolved –

That the Committee welcomes the report and requests a further update on the work of the Empty Homes Team in 12 months time.

LEAD: Strategic Director, Place

42 REGENERATION - SHIPLEY

The report of the Strategic Director, Place (**Document “U”**) provided an update on highlighted work related to Shipley.

The Development Manager was in attendance and gave a synopsis of the report. He stated that the background factors that might lead to major change in Shipley had not significantly changed since last year. Sites around the centre of Shipley were the subject of competitive interest from supermarket operators in 2013. Since that time, these large retailers had collectively drawn back from their expansion plans. The impacts / benefits and challenges that might had accrued locally from such major development were gone for the present, including from the scheme that emerged as the one that received planning approval (Crag Road / Morrisons). The housing aspects were proceeding and would ultimately deliver further footfall to the town centre however the wider retail offer in Shipley would not immediately change as the Morrisons component was not progressing.

- Shipley town centre had a large number of charity shops. Could anything be done from having any further charity shops?
 - Most blocks around the square were owned by investment companies and the units referred to were empty before trading as successful charity shops. Other initiatives had been looked at but now not as many empty shops hence could not progress with initiative. Charity shops paid rent to owners of the properties and caused no issue to owners therefore this area of trade could not be stopped but welcomed;
- Why had the vacancy for the heritage site taken a significant time to recruit?
 - In process to get role filled permanently following an efficient review of the heritage area as this will give the service a case for



- recruitment, hence the delay; and,
- What were the reasons behind Shipley Market not working to its full potential?
 - This was about lifestyle choices of customers and market traders being able to meet their lifestyle demands. On the positive, street markets in Shipley Town Centre were of low cost renting and it was now about waiting for outcomes of location before driving forwards towards a more vibrant market with new ideas to overcome challenges.

During the discussion, the following comments were made. The decline of markets began in 2010 with the recession. Since then, meetings had been taken place between the service , Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Planning & Transport and the MP for Shipley and the future of the Shipley corridor had been discussed. There were also plans of discussing this the Shipley corridor with the government directly in order to get some feasibility funding but this would have to be through local MPs. It was about coming up with solutions to problems so that the final outcome making Bradford a beautiful district to visit and shop. Many people passed Bradford to visit Leeds and this was because Leeds had the right access roads including public transport. It would be better to work with Leeds for the sake of growth than taking individual drastic action which would eventually lead to nowhere.

Resolved –

That the report be welcomed and a further update on the work related to regeneration in Shipley be brought back in 12 months time.

LEAD: Strategic Director, Place

43 **REGENERATION AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2017 - 18**

The report of the Chair of the Regeneration and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee (**Document “V”**) presented the Committee’s Work Programme 2017-18.

Resolved –

That the work programme 2017-18 continues to be regularly reviewed during the course of the year.

LEAD: Overview and Scrutiny Lead

Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Regeneration and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

