

Minutes of a meeting of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 26 March 2019 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced	5.30 pm
Concluded	7.45 pm

Present – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT	GREEN
Heseltine Whitaker	Berry Dodds Iqbal Jamil Mohammed	Stubbs	Love

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBER

Julia Pearson – Bradford Environmental Forum

Observers –

Councillor Ross-Shaw – Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Planning and Transport
 Councillor Ferriby – Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Planning and Transport

Apologies: Councillor Salam

Councillor Jamil in the Chair

69. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interest of transparency, the following declarations were received –

- Councillor Dodds disclosed an interest in the items relating to Update on the Work of the Housing Standards Team, Energy Efficiency in the Private Rented Sector in the Bradford District and the Empty Homes Update due to being a board member of the West Yorkshire Fire Authority (Minutes 72, 73 and 74). She disclosed a further interest in the item relating to the 12 Month Update on Biodiversity Review as she was the Chair of Friends of Brackenhill Park (Minute 75).
- Councillor Heseltine disclosed an interest in the item relating to the 12 Month Update on Biodiversity Review as he was a member of a Friend's Community Group (Minute 75).

- The Chair and Councillor Love disclosed an interest in the item relating to the Private Rented Sector in the Bradford District as the Chair's husband and Councillor Love were private landlords (Minute 73).
- Julia Pearson disclosed an interest in the item relating to the 12 Month Update on Biodiversity Review as she was a member of Friends of Northcliffe Group and a member of a Biodiversity partnership (Minute 75).

ACTION: City Solicitor

70. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

71. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals to the Committee.

72. 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 “AL”**) provided an update for Members on housing conditions and the work of the HST undertaken to address these.

The Principal Operations Manager was in attendance and gave a synopsis of the report.

A question and answer session followed –

- The income that had been generated from fines, what had the income that had been generated from fines used for in order to undertake the Council's statutory functions efficiently?
 - The money had been used for resources, offices, education and training for agents on what the Council expected in terms of standards and raised standards for all parties involved;
- Was the Council familiar with the number of unlicensed agents that were not following Council standards and as a result having a detrimental impact on vulnerable groups from overseas that were not familiar with the basic standards of housing in Bradford?
 - Occasionally this could be a difficult area to monitor as some agents were extremely cunning due to their familiarity of Council standards. However it was the responsibility of the Council to prove Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) were normally properties occupied by more than the one household. The Council used a number of databases to establish properties that were occupied by more than one household;

- Was the Council receiving ongoing information on standards from Social Services or other agencies?
 - Referrals from other agencies were received and the Council offered loans to individuals who may be struggling;
- Was there anything further that could be done to assist the significant amount of children that were being raised in extremely poor housing conditions?
 - During visits to properties, officers looked at defects, fire access and exit door code, heating conditions due to some not installing central heating; and,
- What work was actioned which was deemed a proactive segment of the service?
 - Officers evaluated the worst scenarios during inspection of properties such as how would occupiers leave during a fire and therefore officers worked closely with the Fire Service.

Resolved –

- (1) **That the information contained in Document “AL”, be noted.**
- (2) **That a progress report be presented to the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee which provides an update on the proactive work being undertaken by the Housing Standards Team, and the report also focuses on the impact of legislative changes that are to be implemented over the next 12 months.**

ACTION: Strategic Director, Place

73. ENERGY EFFICIENCY IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR IN THE BRADFORD DISTRICT

The report of the Strategic Director, Place (**Document “AM”**) provided an update for Members on energy efficiency in the private rented sector in the Bradford district including an update on the impact of legislative changes.

The Principal Operations Manager, Sustainability Housing Co-ordinator and the Housing Standards Manager were in attendance and gave a joint synopsis of the report.

The Committee sought clarification on how would a landlord be able to provide efficient energy if he was not in a financial position to finance a scheme. In response it was explained that officers had worked on a regional basis to develop an Energy Repayment Loan for owner occupiers to enable them to access energy efficiency schemes. An interest free loan secured on the property of between £300 to £5,000 to be repaid over a period of up to 5 years was available. Loans would not be expected to normally be given where the total loan to value would exceed 70% of the property’s unimproved value. These loans would be delivered by the Empty Homes and Loans team within the Housing Operations service at Bradford.

Resolved –

That a further update report be provided in 12 months in relation to energy efficiency in the private rented sector.

LEAD: Strategic Director, Place

74. EMPTY HOMES UPDATE

The report of the Strategic Director, Place (**Document “AN”**) provided an update on the Council’s empty homes programme of work.

The Chair invited the representatives to present the report to the Committee. The Principal Operations Manager and the Private Sector Housing Manager gave the following joint synopsis; the provision of quality and affordable housing and communities and neighbourhoods where people wanted 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.

The district had over 217,000 properties. It was recognised that there were always a number of homes that were empty due to people moving home, ending tenancies, etc. known as “transactional empties”. These properties were generally empty for less than 6 months (however due to the current housing market it was not uncommon for properties to remain empty for up to 12 months whilst being sold). These properties did not generally need any intervention from the Empty Homes and Loans team so resources were focussed on properties that had been empty for more than 6 months (known as “long term empties”).

Following presentation, the Chair moved the discussion towards questions and answers –

- How confident was the service in being aware of the number of empty properties in Bradford?
 - All data had been pulled from up to date Council Tax records. In addition, 2 officers were employed on a full time basis to undertake the work of familiarising empty properties in the city;
- Explanation was sought on work done towards delisted properties?
 - Officers were investing significant efforts in dealing with properties under this category due to the substantial demand of work required on delisted buildings;
- Why the number of delists in the City Ward were higher than all other wards?
 - It was important to understand the makeup and condition of housing to linkages to poverty related issues;
- In relation to Incommunities, was it exempt or was it able to delist a property if it seemed unfit for purpose?
 - It was in a position to delist but generally refrained from categorising in such circumstances. The Council abstained from encouraging delisting due to financial loss such as Council Tax but only under the circumstances of no choice;

- At what stage would Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) play a part?
 - Following risk assessment, if a property found to be in a worst state scenario and with no further prospect of progress with a owner then the Council would have a strong case to take the property without the current owner's consent in return for compensation.
 - If the owner objects to the CPO then the case would be progressed to a public enquiry which is a very challenging stage and time consuming hence the last resort of a CPO.

Resolved –

- (1) That a progress report be presented in 12 months which specifically focuses on the work being undertaken to reduce the number of empty properties in areas where there is a high number of empty properties.
- (2) That representatives from the Incommunities Group attend a meeting of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide information on the work currently undertaken by the group to reduce the number of empty properties in its ownership in the Bradford District.
- (3) This Committee requests that a report be presented in the New Municipal Year which details the impact of Council Tax Premiums in reducing the number of empty properties across the Bradford District.

ACTION: Strategic Director, Place

75. 12 MONTH UPDATE ON BIODIVERSITY REVIEW

The report of the Strategic Director, Place (**Document “AO”**) updated the Committee on a review of biodiversity which was undertaken by the Environment and Waste Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2018.

The Countryside Service Manager was in attendance and invited by the Chair to present the report. He explained that at its meeting in July 2017 the Environment and Waste Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved to undertake a review of biodiversity in the Bradford District. An officer presentation to Committee outlining the main issues relating to biodiversity and the Council’s duties in that respect, was followed by an information gathering workshop attended by a range of Council departments and partner organisations. The information gathering session focused on 3 main areas for improvement, (a) examine ways in which the Council can best utilise its own resources, urban and rural to benefit biodiversity; (b) consider areas over which the Council has an influence, such as planning and land development; and, (c) explore awareness – raising and education through schools and with the public.

Following presentation, the Chair invited a question and answer session –

- In relation to a previous discussion on creating meadows in parks trial, how had this progressed?

- Information had been sought by the Woodlands Manager that the trial was still ongoing;
- How positive was engaging with schools?
 - It was occasionally difficult to engage with schools and therefore engagement work was only undertaken on a opportunity basis as opposed to programme based as it was not a factor that could be build in on a regular basis with all schools due to lack of resources;
- There were concerns of vast acres of space for wildlife was disappearing every year?
 - The Council tried to mitigate areas through the planning process; and,
- 3.1.4 of the report gave information about the importance of conditions for developers but was there a proper channel of communication through to you and the planning team in order to establish when a planning condition was not being adhered to?
 - The Countryside & Rights of Way team was based in the same department as Planning with a close working relationship. All officers concerned had a responsibility to ensure planning conditions were met. This was certainly a big area of work to cover but due to resource issues, the service was doing less than it could do.

In response to selected answers, the Committee made several comments, as follows –

- It was paramount that schools were more involved as opposed to being overlooked;
- A report had been released in relation to people and mental health & wellbeing and that getting out in fresh air was a important aspect for mental health;
- Getting people outside was a piece of work that could be done with New Communities partnership; and,
- All Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) had been given resourced uplifts and it was a factor to consider whether to get then involved.

Resolved –

- (1) **That the report be welcomed and officers be thanked for the work undertaken in addressing the Scrutiny Review Recommendations.**
- (2) **This Committee requests that the outcomes from the Government's Biodiversity Net Gain Consultation process be presented to this Committee in 12 months time.**

ACTION: Strategic Director, Place

76. SINGLE USE PLASTICS SCRUTINY REVIEW

The report of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee (**Document “AP”**) contained the draft findings from the Single Use Plastics Scrutiny Review.

The Overview and Scrutiny Lead was present and gave the following synopsis to the Committee. He explained that this report had been produced by the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to make a number of recommendations in response to the Council resolution on Tuesday 16 January 2018 - for the Environment and Waste Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake a detailed Scrutiny Review into Single Use Plastics and make recommendations. Since the Council resolution, the Regeneration & Economy and the Environment & Waste Management Overview and Scrutiny Committees had merged into the Regeneration & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Subsequently, this scrutiny review had been undertaken by the new merged Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The recommendations in the report came under the three key lines of enquiry in the terms of reference of the review (a) reducing the use of single use plastics by Council staff and visitors, (b) engaging with users of Council parks and other recreational facilities to reduce the use of single use plastics and (c) working with partner organisations, local businesses and residents to encourage a reduction in the use of single use plastics across our District.

He further stated that the Council would need to identify where Single Use Plastics was the most significant, where it can be easily removed or alternatives identified and where there would be challenges in finding alternatives.

During the discussion the Committee and the Overview & Scrutiny Lead made the following comments to the review –

- The review was in good detail but it was about reality of progressing of being plastic free;
- Plastic was a synthetic material that was relied on in a multitude of products of different scales. Therefore it was about how deep the Council was willing to get into this subject matter in terms of practicalities;
- Recommendation 9, throw away single use products should be focused on as opposed to long running plastics use;
- Recommendation 9, businesses and schools should be encouraged in focusing less plastic use;
- Recommendation 8, schools were major customers of plastic consumable products and it was vital that schools be targeted in addressing concerns of plastic use; and,
- Recommendation 11, this should not only refer to vending machines, so customers returning plastics bottles being compensated but to involve all retailers and charity organisations.

The Chair thanked the Committee and its co-optees and officers for taking part in the scrutiny review. A special thanks was extended to members of a variety of expert community groups and representatives from different organisations who took the time to attend the information-gathering sessions and to contribute their ideas and experiences to discussions.

Resolved –

That the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee adopts the findings and recommendations contained within the Single Use Plastics Scrutiny Report, subject to comments raised by the Committee.

ACTION: Scrutiny Lead

77. REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2018-19

The report of the Chair of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee (**Document “AQ”**) included the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2018/19.

Resolved –

That the 2018/19 Work Programme continues to be regularly reviewed during the year.

ACTION: Overview and Scrutiny Lead

Chair

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

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER