

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
SCRUTINY COMMISSION FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES  
HELD IN THE  
BOURGES & VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH  
ON  
19 NOVEMBER 2012**

**Present:** Councillors D Over (Chairman), D Lamb (Vice-Chairman), E Murphy and N Sandford

<b>Officers in Attendance:</b>	Charlotte Palmer	Climate Change Team Manager
	Marian Smith	Community Carbon Reduction Officer
	Amy Bowles	Senior Projects and Programme Officer
	Sally Savage	Principal Programming and Project Officer
	Sean Evans	Housing Needs Manager
	Leonie McCarthy	Social Inclusion Manager
	Dania Castagliuolo	Governance Officer

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Harrington and McKean

**2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations**

There were no declarations of interest

**3. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2012**

The minutes of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities meeting held on 17 September 2012 were not approved at this meeting.

**4. Making Villages Energy Sustainable**

This report was presented at the request of the Commission to provide an update on options for making villages energy sustainable. The report specifically focused on a pioneering EU-funded project based in Glinton and Peakirk, which would hopefully have future links to the wider rural area.

The following points were highlighted:

- Peterborough City Council had secured co-funding from the Regional Development Fund through the INTERREG IVB NWE Programme which would be used to increase environmental awareness and reduce carbon emissions in the villages of Glinton and Peakirk
- Between now and December 2014 the funding would be used to deliver capital investments as well as hands on practical support, contributing to the development of an EU-wide zero carbon certification system for communities
- In October 2010 Peterborough City Council was approached by the University of Applied Sciences in Berkfield, Germany to work with them to develop and deliver a project designed to produce a zero carbon certification scheme for residential communities
- Peterborough was keen to use the funding stream to bring in additional revenue to provide additionality to existing funding allocations. To achieve this the focus was on

street lighting and environmental behaviour change within the communities of Glinton and Peakirk

- The villages of Glinton and Peakirk were chosen because there was already a community green group operating. The group had delivered significant community engagement activity including events and household Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) assessments.
- In November 2011 the first full partner meeting took place in Germany and in September 2012 Peterborough City Council appointed a Community Carbon Reduction Officer to co ordinate and oversee the deliverables
- Throughout the project Peterborough would be working with European partners who were available to provide particular expertise in the areas of green financing, greenhouse gas balancing and other innovations.
- The project would contribute directly to 'Zecos' – a new European zero carbon certification system. It would be of direct benefit to the communities of Glinton and Peakirk, reducing their CO2 output and increasing their resilience to climate change
- The project was an intensive project on two specific communities with the view that the successful elements could be rolled out to other communities in future years

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members commented that the project seemed highly commendable and they were very supportive of the work in tackling climate change.
- Members queried whether the project would result in practical changes for individual households. *The Climate Change Team Manager advised the Commission that households would not be forced to make changes although the aim was to talk to people and work through possibilities and look for the small changes that households were willing to make.*
- Members queried if there would be sufficient resources to run the project if it were successful and was rolled out to other rural areas. *The Climate Change Team Manager advised members that this would depend on what the particular initiative was going to be. There were some projects that could be advertised across the city that would be of minimal cost.*
- Members were concerned that the Collective Switching Energy Scheme would be the cheapest but not necessarily the greenest. *The Climate Change Team Manager informed members that that there would also be an offer to switch to a green tariff.*
- Members commented that the thermal imaging was a very good project in Glinton. They queried whether the Climate Change Team could visit the other Parish Councils and give more information about the various projects. *The Climate Change Team Manager advised the Commission that the Community Carbon Reduction Officer would be attending a Parish Council meeting. If other Parish Councils wanted to invite her separately she would be happy to go along and talk to them.*
- Members requested more clarification on the street lighting aspect of the project and if they were going to be switched off at midnight or would they be fitted with LED's and commented that the Communications team may be able to help with the advertising of the projects. *The Climate Change Team Manager advised the Commission that the reason street lighting was included in the project was to secure match funding There was no specification at present as to what would happen with street lighting within the villages. The street lights being turned off would be determined by the wider council policy and what people wanted in the villages. Investment in street lighting was not due until the next financial year as part of the project.*
- Members queried whether the Climate Change Team had engaged with Peterborough Environment City Trust as they had a lot of experience in engaging with communities. *The Climate Change Team Manager informed members that her team had a close working relationship with the Peterborough Environment City Trust.*

- Members suggested that the Climate Change Team approached the hospitals as they had a lot of staff and were in contact with lots of people on a daily basis therefore they could be used to advertise the project
- Members queried whether there was an evaluation mechanism built in to the project for future performance monitoring after 2014 when the project came to an end. *The Climate Change Team Manager informed the Commission that a baseline was being generated for the project and the aim was to continue monitoring after the project had finished.*

## **ACTION AGREED**

The Committee noted the report and supported the ongoing work of making villages energy sustainable

### **5. Street Lighting in Rural Areas**

The report was written at the request of the Commission who required information regarding street lighting in rural areas and in particular with regard to the following topics:

- How the new low energy streetlights would be appropriate for rural areas
- Was there a policy over rural streetlights
- Was it possible to have alternatives to the standard model, like Victorian or other retro styles which may be appropriate to some villages
- Lighting at junctions or danger spots
- The possibility of reducing some lighting
- Was there a safety/crime aspect to street lighting

A presentation was delivered to the commission and the following key points were highlighted:

#### **Street Lighting**

- There were three main areas of work
  1. General Maintenance
  2. Energy Efficiency Scheme
  3. Column Replacements (LTP and MTFs)
- The Energy Efficiency scheme replaced the old orange light emitting lanterns with white LED's without the requirement for additional or replacement columns
- A column replacement scheme which replaced concrete and cast iron columns and replaced both column and lantern

#### **Rural Lighting**

- Street lighting was implemented to illuminate areas of public highway only
- Currently there was no specific lighting policy for rural areas. A new street lighting policy was being considered as part of the process of combining the Highways contract, this would go through the relevant consultation process
- Some authorities had switched lights off and had no significant evidence to show that there had been an increase in crime due to areas not being illuminated
- Rural lighting was often more sporadic than urban street lighting and tended to illuminate specific points such as road junctions
- A majority of lighting in rural areas would be considered for inclusion in the column replacement scheme
- £870k was awarded for ten years to replace cast iron and concrete columns and Local Property Tax contribution which varies annually

- The most suitable, efficient lighting solution would be used which would not always be an LED solution due to the difference in lighting output when compared with orange light emitting lanterns

### **Types of Street Light**

- Discussions were currently taking place regarding options for replacement columns in designated conservation areas
- Standard specification was unpainted galvanised steel columns with appropriate lanterns. The approximate cost per unit was £1380
- Painted steel columns with appropriate lanterns. The approximate cost per unit was £1380 plus ongoing maintenance to the paintwork
- Bespoke made ornamental columns with appropriate lanterns. The approximate cost per unit was £3000 - £5000

### **Further Options**

- When new lighting was installed the lantern was fitted with remote control equipment that had the potential to allow for lantern diming and or switch off
- Reducing lights in over illuminated areas could potentially be investigated however controlling light levels using the capabilities advised above was likely to be preferable to allow for future requests

The Commission were asked to consider the report and make any comments or recommendations.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members were concerned that one of the slides in the presentation stated that there was no evidence of an increase in crime due to areas not being illuminated but had any thought been given to the fact that people might not want to go out when areas are not illuminated for fear of crime. *The Senior Projects and Programme Officer advised the Commission that he was aware of this issue. If street lights were to be switched off then it would be much later at night when less people were on the streets.*
- Members commented that there was a high percentage of people living in rural areas that did not own cars and they needed to be mindful of those people by not making the streets dark which would restrict them from going out in the evening
- Members queried whether additional street lighting was going to be put in to rural areas as there were a significant number of housing developments in progress. *The Senior Projects and Programme Officer informed the Commission that street lighting was considered as part of a planning application when it went through the development control team for comments and through the relevant planning application process.*
- Members were concerned with the amount of street lights in rural areas which were covered by a canopy of trees. *The Senior Projects and Programme Officer assured the Commission that the street light columns were placed according to the best solution for an area.*
- Members queried whether there was a fixed payment for the use of street lights or a charge for the consumption of energy used. *The Senior Projects and Programme Officer advised the Commission that the new street lighting was generally metered and old street lighting was usually unmetered. The cost was calculated by the energy provider based on Peterborough's street lighting inventory.*
- Members requested that before any street light columns were replaced in rural areas that a general introduction was given to the Rural Neighbourhood Committee and Parish Councils to obtain their opinion before any work was carried out.

- Members were concerned that there was a lack of police in rural areas therefore the crime rate has risen slightly. Street lights gave some reassurance to the local people therefore they should not be greatly reduced or switched off.
- Members commented that the council should have a small amount of money set aside for additional street lighting in rural areas for potential danger spots.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission recommends that the Council have funds set aside for additional street lighting in rural areas where there are particular issues of safety.

The Commission endorsed the report on Street Lighting in Rural Areas

## 6. Consultation on the Draft Common Housing Allocations Policy

This report was presented to the Commission to obtain their views on the proposed review of the Common Housing Allocations Policy.

The following points were highlighted:

- Peterborough City Council currently operated the Peterborough Common Housing Register in partnership with ten Registered Social Landlords that had accommodation in Peterborough
- Currently Peterborough operated an open Housing Register open to all who wished to apply as long as they were over 16 years of age, except where:
  - ❖ They did not have the right to reside in the UK
  - ❖ They had previously been guilty of unacceptable behaviour, which would make them an unsuitable tenant
- Due to the open register there had been a large increase in the number of live applications (9324 as of July 2012) These were prioritised in to five bands:
 

311	Applicants in band 1 (highest priority)
3137	Applicants in band 2
1280	Applicants in band 3
3338	Applicants in band 4
1258	Applicants in band 5 (lowest priority)
- Due to such high demand for general needs accommodation most applicants in bands 4 and 5 would never be successful for an allocation of accommodation.
- Between April 2011 and April 2012 1258 properties were allocated through the choice based lettings scheme, during the same period 2678 new applications were accepted
- The Localism Act 2011 made an amendment to the Housing Act 1996 which gave local authorities the power to set their own qualifying criteria for people who were allowed to join the housing register
- The proposed amended allocations policy made full use of these powers by setting the entry criteria to the housing register to those who were in the most urgent housing need This included:
  - ❖ Homeless households
  - ❖ Those who were threatened with homelessness
  - ❖ Those living in insanitary or unsatisfactory housing conditions
  - ❖ Those who needed to move for social/welfare reasons, or
  - ❖ Those for whom failure to assist in moving would cause particular hardship
- It was proposed that Peterborough City Council only accepted applications from those who had a connection with Peterborough. A connection would be established:
  - ❖ By having lived in the area for 6 of the last 12 months or 3 of the last 5 years

- ❖ By having immediate family members who lived in the area and had done for the last 5 years
- ❖ For those who were working in the city
- ❖ For those who needed to move to the area for special reasons e.g. in order to receive specialist medical care
- It was also proposed to exclude applicants who owned suitable accommodation or had sufficient financial resources from joining the register. This would not apply to those over 55 and eligible for sheltered accommodation
- Those who had previously behaved in an unacceptable manner would continue to be excluded from the housing register
- From April 2013 households in receipt of housing benefit who were living in social housing would be assessed to determine what size property they required based on the same criteria as if they were renting in the private sector
- Any household assessed under the criteria who was deemed to be occupying a property larger than they required would have their housing benefit reduced by
  - ❖ 14 % if they were under occupying by 1 bedroom, or
  - ❖ 25 % if they were under occupying by 2 or more bedrooms
- Peterborough City Council were proposing to bring the bedrooms standards policy in line with the criteria to be applied from April 2013 as failing to do so would put families at greater risk of being placed in to poverty
- Local authorities could frame their allocations policy to give additional preference to serving and former members of the armed forces. It was proposed that additional preference was also awarded to applicants who:
  - ❖ Had strong local connections with Peterborough
  - ❖ Were working or training for work in Peterborough
  - ❖ Were making a community contribution
  - ❖ Were members of the armed forces, former members of the armed forces, Serving members of the armed forces who needed to move because of a serious injury , medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service, Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the armed forces leaving services family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner, Serving or former members of the Reserve Forces who needed to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service
- Applicants who were awarded additional preference would receive priority over an applicant in the same priority band who did not have additional preference irrespective of the length of time they had been in the band.

The commission were asked to contribute comments and views as part of the formal consultation process, particularly in relation to housing allocations in rural areas.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members queried whether the Homelessness Act still applied within the criteria even if the person did not have local connections and how the Welfare Reform would affect households in terms of accumulation of rent arrears. *The Housing Needs Manager informed the Commission that this had been the biggest change in housing, housing allocation and homelessness and that over the next few years there would be significant challenges to overcome. The Homelessness Act still applied and took precedence over any changes made in policy. The Local connection would not be the criteria to qualify for the housing register it would be the criteria to qualify for additional preference*
- Members queried if the long standing local connection to qualify for additional preference was anywhere in the city or could it be for specific villages. *The Housing Needs Manager advised the Commission that the proposal was for a long standing local connection anywhere within the city.*
- Members requested clarification on the under 25 rule and whether this still applied within the new policy. *The Housing Needs Manager informed the Commission that the changes*

*implemented in January 2012 were that if you were under 25 and you wanted accommodation in the private sector and were in receipt of housing benefit, the housing benefit would only pay up to the shared accommodation room rate which was significantly lower than the one bedroom rate. In January 2012 the age was changed from under 25 to under 35 before a person could receive the one bedroom rate of housing benefit.*

- *Members queried how this would affect housing benefit for parents of a young person living with them who was 18 and not working. The Housing Needs Manager advised the Commission that the parents would receive a housing benefit reduction and the young person would need to make up the difference.*
- *Members sought clarification regarding part 4 of the report which stated that having a local connection would be part of the additional preference criteria. The draft policy document, paragraph 9.9 had however stated 'Applications will not be accepted from applicants who did not have a local connection with Peterborough'. Was this part of the criteria or was it just part of the additional preferences. The Housing Needs Manager informed the Commission that it related to both the criteria and additional preferences. Once a person had qualified for the register then the additional preference category would be looked in to.*
- *Members felt that section 9.9 (iii) 'The applicant or a member of their household has immediate family parents, children, brothers, sisters and other family members (if there is a particularly close relationship) who have lived in the district for at least the past 5 years' could be open to interpretation. The Housing Needs Manager advised Members that this was open to interpretation because there could be a relationship where a family member acted as a parent or guardian and this would be up to the officer to make a decision in those circumstances.*
- *Members commented that it was good to recognise volunteering contributions within the city.*
- *Members queried whether the extra criteria for additional preferences only included the armed forces or could it be extended to the Police or Fire Service. The Housing Needs Manager advised Members that the legislation permitted the Council to look at any groups. The Council had not considered giving additional preference to any of the other groups but this could be considered going forward.*
- *The report had clearly stated what the proposal was in terms of the criteria and it also stated what the current criteria was. The consultation however had only stated the proposed criteria. Members suggested that the consultation should include both criteria in order to obtain a detailed opinion. The Housing Needs Officer advised the Commission that they had tried as much as they could within consultation questionnaire to include both criteria, in addition to this there was a covering letter with the questionnaire explaining the proposed changes in more detail. The consultation had been distributed to everybody who had a live application with the housing register plus there was information available on the Council website and officers giving telephone advice.*
- *Members queried who would be deal with any appeals. The Housing Needs Manager informed the Commission that the proposal to conduct reviews would be for a combined panel which consisted of two representatives from the Housing Needs Service and operational managers from the Council's partner Housing Associations.*
- *Members were concerned that people in their early 50's were going in to the sheltered accommodation in Barnack from all around the city. The Housing Needs Manager informed the Commission that sheltered accommodation had an age restriction for people over the age of 55 though sometimes they could have a partner who was under 55. There was a difficulty with letting sheltered accommodation to remote locations like Barnack therefore sometimes it was a case of leaving the property empty or housing a person with a lower age limit.*
- *Members queried whether the Council dealt with housing needs by assisting people to find housing within the private sector and how was that dealt with in the rural areas. The Housing Needs Manager advised Members that they currently assisted households to meet their housing needs. The stock of social housing was very limited therefore*

*everything was done to assist people by finding them other forms of housing. There was an initiative in place called the rent deposit scheme where the Council were able to assist households to secure accommodation in the private sector for a six or twelve month assured short hold tenancy. This was used as a homelessness prevention tool. The Council were given new powers under the Localism Act to discharge its homelessness duties by way of a private sector tenancy. There were some restrictions around suitability of the accommodation therefore there was still some work to do regarding the private sector to ensure the Council were meeting the suitability requirements. Rural areas did not have much private sector accommodation and if there was then the rent would be considerably high for somebody on housing benefit.*

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Commission recommends that the Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning investigates the feasibility to grant additional preference within rural areas to housing applicants of substantive and long standing Village connections.

## **ACTION AGREED**

The Housing Needs Manager agreed to consider looking in to extending the additional preference criteria to the Police and Fire Service.

## **7. Notice of Intention to Take Key Decisions**

The Committee received the latest version of the Council's Notice of Intention to Take Key Decisions, containing key decisions that the Leader of the Council anticipated the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would make during the course of the following four months. Members were invited to comment on the Plan and, where appropriate, identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's work programme.

## **ACTION AGREED**

The Commission asked for clarification on the Notice of Intention to Take Key Decisions which was formerly the Forward Plan as it did not include dates of when the decisions would be taken.

## **8. Work Programme**

Members considered the Commission's Work Programme for 2012/13 and discussed possible items for inclusion.

## **ACTION AGREED**

To confirm the work programme for 2012/13 and the Governance Officer to include any additional items as requested during the meeting.

## **9. Date of Next Meeting**

14 January 2012

*The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 8.55pm*

CHAIRMAN