

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY PANEL
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25 MARCH 2009
AT THE BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOM - TOWN HALL**

Present: Councillors D Over (Chairman), J Wilkinson (Vice-Chairman), S Dalton, D Day, S Day and J R Fox

Also Present: Councillor Murphy
Councillor Lee

Officers Present: Adrian Chapman, Head of Neighbourhood Services
Ralph Middlebrook, Supporting People Manager
Karen Whatley, Homelessness Prevention Manager
Gillian Barclay, Arts and Heritage Services Manager
Amy Brown, Solicitor
Paulina Ford, Performance Scrutiny and Research Officer
Gemma George, Governance Support Officer
Kevin Tighe, Head of Cultural Services

1. Apologies For Absence

Apologies had been received from Councillor Allen.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 11 February 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2009 were approved as a correct record.

CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF THE AGENDA

It was agreed that item 7 on the agenda, the Update on the Proposed Closure of Southview – Supporting People, would be considered next.

4. Update on the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2011

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the progress of the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2011 and associated outputs.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities stated that “an applicant was statutorily homeless if they did not have accommodation that they had a legal right to occupy, which was accessible and physically available to them (and their household) and which it would be reasonable for them to continue to live in. It was not reasonable for someone to continue to live in their home, for example, if that was likely to lead to violence against them (or a member of their family)”.

Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 placed a duty on housing authorities to ensure that advice and information regarding homelessness and preventing homelessness, was available to everyone in their district free of charge. The legislation also required authorities to assist individuals and families who were homeless or threatened with homelessness and applied for help.

In 2002, the Government amended the homelessness legislation to ensure a more strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness, in particular, by requiring a homelessness strategy for every housing authority district.

The strategy was based on a review of all forms of homelessness in the district. It set out the local authorities' plans for preventing homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation was, or would be, available for those who became homeless or were at risk of becoming so. All organisations, whose work could help to prevent homelessness, or meet the needs of homeless people in their district, were considered in the strategy. This joined up working had a massive impact on reducing those who would otherwise potentially experience the negative aspects of homelessness and the risks of becoming homeless. Through the implementation of the Homelessness Strategy, the aim was to reduce the number of people in the local authority area who were homeless or threatened with homelessness. A preventative approach was seen as the most effective way to achieve this and to ensure that there were the necessary support services available including access to free advice and assistance which was vital. The Tenancy Relations Service and work which had been undertaken in schools to educate people prior to their move to independent living had resulted in reductions of homeless acceptances.

The credit crunch saw a 72% increase in people seeking advice through Housing Options regarding mortgage arrears and a 59% increase in relationship breakdowns which increased the threat of homelessness. Access to support and advice alleviated these issues, prevented actual homelessness and reduced pressure on housing waiting lists. Currently there were 9949 applicants on the Peterborough Common Housing Register.

Members were invited to comment on the report and the following issues were raised:

- Members questioned why a father with children would be housed in a single bedroom property, as this would surely impact on the amount of access he had to his children. Members were advised that a father would be housed depending on the level of access he had to his children, for example, if the father had 50/50 access to his children then he would be housed accordingly. If the level of access was lower than 50% then the private rental sector would be suggested.
- A query was raised regarding the Peterborough Accredited Landlords Scheme, if a private landlord was part of the scheme, would this determine whether they could obtain a rent deposit loan. Members were informed that the landlord accreditation scheme had been introduced recently, and all landlords should be accredited. However, this would not affect their ability to obtain a rent deposit loan.
- Members sought clarification on the reasons behind 9949 applicants being on the Peterborough Common Housing Register, this figure seemed rather high. Members were advised that there were approximately 200 families who required a move as priority, but the figure also included the number of people who wanted to move out of choice, thus increasing the number.
- A reference was made to the item on the agenda concerning the update on the work of private sector housing, specifically the 1923 empty properties which had been identified at the beginning of April 2008. Going forward, could tenants not be provided for these properties. Members were assured that work was undertaken with housing options in order to populate these residences, and grants were given in order to bring the properties back up to habitable standard.

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel noted the report.

5. Update on the Work of Private Sector Housing

The Panel received a report which detailed the recent work which had been undertaken by Private Sector Housing Officers in relation to the private rented sector.

Specific areas of work relating to the regulation and improvement of the private rented sector were highlighted to the Panel, these included:

- Tenancy relations;
- Empty homes;
- Additional houses in multiple occupation licensing; and
- Landlord accreditation scheme.

With regards to tenancy relations, in 2008, Supporting People had funded two temporary Tenancy Relations Officers for six months, during which time they had dealt with 100 enquiries and had prevented illegal evictions including those relating to repossessions and harassment. Several cases had also been progressed towards prosecution which ensured clear and consistent messages were given to landlords and letting agents about how they should let their properties in the city.

The introduction of Empty Home Grants in Peterborough over the recent years, along with the first use of new legislation and the launch of a private sector leasing scheme, had helped to bring a number of empty properties back into use. On 1 April 2008, Peterborough had 1923 empty properties, 858 of those were long term empty. Under the Empty Homes Strategy, 266 long term empty properties had been brought back into use since 2003. Also, following the introduction of the Private Sector Leasing Scheme in April 2007, there had been 34 privately owned empty properties brought up to a decent homes standard and made available to let through Housing Options as social housing. As it stood, there were a further 10 properties in the process of being prepared. Peterborough was also the first authority in the country to make full use of new powers granted by government under the Housing Act 2004 and made the first ever Final Empty Dwelling Management Order in July 2008. This resulted in a property that had stood empty for over 5 years to be renovated and a further 10 properties identified for Empty Dwelling Management Orders.

A House in multiple occupation (HMO) was a building occupied by three or more persons forming two or more households and sharing at least one basic amenity. Any HMO comprising or three or more storeys and occupied by five or more persons forming two or more households, was required to be mandatory licensed by the local authority. Currently, there were approximately 150 HMOs in Peterborough that required mandatory licensing under the Housing Act 2004. However, the city had far more smaller houses being used for multiple occupation which were not required to be mandatory licensed. So with this in mind, private sector housing had made an application to Communities and Local Government for an additional HMO licensing scheme in December 2008 to cover the smaller houses in multiple occupation. Approval for the scheme was received at the beginning of March 2009 and the HMOs covered in the designation were those comprising two or more storeys and occupied by three or more persons forming two or more households, and where at least one basic amenity was shared. It was estimated that there were 300 HMOs within the specified designated area that would require licensing.

The implementation of the pilot of the Peterborough Accredited Landlord Scheme (pals) had taken place on 9 December 2008. Private Sector Housing had been working closely with local letting agents and private landlords to implement the pilot which recognised those who were committed to providing properly managed, good quality accommodation to let. The

scheme would also benefit tenants who, by signing a tenancy agreement with an accredited landlord, could rest assured that the property was safe and the landlord fair and reasonable. The pilot, which was free and voluntary, had a steering group which was made up from local managing agents and landlords and the landlord accreditation officer. To date, a total of 15 letting agents and landlords had been accredited under the scheme with a total portfolio of 1758 properties. The landlord accreditation officer was also working with Housing Options officers to ensure that all of the accommodation used to house homeless and vulnerable residents was accredited through the scheme.

Members were advised that, going forward, private sector housing would be placed at the heart of neighbourhood management enabling better intelligence sharing, therefore leading to better problem solving.

Members questioned whether it was going to be possible to achieve “no empty homes”. Members were advised that the Private Sector Housing Team were to be supported by a structure which saw housing as a priority and they would be surrounded by other officers who could help progress issues.

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel noted the report.

6. The Peterborough Festival 2009 - Update

The Panel received a report which provided an overview of the Peterborough Festival 2009. The festival would be focused around three weekends, with each weekend being held in a different location.

The Central Park weekend, which would be held on 20 and 21 June 2009, would provide a varied programme appealing to a wide audience, incorporating a diverse daytime programme and a first evening of popular music. The Sunday programme was to focus on an orchestral performance by the city of Peterborough Symphony Orchestra. The programme would be provided free to the public, although an event at the Cathedral with the Orpheus Male Choir would be a paid event.

The City Centre weekend, which would be held on 27 and 28 June 2009, would see the first ever ‘Heritage Festival’ in the heart of the city to celebrate its history and heritage. It would be delivered in partnership with the Cathedral and would incorporate re-enactments, medieval markets and performances of Shakespeare in and around the city centre and precincts.

The Embankment weekend, which would be held on 4 and 5 July 2009, would see the ‘country come to town’. A town and country fair, including displays, entertainment, local produce, a steam rally, shire horses and more would be provided by Oakleigh Fairs. Alongside this would be the Peterborough Boat Festival.

In addition to the three weekends there would be a host of other events taking place, providing opportunities for emerging talent in the area. This aspect of the festival would be encouraged over the coming years. The festival would also be developed as a recognisable brand with a three year rolling planning cycle which would allow sustained development and ongoing partnership involvement.

Members offered their support and good wishes for the event and were advised that they would all receive invitations to the official launch of the festival.

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel noted the report.

7. Update on the Proposed Closure of Southview - Supporting People Programme

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the proposed closure of Southview.

At the meeting of the Community Development Scrutiny Panel, held in February 2009, the Supporting People Annual Plan had been presented for approval. During the discussion, Councillor Murphy and Councillor Benton had raised concerns regarding the withdrawal of Supporting People funding to 1-3 Southview, Woodston. The property was owned by Axiom Housing and Supporting People funding had been used to provide housing related support for residents at the premises with learning difficulties. It had therefore been agreed at the meeting of the Community Development Scrutiny Panel, that officers would meet with the Councillors to discuss a possible way forward.

Following this meeting with Councillor Murphy and Councillor Benton, which had been held on 2 March 2009, it had been further agreed that a paper would be taken to the next Supporting People Commissioning Body meeting to review the decision taken to withdraw funding from Southview. This meeting was due to be held on 11 May 2009. The Supporting People Commissioning Body comprised of three voting members from Peterborough City Council, the Primary Care Trust and Cambridgeshire Probation. The Body was the governing body for the Supporting People programme and was responsible for making decisions regarding Supporting People funding.

Councillor Murphy and Councillor Lee, the latter whom was present on behalf of Councillor Benton, were invited to the table to speak. Concern was expressed at the prospective closure of Southview. The residents were distressed at the possibility of being separated. They had all been residents at the facility for a long time and offered one another immense support. Southview had originally been viewed as a lesser option, because of the lack of amenities including ensuite bathrooms etc, however the residents did not want to move and unfortunately it appeared that no consideration had been shown regarding their thoughts and feelings. If they were moved they would lose not only their unity, but also their family. They would also be housed in individual flats which would surely cost more than housing them at Southview.

Councillor Murphy highlighted to the Panel that a meeting had been held with the Operations Director and the Chief Executive from Axiom Housing, who were both present at the meeting of the Community Development Scrutiny Panel. In order for the residents to stay at Southview they had offered to change the property to fit in with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance. Therefore possible funding was there to be had from Axiom Housing.

Members were invited to comment on the report and the following issues were raised:

- Members questioned how many residents there were at the facility and what the costs were to keep the facility open. Members were advised that Southview housed 10 residents and received a grant of £67,000 per annum.
- Members further questioned the origin of the grant. Members were further advised that the grant was a government grant.
- Members expressed concern at the possibility of the 10 residents being moved away from their home, and also that their new accommodation could cost more than the £67,000 grant provided each year. Members were informed that it was important for the residents to be able to support themselves in the community and further information would be provided regarding the cost of housing the residents individually.
- A query was raised regarding the Supporting People Commissioning Body meeting which was due to be held on 11 May 2009. Was there any way that the meeting could be scheduled to happen sooner, as it would be more desirable for the residents to be informed of the outcome as soon as possible. Members were advised that the Commissioning Body met quarterly, and May

was the earliest meeting scheduled. However, this suggestion would be taken away and an earlier meeting would be requested.

- Members sought clarification on the different levels of needs of all the Southview residents, and whether confidence was high in their independence. Members were assured that confidence was extremely high, and all of the residents will be offered appropriate housing based on their individual needs.
- Members questioned if there was possibly a legal document of some description that residents could sign to say they were happy with their current accommodation and therefore did not want to be moved. Members were advised that this query would be investigated further.

The Panel recognised the plight of the residents at Southview and recommended that the proposal to bring the Supporting People Commissioning Body meeting forward to April was followed up straight away as a resolution to the matter was of vital importance.

The Panel was advised that it would be made aware of the outcome of the meeting of the Supporting People Commissioning Body as soon as possible and an update report would be brought back to the next meeting of the Community Development Scrutiny Panel.

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel

- (1) noted the report; and recommended the meeting of the Supporting People Commissioning Body be brought forward to April.

8. Executive Decisions

The Panel considered the following Executive Decision made since the last meeting:

- The Cultural Strategy

There were no requests from the Panel for any further information to be provided.

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel noted the report.

9. Forward Plan - 1 April to 31 July 2009

The latest version of the Forward Plan was presented to the Panel for consideration.

The Panel requested that further information be provided on the closure of Lady Lodge Arts Centre.

The Panel further requested that a report on Fletton Cemetery be presented at its next meeting in July.

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel noted the Forward Plan.

10. Agenda Plan 2008-09

The Panel received the latest version of the Agenda Plan for consideration.

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel noted the Agenda Plan.

The meeting began at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.01 pm

CHAIRMAN