

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2008 AT THE BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOM - TOWN HALL**

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

Officers Present: Paul Phillipson, Executive Director Operations
Adrian Chapman, Head of Neighbourhood Services
Karen Whatley, Homelessness Prevention Manager
Stephen Compton, Chief Executive, Opportunity Peterborough
Sarah Stannage, Project Officer, Opportunity Peterborough
Carrie Denness, Principal Lawyer
Liz Boome, Health Scrutiny Officer
Gemma George, Governance Support Officer

1. Apologies For Absence

No apologies had been received.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 September 2008

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2008 were approved as a correct record.

4. Streets Squares and Spaces Strategy (Public Realm Strategy)

The Panel received a report detailing the background of the Strategy.

At its meeting on 18 June 2008, the Panel had received a presentation outlining the Public Realm Strategy which had been re-named the Streets, Squares and Spaces Strategy. Members' views had been sought on the strategy prior to the Council and Opportunity Peterborough proceeding to 'implementation phase' of the public realm work, initially focusing on Cathedral Square.

The Panel had agreed that it wished to be engaged with the project as it progressed and welcomed the opportunity to consider detailed designs and timescales in due course. Subsequently, these had been prepared and had been the subject of wide consultation prior to and during their evolution.

The Panel was advised that previous comments had been taken on board and the design concept stage had now moved forward and a planning application would be submitted within the next two weeks.

Members were invited to view a detailed model for the planned transformation of Cathedral Square and the key areas of the design were highlighted, including:

- St John's Square and the possible addition of a pavilion area, creating more space for the public
- The introduction of more plants and foliage to the area
- The decrease in the number of water fountains, therefore increasing the space for pedestrians
- Controls for the water fountains to enable them to be activated only when the weather conditions were suitable
- The introduction of more lighting to enhance the appearance of the area at night time
- The provision of more seating in the area as well as the proposed bollards, all of which would be produced from locally sourced natural materials. The addition of more seating would also decrease the dominance of the road
- The possibility of bespoke bins with joint recycling compartments to encourage zero waste
- The overall look of the area would be sophisticated and clean, enhancing and celebrating the surrounding buildings

Members were asked to consider and comment on the design and the following issues were raised:

- A query was raised regarding the fountains and the possibility of them acting as a barrier instead of enticing people into the area. Members were advised that a review had been undertaken which had focused on pedestrian movement, and the flexibility of the system would accommodate the concerns. The fountains could be turned off at any time, for example when the local markets were taking place.
- A further query was raised regarding the safety of people walking near the fountains and also the possibility of the public treading excess water into Queensgate shopping centre. Members were assured that a non slip granite surface would be used to surround the fountains and also the water dispersed further afield from the fountains would be minimal. The centre for environment and the public had also shared these concerns hence the proposals for the fountains being turned off during the winter months.
- Clarification was sought on the reasons behind the recent inclusion of trees in the designs. Members were advised that the non intrusive trees had been incorporated into the design for two reasons. Firstly to partly disguise the back of the old Queensgate building and secondly to encourage a barrier like effect maintaining the possibility of vehicular access as requested in a recent vehicle audit of the area.

ACTION AGREED:

The Panel considered the detailed designs for Cathedral Square.

5. Peterborough Housing Register and Allocations Policy

A report was submitted to the Panel detailing proposed additions to the Peterborough Housing Register and Allocations Policy following recommendation from the Peterborough Choice Based Lettings Board.

Members were advised that in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 Part VI, Local Authorities and/or agents administering the Local Authorities allocations scheme must provide a Choice Based Lettings scheme by 2010. Choice Based Lettings had been in operation in Peterborough since 2004.

Choice Based Lettings aimed to provide applicants with as much choice as possible by openly advertising vacancies and inviting applicants to express their interest. The system aimed to simplify existing allocations procedures and to provide an open and transparent service to applicants, an applicant being anyone seeking housing through the scheme, including existing tenants wishing to transfer.

Peterborough City Council and the Registered Social Landlords (housing associations regulated by the Housing Corporation that provide affordable housing on a not-for-profit basis) had worked in partnership with tenants and stakeholders to produce the common housing policy for allocating their properties in Peterborough. Therefore, this enabled the Council to maintain a single housing register for Peterborough, making it easier for applicants to find out about housing.

The policy was considered to be fit for purpose and the changes suggested were only minor additions to reflect the growth of the scheme.

Members were asked to consider and comment on the report including the minor changes suggested and the following issues were raised:

- Clarification was sought on the “2 children of opposite sex” rule and the reasoning behind this criteria being placed under the three bedroom heading. Members were advised that the general ruling was that if a parent had a male child over the age of 7 or a female child over the age of 7 they would require separate bedrooms hence the need for a three bedroom property.
- A query was raised regarding troublesome tenants with young children and whether, if this behaviour persisted, they would be evicted from the property. Members were advised that this would be down to the discretion of the landlord and it would depend on the level of behaviour. The Council would however have a duty to provide assistance in such a situation.
- Members questioned whether it was common for tenants to be four weeks in arrears with their rent. Members were advised that evaluation had been undertaken of other local authorities and the proposed addition to the current policy was to be put in place to act as a warning system.
- Clarification was sought on the bidding system, and whether people placed in a higher band would be subject to the bidding process. Members were advised that the Choice Based Lettings system required all applicants to bid for properties. Applicants who had been accepted by the Council as unintentionally homeless and in priority need would be made one reasonable offer of accommodation. Bidding could also be undertaken by the Council on behalf of vulnerable applicants or those with support needs.
- Members questioned the number of houses available and the length of time it would take to house a person in Band 1. Members were advised that there were currently 220 people located in Band 1 and roughly 30 properties per week were becoming available. The market was very competitive with some properties being more desirable than others.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel:

- (i) Noted and approved the additions to the policy;
- (ii) Agreed to the recommendation to Cabinet to approve the additions to the policy.

6. Executive Decisions

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

- Peterborough Public Realm Strategy

There were no requests from the Panel for any further information on this item.

A request was made for further information regarding the Mercury Abatement executive decision. Members were advised that information would be circulated the next day.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the report.

7. Forward Plan

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

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the Forward Plan.

8. Feedback and Update Report

The Panel received a report detailing the progress of the community contact centres funding.

The Panel considered the report and no issues were raised. Members were advised that any future queries should be directed to the Head of Neighbourhood Services.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the report.

9. Work Programme

The Panel received the latest version of the Work Programme for consideration.

Members requested an update on the proposals for the Corn Exchange and were advised that it would be scheduled into the work programme and brought to a future meeting.

ACTION AGREED

The Panel noted the latest version of the Work Programme.

The meeting began at 7.00 pm and ended at 7.38 pm

CHAIRMAN