



Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities held at the
Bourges/Viersen Room - Town Hall
on 21 November 2011

Members Present: Councillors C Burton (Chair), D Sanders, R Dobbs, E Murphy, N Sandford, G Casey and J R Fox

Officers Present: Anne Keogh, – Housing Strategy Manager
Andrew Wilson, Head of Enterprise Services, NWES
Justin Beaumont, Marketing and Commercial Trading Manager
Leonie McCarthy, Social Inclusion Manager
Paulina Ford, Senior Governance Officer
Karen Dunleavy, Governance Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Over, Nawaz, Stokes, Shaheed and Harrington. Substitutes in attendance were Councillor Burton, Councillor Casey, Councillor Sandford, and Councillor Fox.

2. Declaration of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3. Minutes of Meeting Held on 19 September 2011

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2011, were approved as a true and accurate record subject to Councillor Sanders being included in the minutes as attending the meeting.

4. Draft Housing Strategy 2011 - 2015

Members received a presentation of the report for the draft Housing Strategy 2011-15 for Peterborough. Members were advised that development of the Housing Strategy was a statutory requirement under the Local Government Act 2003. Comments made by the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities would be included in the consultation responses and fed into the final draft of the strategy. Members were also informed that the final draft Housing Strategy would be presented to Cabinet in February 2012 and that the current draft version of the Housing Strategy was presented to Cabinet on 7 November and subsequently received approval to commence a four week public consultation.

Key points highlighted were:

The draft Housing Strategy was a major policy item for the Council, which set out the Council's policies, commitments and programme for the period 2011-2015 for a wide range of Housing matters, including:

- How the Council would assist vulnerable people, such as the homeless;

- What the Council's priorities were for delivering new homes, including prestige and affordable homes;
- How the Council would endeavour to regenerate existing housing stock, whether that be private or social housing;
- How the Council would assist people to get access to housing, including the Council's Mortgage Scheme;
- How the Council would tackle Gypsy and Traveller housing issues; and
- How the Council would respond to the Government's reforms to social housing

The four key objectives of the Strategy were:

- To support the delivery of substantial yet sustainable growth;
 - To secure the regeneration and improvements to Peterborough's housing stock;
 - To meet existing and future housing needs; and
 - To create mixed and sustainable communities.
- Members were invited to comment on the draft Housing Strategy. All comments would be included in the consultation responses that would feed into the final draft version of the Strategy which would be presented to Cabinet in February 2012. The Consultation would close on 12 December 2011.

Members also received an update on:

- Rural housing delivery partnership;
- Working with Parishes for Rural acceptance sites; and
- Community land trusts and self build for rural areas;

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Would the Parish Councils be approached in regards to the plans for the rural areas? *The Housing Strategy Manager advised Members that the team were consulting with all key stakeholders who would feedback to their client groups. The Consultation was available on the Peterborough City Council website and in all libraries. Parish Councils had also been advised that the draft Housing Strategy was available for consultation and had been invited to comment.*
- Members commented on the 385 affordable homes that Cross Key homes have been allocated funding to provide as a result of their recent bid to the HCA for the 2011-15 affordable housing programme and sought clarification over how many of them had been identified for placement in rural areas? *Members were advised that Cross Keys had four years to identify where they would place units, and to date, 180 homes were included in their site proposals. However, there had been no new sites identified for the rural areas and that there was no further details to date over where the unidentified units would be located. The numbers of homes recently completed and currently under construction in rural areas would be confirmed by the Housing Strategy Manager at a later date.*
- Members sought clarification regarding housing developments on Community Trust Land referred to within Council's draft Housing Strategy and where the intended location would be for rural areas? *Members were advised that there are no CLT in progress yet in Peterborough.*
- Councillor Sanders commented that Eye was against development outside the village envelope and sought comments of the Housing Strategy Manager? *Members were advised that the rural sites would only go forward if the Parish Councils accepted the proposals of the housing associations.*
- Members commented that the Council was committing itself to an ambitious Housing Strategy in order to provide 25,500 homes by 2026.

- Members commented that the draft Housing Strategy would be unsustainable if the Council had not used all available land because of objections received to build on rural sites? *The Housing Strategy Manager advised Members that policies and strategies were being used to encourage housing growth; however, agreement was needed from the rural areas in identifying development sites for rural exception development.*
- Members commented about the provision of 25,500 homes by 2026 and sought clarification over the allocation of sites for Eye and some other areas in Peterborough and whether the Council was being led by developers over which sites would be used? *The Officer advised the Committee that the Council would try to facilitate development sites where possible; however, developers would only develop on their preferred sites. Members were also advised that the power to encourage development on sites was held within the Core Strategy and the Site Allocations Document rather than in the Housing Strategy.*
- The council's Repairs Assistance Fund would provide help for houses in the form of grants to improve energy efficiency. Members sought clarification over the council's target for improving the thermal efficiency in private sector homes in Peterborough using these funds *Members were advised that one hundred houses would be assisted each year, and that funding was available through Warm Front Grants and Council schemes. Members were also advised that the Green Deal scheme was to be introduced next year and that there was no date for the Council to introduce its own Green Deal strategy. The Housing Strategy Manager advised Members that further information would be provided on how the Council intended to develop a Green Deal strategy.*
- Comments were made over Peterborough's aspirations to become the Environment Capital and that there seemed to be a slight discrepancy between the Government's and Peterborough's targets to improve thermal efficiencies for houses? *Members were advised that Council intended to tackle thermal initiatives by working with energy companies to provide advice on how to improve energy saving ideas, and to introduce a scheme to ensure that households were aware of their energy ratings.*
- Members commented that the draft Housing Strategy had made reference to the Council's Community Action Plan (CAP) and the provision for community-led housing solutions. Clarification was sought over whether the Housing Strategy Manager was confident that Neighbourhood Committees would develop their CAP's by April 2012? *The Housing Strategy Manager advised Members that following consultation with Neighbourhood Managers, the Council was advised to reschedule the target date for the development of CAP's.*
- Members sought clarification over the representation of the figures within the report on the Council's targets on the supply of new housing between 2007 and 2010 and wanted to know if the figures had decreased? *The Housing Strategy Manager confirmed that the figures within the report separated the total number of supply of new housing to show the numbers for private sector and affordable housing. Members were also advised, that the two figures combined, showed that there had been an increase over the three year period.*
- Members sought clarification over whether the term 'Handy Persons Scheme' within the draft Housing Strategy was the same thing as Care and Repair and whether the funding was guaranteed until 2014? *Members were advised that the Handy Person Scheme was part of the Care and Repair Team and that funding was secured until 2013/14.*
- Members sought clarification over whether the £100,000 funding that was received by the Peterborough Handy Persons Scheme was shared between the Handy Persons Scheme and the Care and Repair Team? *The Housing Strategy Manger advised that this would need to be clarified and that the information would be provided at a later date.*
- Members sought clarification over how near the Council was to providing a transit site for the Travelling Community and if the draft Housing Strategy covered this? *The Housing Strategy Manager advised Members that a site had been identified at Norwood Lane and that a public inspection of site allocation report was expected back from the inspector. It had been identified that the site was to be safe guarded, but if a more appropriate alternative was put forward, then it may be pursued.*

- Clarification was sought over whether the Council was confident that the Norwood Lane site had been correctly identified for the Gypsy and Travelling community. Members commented further that previous provisions by the Council for a Transit site at Norwood Lane had been unsuccessful.
- Members commented about affordable housing and sought clarification over the Council's plans to provide housing for people that had originated from rural areas? *Members were advised that Parish Councils were being asked to consider exception sites for development. The Local Authority Mortgage Scheme would also assist in helping people to get on the property ladder. However, preference would only be given to people that had originated from rural areas for affordable housing provided in rural locations if the housing is provided on a rural exception site.*
- PCC had maintained membership of the Rural Housing Development Partnership until 2013. What was the benefit of this? *The Housing Strategy Manager advised Members that there was a benefit for the Council to continue the membership, as the expertise and knowledge provided was thought to be of great value.*
- Members sought clarification over the recent change in the Housing Benefit policy and whether it made it difficult for adult children to stay at home with their parents? *The Housing Strategy Manger advised Members that a slight reduction in Housing Benefit was made if the non dependent was unemployed and that concerns had been raised by schemes such as Shelter and Housing Associations over the implications. The aim of the change was thought to encourage parents to think about whether they were able to afford to keep their non dependent children at home.*
- Members commented that one in five people in Peterborough was unemployed and received benefits and that current rental climates were becoming unaffordable for them. Members also commented that the number for new build properties had reduced for 2010 and 2011 and that the figure for homelessness was up by 60 percent. *The Housing Strategy Manager confirmed that there had been a higher completion of affordable properties in 2009/2010. Members were also advised that the figures for homelessness had recently remained stable and that work was being conducted by the Council on prevention methods. The Housing Strategy Manger advised that the latest figures would be provided to Members for the next three quarters.*

ACTION AGREED

The Commission requested that the Housing Strategy Manager provide further information on:

- New builds on Community Trust Land in rural areas;
- Clarification on Funding secured for the Handy Person Scheme and Care and Repair; and
- The Council's intension to develop its Green Deal strategy;
- Third quarter figures for affordable housing?
- The Principal Strategic Planning Officer to provide an update on the inspectors report on site allocations. A separate meeting would be organised to discuss the document in further detail and in particular options for land to provide provision for a Transit site.

5. Peterborough Enterprise Centre - Engagement with Rural Communities

The Norfolk & Waveney Enterprise Services (NWES) Head of Enterprise Services presented the report to the Commission, on the work being conducted by the Peterborough Enterprise Centre to promote business start up in rural areas. Funding for the Enterprise project had originally been sourced from the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) Economic Participation Programme and had been managed through Peterborough City Council. This funding had ceased on 31 March 2011 and further funding options had been explored and had been obtained.

The activities to engage with rural areas over business start up were as follows:

- Leaflets in Libraries - Thorney and Eye.
- Leaflets in Post Offices - Thorney, Newborough, Glinton, Helpston, Northborough, Wansford, Wittering
- Leaflets on notice boards – Peakirk, Maxey, Marholm, Royal Air Force Wittering Children’s Centre, Northborough
- Advertising campaign in the Evening Telegraph
- Open day events, spring into action campaign to encourage the public to visit the centre

Members were asked to consider the information presented and make any appropriate recommendations for future development and engagement of rural communities by Peterborough Enterprise Centre.

Further to the report the Head of Enterprise Services advised Members that:

- The Enterprise Centre was under new management- NWES had taken over as centre managers in January 2011,
- The café was closed in April as it had not been financially viable,
- The branding had changed to Peterborough Enterprise Centre,
- Further funding had been sourced from the council to run the Enterprise Centre. NWES have secured funding additional to that from the council to provide additional support focussing on supporting businesses to start in a low carbon manner., and
- NWES have been looking to draw other providers into the centre, for example Princes Trust now use the centre on an ad hoc but regular basis.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members sought clarification over the funding available from Peterborough City Council (PCC) to run the Enterprise Peterborough Centre? *The Head of Enterprise Services advised Members that from 1 October 2011, PCC had been provided £86,000 for an eighteen month period. Members were also advised that the total funding figure for the Enterprise Centre was higher than this and NWES own contribution amounted to £125,000 which included the funding from other funding sources that they had secured.*
- Members sought clarification over whether the number of clients the Centre had received, had provided value for money? *The Head of Enterprise Services advised Members that there had been a fifty percent over delivery against contract, so the service was value for money.*
- What advertising campaign had there been to promote the change in name from Women’s Enterprise Centre to the Peterborough Enterprise Centre? *The Head of Enterprise Services confirmed that a press release had been issued at the time of the name change. Members were also advised that it was hoped that the central location in the centre would invite people to investigate what was on offer.*
- Members noted that there had been engagement with 233 clients since 1 April. Had officers measured the outcome of this engagement? *The Head of Enterprise Services advised Members that there had been 22 business start ups and that this had been average for industry standards and what the centre was expecting.*
- Members raised a question regarding the advice given by the Enterprise Centre on low carbon initiatives for businesses, and sought clarification over whether the centre was working in partnership with the other organisations such as Eco Innovations or whether the centre was in competition with them. *Members were advised that the Enterprise Centre provided a different type of carbon initiative advice to that of the other organisations, so was not in competition with them. The advice provided by carbon initiative businesses such as Eco Innovations, would provide advice on the detail of how*

- to trade in an environmental friendly way as opposed to the Enterprise Centre providing advice on a more generic basic principle of why to do something in a low carbon manner*
- Members sought clarification over the definition for client engagement, which was referred to within the report? *The Head of Enterprise Services advised Members that client engagement was someone receiving face to face business advice with an advisor. Members were also advised that the centre, on average, provided 2.3 advice sessions per client.*
 - Members raised a question regarding the total £200,000 investment figures that had been highlighted in the presentation and sought clarification over whether the centre would be providing figures regarding the return. *The Head of Enterprise Services advised Members that the calculation on investment return had not been carried out*
 - What sort of business advice was being provided for in the rural areas? *Members were advised that there was very little difference in advice provided for rural and non rural areas. Primarily the centre was providing advice on life style businesses such as gardening and beauticians.*
 - Why had the centre's name changed from Enterprise Women's Centre to the Peterborough Enterprise Centre, and whether the public would realise that the services currently being provided catered for both men and women? *Members were advised that the company took over the contract on a six month basis and at the time it was decided that a re-launch of the centre was not required, only a name change.*
 - Members wanted to know whether other organisations had been invited to use the Peterborough Enterprise Centre and share the running costs. *The Head of Enterprise Services advised Members that the centre and council staff had held discussions with Opportunity Peterborough, Princes Trust, Manor Drive, Job Centre and other providers. Members were also advised that work was being conducted to liaise closely with the Head of Commercial Opportunities to identify partnership opportunities.*
 - Members raised comments regarding the Business Link centre, which provided free advice to the public and that it had been due to be closed down. *Members were advised that that following the announcement of the Business Link closure, this presented opportunities such as offering commercially priced training opportunities to the public and that it would provide sustainability for the centre.*
 - What types of business start ups had there been by members of the public using the Enterprise Centre. *Members were advised that there were 76 start ups so far with a projected 38 for the current 18 month contract? The Head of Enterprise Services would provide Members with information on the Investing in Communities case studies in order to provide an example of the types of business that had been started up.*
 - Members raised a question about the support available through the Peterborough Enterprise Centre to advise companies when businesses were struggling on how to become successful. Members also sought clarification over what resources was available to provide the advice?

Members were advised of the following support opportunities available to businesses:

- A business advisor based at the centre;
 - The British Bankers Association provided mentors for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises;
 - The Low Carbon initiative;
 - Government's tender plans to introduce a high growth business coaching programme for high growth companies
- Members wanted to know what plans were in place to improve the promotion of services available to the rural community. *The Head of Enterprise Services invited Members to make suggestions on how engagement with rural communities should be improved. Members were also advised that the centre was also working with Cross Keys,*

Neighbourhood Managers, and other networking opportunities to spread the word as much as possible.

Members offered the following suggestions:

- Communicate with Parish Councils; and
- Promotion in village magazines.

Members commented that the Council's investment of £86,000 in the Peterborough Enterprise Centre was a good use of resources, as 76 companies had been started up through the scheme.

ACTION AGREED

The Head of Enterprise Services would provide Members with further information on the following:

- Return on investment for the Peterborough Enterprise Centre specifically for rural areas;
- The Peterborough Enterprise Centre's plans for rural engagement; and
- Investigating in Communities case studies.

The response would be sent to Officers and then circulated to Members of the Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities and substitutes that were interested in receiving the information.

6. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The latest version of the Forward Plan, showing details of the key decisions that the Leader of the Council believed the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would be making over the next four months, was received.

In relation to the sale of the surplus former residential care home in Eye, KEY/01OCT/1; Councillor Sanders requested that provision should be made for open space from the sale of the Croft when the capital receipt for the sale was complete. It was agreed that Simon Webber would produce a briefing note on the allocation of land.

7. Work Programme

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme for 2011/12 and discussed possible items for inclusion.

Members were advised that there was a change to date of the joint budget meeting. The meeting due to be held on 5 January 2012, would be held on 30 January 2012.

To confirm the work programme for 2011/12 and the Scrutiny Officer to include any additional items as requested during the meeting.

8. Date of the next Meeting

Monday, 9 January 2012.

CHAIRMAN
7.00 - 9.08 pm