

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN THE  
BOURGES & VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH  
ON  
20 NOVEMBER 2012**

**Present:** Councillors Peach (Chairman), Day (Vice Chairman) Kreling, Nawaz, Johnson, Forbes and J R Fox

**Also Present:** Councillor P Hiller Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning

<b>Officers in Attendance:</b>	Adrian Chapman	Head of Neighbourhood Services
	Jawaid Khan	Community Cohesion Manager
	Ian Phillips	Assistant Community Cohesion Manager
	Julie Rivett	Neighbourhood Manager
	Brian Tyler	DIAL
	Belinda Child	Strategic Housing Manager
	Sharon Malia	Housing Programmes Manager
	Adam Cliff	Empty Homes Officer
	Paul Phillipson	Executive Director of Operations
	Amy Brown	Solicitor
	Dania Castagliuolo	Governance Officer

**1. Apologies**

No apologies were received.

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

Portfolio Progress Report from Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods

Councillor Fox declared that he was chairman of the working group for Care and Repair.

**3. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2012**

The minutes of the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 September 2012 were approved as an accurate record.

**4. Call In of any Cabinet, Cabinet Member or Key Officer Decisions**

There were no requests for Call-in to consider

**5. Portfolio Progress Report from Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods**

The purpose of this report was to provide members with a progress report from the Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning in relation to matters relevant to the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee.

The following areas were highlighted within the report:

- Neighbourhood Management
- Housing and Homelessness Prevention

- Environmental Health
- Licensing
- Trading Standards
- Enforcement and Housing Enforcement
- Pollution Control
- Civil Enforcement
- Enforcement against Environmental Crime
- Social Inclusion
- Strategic Planning
- Building Control and Planning Compliance
- Planning Development Management
- Transport and Engineering
- Forthcoming Priorities which included:
  - ❖ From April 2013 the council would become responsible for the Public Health function that currently fell under the remit of the NHS. The function and staff would be integrated in to the existing Neighbourhoods division.
  - ❖ National reforms in the welfare system were to be welcomed, but it was recognised that there would be local impacts that needed to be carefully planned.
  - ❖ Achieving the right balance between needing to find savings and enhancing the approach to working with and supporting communities and businesses was critical, especially as the council began to prepare its budget for the coming years.
  - ❖ The integration of the four main transport and engineering contracts in to one new core contract, which would further strengthen Peterborough's ability to deliver all aspects of the service in an efficient and effective manner.
  - ❖ The major challenges to the transport group would stem from continued budgetary pressures that were inevitable in the current economic climate and reduced funding from central Government.
  - ❖ A vibrant, thriving, safe, attractive and sustainable city centre was key to Peterborough's future bringing economic prosperity, inward investment and a greater sense of pride. With the regeneration work already completed in the city centre, broader delivery of city centre regeneration through the process was already underway.

Members were asked to scrutinise the progress made on the Cabinet Member's Portfolio by providing challenge where necessary and to suggest ideas and initiatives to support improvements in performance.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members commented that a lot of people benefited from the Care and Repair Scheme and queried if the funding for lighting outside the doors of elderly people would still be available next year. *The Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning advised Members that he was a great supporter of the Care and Repair Scheme and that there would be funding for the lighting next year but it would be delivered in a different way to the previous year.*
- Members were concerned that alcohol licenses were still being issued within the Millfield area where there had been an increase in antisocial behaviour. *The Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning advised the Committee that the members of the Licensing Committee always listened to the representations of the qualified advisors before approving a licence and if there was no representation and no objection to licensing hours being increased or new licenses being issued then the Licensing Committee would have difficulty in refusing a license if they had no good reason to.*

- Members were concerned that so few members of public turned up to the Neighbourhood Committee meetings and queried whether there were any thoughts on conducting them less frequently. *The Head of Neighbourhood Services informed the Committee that Officers do put a lot of work in to the Neighbourhood Committee meetings and it was a shame that only a few members of public turned up. This was not necessarily all negative because there was a lot of work carried out behind the scenes to resolve issues that did not require a large public forum. He informed members that the Neighbourhood Committee meetings were part of the Council's Governance structure and were still very useful as they were a decision making forum.*
- Members queried that there were a lot of meetings conducted regarding Operation CanDo and was there anything being resolved through this project. *The Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning advised the Committee that Operation CanDo was one year in to a ten year programme to change troubled areas. It was having a direct impact on licensing applications and he was confident that the ten year programme would be successful. The Head of Neighbourhood Services added that the Operation CanDo area was the fastest improving in the city for reported crime and the reduction of reported crime. There was currently a comprehensive housing survey being conducted as one of the biggest issues within the CanDo area was the condition of the private rented houses, therefore a large amount of time was being used to understand the issues within the CanDo area then use that as evidence to develop new methods in regulating the private rented market. With regard to Licensing there was now a picture of the problem around the saturation of licensed premises and the Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that he was working closely with the Executive Director of Operations, the Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning and Licensing officers to look at the best way of introducing appropriate Licensing and Planning policies to regulate the number of licensed premises in the CanDo area. The Executive Director of Operations informed the Committee that 2000 households had been visited to date as part of the CanDo project and some of them were found to be in a very poor state with immediate action being taken on these properties.*
- Members queried whether Peterborough City Council were following the new legislation regarding Travellers and illegal encampments and if it was in place what it would mean. *The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised Members that Peterborough City Council had already been reviewing their own procedures around Travellers before the new legislation was put in place. Peterborough City Council had been using a civil enforcement process which relied on goodwill between the Traveller Liaison Officer and the Travellers. The process was then reviewed through a working group and now the criminal law was used for every encampment. Peterborough was now seeing the fastest evictions and the use of bailiffs where required. Health and welfare assessments were conducted within the first two hours of an encampment arriving, dedicated legal officers worked with Neighbourhood Services to provide court dates as quickly as possible in order to serve relevant notices and if they were ignored then bailiffs would be used to help evict the travellers. An advisory group had been established for emergency stopping camps that would help move travellers on swiftly.*
- Members were concerned that when a call was made to the police regarding the travellers they were told to contact the council and vice versa and what action was to be taken on this issue. *The Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning advised members that the situation depended on whether the land the travellers had set up the encampment on was private land or Council owned land.*
- Members were concerned with the amount of feral pigeons in Cathedral Square and Lincoln Road and queried whether any action was going to be taken regarding this issue. *The Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning was not sure if any action was being taken and advised members that the appropriate officer would be contacted with this query.*

- Members requested further information regarding Peterborough's first food bank. *The Head of Neighbourhood Services informed members that the food bank had been set up in association with the Trestle Trust who were national experts in running food banks. A person in crisis would be referred to the food bank to obtain urgent access to three days worth of food to help them through a difficult period in the event that they had not received their benefits or they had to leave their home due to dangerous circumstances. At the same time they would also be able to obtain access to the different types of support services required to help them with their situation. The food bank was operating from a base at the Herlington Centre in Orton and there would be an increase in the number of outlets within the city.*

## **ACTION**

The Committee requested information on feral pigeons and if there was still an officer in place to deal with them as there were far too many in Cathedral Square and Lincoln Road.

## **6. Community Cohesion Strategy and Delivery**

This report was presented to the Committee asking them to scrutinise the effectiveness of the 2012/13 Cohesion Strategy in tackling the current cohesion action plan priorities and make any recommendations for the Cohesion Strategy/action plan for 2013/14.

Community Cohesion featured as part of the Empowering People and Creating Cohesive Communities Priority within the Sustainable Community Strategy. Within the Community Cohesion Action Plan there were three main themes:

- Improving community harmony
- Engaging young people
- Engaging and empowering communities

Consultation with the Community Cohesion Board and wider partners took place during summer 2012 in order to identify and agree projects for the year. The Community Cohesion team regularly engaged with community partners and networks to understand issues from a community perspective and intelligence was shared amongst relevant partners to enable a targeted response.

Key projects from the action plan were as follows:

- Building better mutual understanding between communities through ESOL and family
- Inspire Peterborough – aiming for the games
- Events to bring communities together
- International family fun day

It was recommended that the Committee noted the progress on delivery of the Cohesion Strategy and provided a steer on future delivery.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members queried whether the recent event that had been held in the city relating to the Paralympics had been organised by Peterborough City Council. *The Cohesion Manager advised members that the event was linked to Peterborough City Council but was set up by Vivacity and it involved bringing in athletes that had won medals during the London 2012 Paralympics.*
- Members commented that they felt that a lot of people would benefit from the Inspire Peterborough project.

- Members commented on part 3.2 of the report 'Supporting the work of the Disability Forum to give disabled people a voice in the city' and queried how the message was going to be given to all 57 Councillors as no one person was an expert on disability as it was such a vast area. Members felt that people needed to be made aware that the only experts in this field were the people with the disabilities. *The Cohesion Manager informed the Committee that the Cohesion Team was working closely with Neighbourhood Committees and other partnerships to try and get the message across to Councillors and local people.*
- Members commented that stakeholders were using expensive consultants with little experience instead of local disabled people who were part of the Disability Forum who would do the work for free and were the experts. *The Cohesion Manager confirmed to the Committee that no consultants had been used in relation to work of the Cohesion Team.*
- Members queried how groups of disabled and able bodied people were going to be brought together for the Paralympics event. *The Assistant Community Cohesion Manager advised members that to start with the focus would be on disabled people because there were less opportunities around the city for them to engage in sport activities. Over time this could easily expand to all members of the community and increase the engagement between able bodied and disabled people through volunteering.*
- Members were concerned whether disabled people wanted to be seen as different to the rest of the community by having their own Paralympics. *The Neighbourhood Manager advised members that there was a whole wealth of experience that was working on the Inspire Peterborough project and the Cohesion Team were taking a lot of advice from various groups and Forums.*
- Members commented that they would like to see disabled people in all gyms within the city.
- Members commented that they would encourage other members to go to the athletics track when they were doing cycling for disabled people to see the disabled children whizzing around the track enjoying themselves. A difference could be made and Peterborough City Council needed to encourage and help disabled people to continue on with their lives through projects like Inspire Peterborough.
- Members queried whether there would be another international fun day held at Central Park. *The Community Cohesion Manager advised members that there were currently discussions taking place with Friends of Central Park and the City Centre Management Team as they would like to continue with the International Fun Day.*

## 7. Empty Homes Strategy

This report was presented to the Committee to provide members with the opportunity to scrutinise the Council's new draft Empty Homes Strategy.

The Strategy aimed to:

- Bring empty homes in the private sector back in to use, utilising both voluntary means and statutory enforcement powers, which would increase the housing supply, alleviate the numbers of people in need of housing on the Housing Register, improve neighbourhood and community confidence and contribute to tackling homelessness in Peterborough
- Offer a comprehensive advice and assistance service to the existing owners of empty property, those who were looking to purchase or develop empty property and those who were experiencing problems arising by living near to empty properties
- Maximise income from the New Homes Bonus and to utilise it effectively by delivering initiatives to tackle empty homes
- Improve the evidence base by assembling relevant, accurate and current information

- Raise awareness of the Empty Homes issue and to promote the service and strategy to owners, neighbours and those affected by empty homes
- Retain dedicated staffing resources to tackle the problems of empty homes and to effectively bring them back into use thus preventing the waste of valuable housing resource across the city

Progress to date was:

- Problematic or long term empty properties, which were empty for more than six months, were targeted under the Empty Homes Strategy
- In July 2011 the council recruited a dedicated Empty Homes Officer. At the time of his appointment there were 2,099 empty properties in the city, including
  - ❖ 523 long term empty, of which
  - ❖ 396 had been empty between 6 and 23 months and
  - ❖ 127 had been empty for more than two years
- As at 1 October 2012 there were a total of 1,915 empty properties in the city, including:
  - ❖ 453 long term empty, of which
  - ❖ 338 had been empty between 6 and 23 months and
  - ❖ 115 had been empty for more than 2 years

Members were asked to scrutinise the draft strategy and the current incentives, initiatives and enforcement options that were available to assist or enforce owners of empty property to bring their properties back in to use. Members were asked to provide challenge where necessary and to suggest ideas and initiatives to support further activity.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members commented that they were happy with the strategy overall and that empty homes were now being occupied.
- Members queried as to why the council had an arrangement only with Cross Keys and not the other Housing Associations. *The Strategic Housing Manager advised the Committee that there was no specific arrangement with Cross Keys. Cross Keys had approached the Homes and Community Agency for funding which the other Housing Associations did not therefore it was about working with the Housing Associations that were interested in dealing with empty homes.*
- Members queried whether any consideration was given to private landlords as well as Housing Associations. *The Strategic Housing Manager advised members that there were other projects that were ongoing in the city but the partner for Peterborough City Council was currently Cross Keys unless the property owner wanted to sell a property to another landlord.*
- Members were concerned with the information on page 61 of the strategy where it stated 'At the current rate of household formation and housing supply, an average of 1,008 households would fall in to housing need each year' and on page 57 of the report where it stated 'In July 2011 the council recruited a dedicated empty homes officer. At the time of this appointment there were 2,099 empty properties in the city'. Members queried how would this work if 1000 people that needed a property would never succeed. *The Strategic Housing Manager advised the Committee that the Empty Homes Strategy was one of the strategies that sat behind the council's Housing Strategy and was only one element of a strategic view taken by the council to bring all of the elements together trying to influence all aspects of housing.*
- Members queried whether the homes of elderly people who were encouraged to go in to care homes would be dealt with by the Empty Homes Strategy. *The Strategic Housing Manager informed the Committee that all categories of empty properties were looked in to and the Empty Homes Officer had different ways of*

*approaching different circumstances especially with properties that had become empty under sensitive circumstances.*

**8. 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 Committee noted the Forward Plan and agreed that there were no items for further consideration.

**9. Work Programme**

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

**ACTION AGREED**

To confirm the work programme for 2012/13.

**10. Date of Next Meeting**

16 January 2013

*The meeting began at 7.00 and ended at 8.10 pm*

CHAIRMAN

This page is intentionally left blank