

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN THE  
BOURGES & VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH  
ON  
WEDNESDAY 15 OCTOBER 2014**

**Present:** Councillors Khan (Chairman), J.R Fox (Vice Chairman) Day, Peach, Forbes and Okonkowski

**Also Present:** Councillor Peter Hiller Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Services.

**Officers in Attendance:** Wendi Ogle-Welbourn Director for Communities

Belinda Child	Head of Housing and Health Improvement
Donna Hall	Public Protection Manager
Peter Gell	Regulatory Services Strategic Manager
Russ Carr	Care & Repair Manager
Gary Wright	Market Development Manager
Dania Castagliuolo	Governance Officer

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Maqbool.

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

**Item 6. Progress Report Care and Repair Home Improvement Agency**

Councillor J R Fox declared that he was the Chairman of the Care and Repair Working Group.

**3. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2014**

The minutes of the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 3 September 2014 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 Planning and Housing Services**

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Services to provide Members with a progress report in relation to matters relevant to this Committee.

The Council's Constitution set out the responsibilities of the Cabinet Member, including:

- Homelessness, Housing Options and Supporting People
- Traveller Sites

These responsibilities fell under the remit of the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee, other responsibilities contained within the Cabinet Member's portfolio fell outside of the remit of the Committee.

Key points highlighted were as follows:

- Empty Homes
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EMDO's)
- Empty Homes Partnership
- Consulting with other Councils
- Awards
- Housing Related Support
- Care and Repair
- Homelessness in Peterborough
- Rent Deposit Scheme and Discretionary Housing Payments
- The Tenancy Relations Service
- The Peterborough Homes Allocations Policy
- Partnership Working
- Rough Sleeping in Peterborough
- Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- Single Persons Homelessness
- Housing Enforcement

Members were asked to scrutinise the progress made on the aspects of the Cabinet Member's portfolio relevant to the Committee by providing challenge where necessary and to suggest ideas and initiatives to support the continued delivery of priorities within that portfolio.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members referred to page 10 of the report 5.1.2 'The current number of properties being charged the empty homes premium was currently 114', when in 5.1.1 of the report it stated that there was currently 430 long term empty homes. Members asked the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Services to explain this discrepancy between those numbers. *Members were advised that sometimes the ownership of an empty home was difficult to ascertain. It was also dependent upon timescales, as the Council would look in to an empty property for six months or more, then Council Tax would take a different view on the people who were required to pay the premium.*
- Members asked what the criteria was for empty homes. *The Head of Housing and Health Improvement responded that the Empty Homes Officer would take action once a home had been empty for 6 months. The Council did not know about empty homes until they were reported. They would generally go unnoticed and be in a bad state before they were reported.*
- Members were concerned that the Council's enforcement criteria was different to the Fire Service's safety criteria. *Members were advised that Peterborough City Council would inspect properties under the Housing Rating System and electrical safety was included in this system. The Council did carry out visits with a fire officer.*
- Members referred to page 12, 5.4.4 where it explained that the Department for Communities and Local Government funding for the three officers in the homelessness prevention team was due to come to an end in March 2015 and queried what impact this would have and if there would be any likely costs as a result of that loss. *Members were advised that this would have an impact. Structures were currently being worked on with partners SERCO to ensure that there was enough specialist preventative officer time to carry out their work, without having to do administrative work around the cases. This would allow them to keep the same level of expertise.*
- Members referred to page 12 of the report, 5.4.5 and queried what Peterborough was doing so well to have an amount of applications for 'Statutory Homelessness', which was lower than the national average. *Members were advised that the reason behind this was linked back to work carried out around homelessness prevention, which caught individuals and helped them before they became homeless.*
- Members queried whether Axiom Housing had taken over the work of Peterborough Streets. *Members were advised that Axiom Housing were already working with Peterborough Streets prior to closure and they had carried on with this work with success.*
- Members referred to page 16 of the report 5.4.32 and queried what tools were now used to prevent homelessness since the Mortgage Rescue Scheme had ceased and had there been an

increase in homelessness as a result of this. *Members were advised that there had not been an increase in homelessness since the Mortgage Rescue Scheme had ceased because the cases that were being worked on were carried over and work had continued on them. An increase in homelessness would be seen if the mortgage interest rates were to rise. The tools available in place of the Mortgage Rescue Scheme were, early prevention and identification, debt advice to prevent mortgage crisis and alternative housing options. There was currently no product to replace the Mortgage Rescue Scheme.*

- Members requested an update on the Big Issue since the closure of Peterborough Streets. *Members were advised that the Big Issue was now distributed through the Peterborough Council for Voluntary Service (PCVS) and this was a permanent arrangement.*
- Members were concerned that accommodation was only offered to homeless people if the temperature was below 0 degrees for three consecutive nights. *Members were advised that three nights was a governmental figure and if the forecast had predicted three nights or more at below 0 degrees then the service was activated for homeless people.*

## **ACTION AGREED**

The Committee noted the report and agreed for the Head of Housing and Health Improvement to provide information on Discretionary Housing Payments (How much was in the pot and what it is used for?).

## **6. Progress Report Care and Repair Home Improvement Agency**

The Care and Repair Manager introduced the report which provided the Committee with an update on the performance and achievements of the Care and Repair Home Improvement agency over the last twelve months.

Care and repair was established as a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) in Peterborough City Council almost twenty years ago.

The key points highlighted within the report were as follows:

- Achievements
- Performance
- Benchmarking
- Further development
- Impact

The Committee was asked to scrutinise the performance and achievements of Care and Repair by providing challenge where necessary and to suggest ideas and initiatives to support the continued delivery of priorities within the service.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members commented that Care and Repair was such a successful service due to the work of the Care and Repair Manager and his team.
- Members Congratulated Care and Repair on the awards they had received.
- Members queried how the work of Care and Repair was turned over so quickly and how costs were kept low. *The Care and Repair Manager responded that the Handy Person Scheme was the cheapest way of completing jobs. Work was carried out by self-employed people and the price was set at an hourly rate.*
- Members queried how much it would cost to change a light bulb. *Members were advised that it would cost around £8.50 although, some Housing Associations would send an electrician in to change a florescent tube and it could cost up to £100.*
- Members queried what the turnaround time was as there was no waiting list. *Members were advised that each case was different. The new contract states that if a case is not urgent it would be turned around within 7 days and if a case was urgent then it would be turned around within 24 hours.*

- Members queried how it would be possible to let the public know about Care and Repair. *Members were advised that Care and Repair was advertised on the Council's website, the Care and Repair Manager would go out and give talks about the service and the Council's call centre could point people in the right direction.*
- Members suggested that Care and repair could be advertised on the Council Tax bills.
- Members thanked the Care and Repair Scheme as it had recently helped an 87 year old lady with her gardening.

## **ACTION AGREED**

Members agreed for the Care and Repair Manager to investigate the possibility of advertising Care and Repair on the Council Tax bills.

## **7. Compliance and Enforcement Policy for Regulatory Services**

The Public Protection Manager introduced the report which presented the Committee with the new Compliance and Enforcement Policy for Regulatory Services.

The policy set out how non-compliances with legal requirements should be responded to.

The new Compliance and Enforcement Policy replaced the previous Enforcement Policy and had been written in accordance with the Regulators' Code which came in to statutory effect this year. The code provided a flexible, principals based, framework for how regulators should engage with those regulated.

The Policy applied to all enforcement practices undertaken by Peterborough City Council Regulatory Services, including Trading Standards, Licensing, Taxi Licensing, Food Hygiene, Health and Safety, Environmental and Pollution Control and Statutory Nuisance.

By adopting this and publishing this policy, the Council would demonstrate its commitment to the principals of good regulation and to working with businesses and the community to secure compliance. It created transparency for all stakeholders as well as supporting the council in its decision making process.

Consultation had taken place with officers in Regulatory Services and on adoption of the policy, training would be provided to all officers to ensure they were familiar with its provisions. A cross section of businesses had also been contacted. In particular, businesses were asked:

- Was the policy generally easy to understand, and if not how could it be improved?
- Did it clearly explain the enforcement sanctions that were available to us as a local authority, and how we may choose the appropriate sanction?
- Did the policy demonstrate that the local authority were trying to act fairly and proportionately at all times?
- Any other comments

Consultation was in progress, although, feedback from businesses to date had been taken on board and incorporated in the policy. Businesses that had responded were generally supportive of the policy and felt it was clear and easy to understand.

Consultation was also taking place with representatives of community groups as well as key partners including, HMRC and Cambridgeshire Constabulary.

Members were asked to scrutinise the policy and provide comment or feedback as they considered appropriate.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members were concerned that they had seen licenses for alcohol and tobacco revoked and the stores were shortly back in business and queried how this was dealt with. *The Public Protection Manager responded that the Enforcement Team looked at using other mechanisms. Alcohol licenses would be called in for review, this had an impact and sent a clear message out to traders.*
- Members queried whether licenses could be taken away from the premises and not the individual. *The Regulatory Services Strategic Manager responded that if businesses had operated badly then a license would be revoked and the premises could be closed down. The Enforcement Team were carrying out proactive work to encourage businesses to follow good practice.*
- Members queried whether the Food Hygiene rating system was still running. *The Public Protection Manager responded that this was a programme managed nationally by Food Standards. Businesses were not currently required to display their certificates.*

## **ACTON AGREED**

The Committee agreed for the Enforcement team to advise businesses to display their star ratings for customers.

### **8. City Market**

The Market Development Manager introduced the report to the Committee to provide Members with an overview of the City Market operation and proposed future planning regarding:

- Market Services
- Performance
- Expenditure/income and service costs
- Staffing numbers and staffing issues within service
- Opportunities for service
- Service threats
- Service objectives for 2014/15

The Committee was asked to note and comment on the work of the City Market and propose further scrutiny in relation to its business activities.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members congratulated the Market Development Manager on the report and on the developments of the market.
- Members queried whether the market was going to be relocated and commented that it would be a shame if this was the case as the market had good facilities very close by. *The Market Development Manager responded that discussions on relocation of the market had taken place before his appointment and commented that it was important to develop the existing market.*
- Members were concerned that members of the public did not use the market as it was not well advertised and suggested that marketing of the market was included within the budget, as this would generate more custom. *Members were advised that this issue had been addressed in the marketing plan. The plan was to have a social media presence, clear signposting, an established food court and market research was going to take place to find out what customers would like to see at the market.*
- Members suggested that having a Facebook page and Twitter account for the market would help with promotion.
- Members commented that if the market was in a warmer environment it would be more welcoming to customers especially where food was being served. *Members were advised that the food court idea was for hot street food and the focus would be on quality.*
- Members commented that there was no supermarket in the city which sold the variety of fruit and vegetables that were sold at the market.

- Members queried what action could be taken to get people in Peterborough to use the market. *Members were informed that the whole plan was to change the dynamics of the market. Stalls were to be used as a showcase and it would need to be evident that the market was changing for the better and growing.*
- Members suggested that a bank holiday market could be held to let people know where the market was and what was on offer. *The Market Development Manager agreed that events would need to be held regularly to increase the visibility of the market. There was a food festival planned for 2015.*
- Members asked if the market could be made in to a smaller indoor market. *Members were advised that to achieve this would require a very large capital investment and by doing this it could send out a message that the market was failing.*
- Members suggested that holding a Christmas market could draw people in to the existing market. *Members were informed that a Christmas market had already been planned to be held on Cathedral Square this year. This would also be held in house with the City Market and not be contracted out.*
- Members queried why Bridge Street had so many different market stalls visiting when Peterborough already had the City Market. *The Market Development Manager commented that Bridge Street needed to build in a link with the City market to make it more visible in the city centre.*

#### **ACTION AGREED**

The Committee agreed for the Assistant Director for Commercial Operations to attend a future Committee meeting to discuss the long terms plans for the Market.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee recommended to the Assistant Director for Commercial Operations that Peterborough market traders had the opportunity to take the lead and ownership of the 2014 Christmas Market.

### **9. Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

The Committee received the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan of 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 forthcoming month. 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 of Key Decisions and agreed to receive a briefing note on the following key decisions:

- Fit to Rent Scheme
- Invest to Save Scheme

### **10 Work Programme**

Members considered the Commission's Work Programme for 2014/15 and discussed possible items for inclusion.

#### **AGREED ACTION**

Members noted the work programme for 2014/2015

**11. Date of the Next Meeting**

The Chairman advised that the next date of the Meeting for Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee was due to be held on Tuesday, 18 November 2014.

*The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 8.40pm*

CHAIRMAN

This page is intentionally left blank