

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 5
10 NOVEMBER 2010	Public Report

Report of the Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning and the Cabinet Member for Business Engagement

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PORTFOLIO PROGRESS REPORT

1. PURPOSE

To provide Members with a progress report from the following Portfolio Holders in relation to matters relevant to this Committee:

- Cllr Peter Hiller: Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning
- Cllr Gavin Eley: Cabinet Member for Business Engagement

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

The ambition of the Sustainable Community Strategy is to deliver a bigger and better Peterborough, taking advantage of the inherent opportunities we have and at the same time tackling the challenges we face in order to deliver a higher quality of life for all. The priorities and actions from relevant Portfolios directly contribute to this ambition.

4. BACKGROUND

At its March 2010 meeting, the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee invited Councillor Eley and Councillor Hiller to update them on their priorities for the coming year. This report provides Members with an update on those priorities with progress made to date, coupled with information about newly emerging priorities and progress made where relevant.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 Councillor Hiller – Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning

In preparing for proposed budget reductions, Cllr Hiller's focus has been on ensuring the right balance of regulatory and preventative services remain, and are further enhanced where possible to deliver positive action for our communities. Investment in our transport infrastructure has also required significant input from Cllr Hiller.

Key priorities for the remainder of the municipal year include supporting officers to embed new working practices in the context of public sector spending pressure, ensuring that our communities have a strong voice to help deliver the aspirations of the Big Society, and continuing to champion major developments in the city from both a transport and planning perspective.

5.1.1 Update

More specifically, the following details provide Members with an update of progress in recent months:

Planning Services

(i) Development Management & Compliance

In recent years the service had a poor reputation in terms of speed and quality of service but in the last 12 months significant improvements have been made in several key areas:

Application Type	% of Applications Determined in Target Period		
	2008/9	2009/10	2010 to date
Major – 13 weeks	61%	53%	73%
Minor – 8 weeks	65%	70%	78%
Other – 8 weeks	77%	85%	91%

Significantly more planning applications are being decided within target timescales and we are providing a managed, income earning pre-application facility. Response times in the Compliance team have been much improved with 98% of service requests being investigated within 10 days and 92% of cases (where no planning breach has been found) being dealt with in 8 weeks.

A great deal has been done to improve our relationship with our customers and raise our public profile. We hold regular liaison events with service users, frequently present material at Chamber of Commerce events, and the City Council's first Construction and Design Awards are to be held this November. We encourage feedback on people's experience of the service and undertake satisfaction surveys. We have recently been presented with a Government Customer Excellence Award and compliments to the service outstrip complaints by 6:1.

A number of significant planning applications have been submitted to the Council recently including 350 dwellings on the Carbon Challenge site, the Stanground Local Centre, a care home at Bretton and work continues on the applications from the Great Haddon development. The service has strengthened its linkages with Opportunity Peterborough to ensure that new business and expansion enquiries are promptly and effectively dealt with.

The merger of Planning Services and Transport and Engineering Services under a single Head of Service will bring improved integration, co-ordination and synergies.

(ii) Natural & Built Environment

Good progress is being made on preparing village design statements which will provide bespoke planning guidance for a number of key villages in the City. The Biodiversity Strategy has been adopted, and 1km of the green wheel has been resurfaced.

(iii) **Building Control**

Building Control has recently completed the building control advisor role on the new hospital project, a role which lasted five years. The service has also been awarded the carbon challenge site contract which is for 350 zero carbon homes.

Additionally, the service has continued to win work outside of the Peterborough area having given assistance to Sainsbury's on 8 projects.

Transport and Engineering

Current budget proposals set out measures to significantly improve our car parks to give better disabled access, introduce pay-on-exit machines, and to enable enforcement officers to monitor parking on our streets. We are also proposing to seek to competitively price each of our car parks. This will make sure we fill our car parks and make best use of the space available across the city. This will mean some prices will go up and some will go down and the council will be aiming to compete with private operators in the city.

Following successful meetings with the disability forum, additional and improved wide-access parking bays have been installed at various off-street car parks, increasing the available provided space. Further bays are yet to be installed at some other car parks

A number of major transport infrastructure schemes have continued or have concluded, including:

- works across the **City Centre Public Realm project** which are reaching the final stages. Works in the coming month will include:
 - Continued paving, ramp and step construction around the West of St John the Baptist Church & the forming of St Johns Square
 - Finishing touches across many areas of work to remove fencing and open completed works throughout October and early November
 - The completion of the lighting, both architectural and functional, such as on street lighting columns, up lighting to the Cathedral great gates and wall mounted lighting units onto key buildings
 - Final electrical works to pop up power units and water feature
- **Morrison Superstore Access:** Signalised Junction within Lincoln Road. Civil works are complete apart from snagging items, which will be carried out in due course. Signals are in operation
- **A15/A1139 Junction 8 Roundabout:** Junction 8 roundabout improvement scheme involves the signalisation of the junction to accommodate future growth in Peterborough by improving traffic flows and reducing congestion. Work on site commenced on 19th April and is proceeding slightly ahead of programme, with completion planned for Christmas. Works are being delivered alongside the Welland Road Traffic calming and regular information events are held for ward councilors, businesses and representatives from residents groups. Information is also available on the website at www.jn8.co.uk The final carriageway surfacing has been completed although there is still some high friction surfacing material to be laid on top of this on traffic signal approaches. It is currently planned to switch on the traffic signals in early to mid-November.
- **A1073 Spalding to Eye Improvement scheme:** the northern section of the road between the A16 and Crowland opened to traffic on 8th August 2010. The southern section of the road between Crowland and Peterborough cannot open until the instability issues affecting the embankment approaching Car Dyke Bridge have been resolved. Geotechnical experts are currently carrying out tests, which will determine the best course of action to stabilise the embankment and their report was expected at the end of October. It is estimated that the road will be opened to traffic between January and March 2011, depending on the scope and complexity of the remedial works. Lincolnshire County Council is leading on this joint Lincolnshire County Council/Peterborough City Council scheme.

Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3)

A consultation leaflet on Peterborough's third Local Transport Plan was distributed to all Peterborough residents in September's edition of Your Peterborough. Representatives from the Transport Planning Team also attended all Neighborhood Council meetings throughout August and September and staffed a two day exhibition in Queensgate to give residents the opportunity to discuss the consultation document and raise any queries they may have had. For the main part the consultation has been well received and remains open until the end of November. To date, the team has received over 1,000 responses. Upon close of the consultation period the data will be collated and a report will be submitted to Cabinet.

Neighbourhood Services

The key focus in recent weeks has been on a major restructure of the Neighbourhood Services division, to ensure a strong, supportive service is provided to support communities and Members. The newly emerging structure is likely to feature:

- A combined regulatory and enforcement service responsible for enforcement activity (parking, housing, environmental etc) and regulatory services (trading standards, environmental health, licensing etc)
- A joint PCC/Police community safety service operated through a single manager and responsible for leading on Integrated Offender Management, substance misuse and preventing and enforcing against anti-social behaviour
- A combined strategic housing service responsible for homelessness prevention, supporting people to live in their own homes through the Care and Repair service, and supporting vulnerable groups with housing related support through the Supporting People programme

The division will also continue to lead on the cohesion agenda, as well as on key neighbourhood programmes including the RSA Citizen Power project.

The Care and Repair Home Improvement Agency was being considered for outsourcing as part of the City Services Lot 3 procurement process. It has now been confirmed that the service will not be outsourced through Lot 3, but instead will be internally reviewed in order to ensure maximum efficiency and viability.

A number of high profile prosecutions have been achieved in our regulatory services, including the businessman sent to prison for two years and fined £20,000 as a result of a large scale oil drilling equipment counterfeiting (a case worth £950,000), Hampton Trading Ltd pleading guilty at court to 5 offences relating to consumers being misled (the company was charged £2,000 per offence plus £1,700 costs), a private hire company successfully prosecuted for using unlicensed drivers and vehicles (as a result they lost all passenger transport contracts with the authority), and the Huntingdon licensed driver prosecuted for unlawfully plying for hire in Peterborough.

We have worked in partnership with the UK Borders Agency on a project to eradicate the issue of rough sleeping in Peterborough. The project, which supported rough sleepers to access help or to reconnect to their home countries, has been hugely successful and is seen as a model of good practice for other towns and cities.

Our Neighbourhood Management team are working closely with communities across Peterborough to develop robust community action plans, and to support the capacity of local groups and people to become more involved. Neighbourhood Councils have also continued to develop – this is a separate agenda item at this meeting.

5.2 Councillor Elsey – Cabinet Member for Business Engagement

In preparing for public sector spending pressures, Cllr Elsey has supported the development of a greater focus around commerciality, including maximising city centre events, the use of our valuable city centre open spaces, and working hard to enhance the retail offer in Peterborough.

5.2.1 Update

The Visitor Destination Centre has had a very busy summer with the introduction of the Key Theatre Box Office. First Capital Train tickets will also be available from December 2010 and work is progressing with the Ticket Factory to become an Agent for the area due to the closure of all Ticketmaster Agencies. National Express tickets will also be available within the next month. Work to integrate the Visitor Destination Centre and the Travelchoice Centre staff teams is complete, with those staff able to support both venues. It is envisaged that customers will be able to obtain their railcards and bus mega-riders from the Visitor Destination Centre in the near future.

The Peterborough Privilege Card is soon to be launched, with over 50 businesses sponsoring the card.

Business Forum meetings continue to be held monthly with 30+ businesses attending each meeting. The Local Data Company report for the first six months of the year shows that Peterborough is showing a positive of 0.79% increase of shop unit occupancies, with an overall 9.4% of vacant shops. This compares favourably to Cambridge's rate of vacant units which is at 11.9%.

For the first time ever Peterborough came top and was awarded Gold in the Anglia in Bloom competition. Peterborough's entry was managed and co-ordinated by the City Centre Operations team.

The Italian Festival held in October was once again a great success drawing significant crowds to the city centre. The Italian Community Association is looking to bring the 2012 event slightly forward in the year.

This year's Christmas lights switch-on ceremony will be held on 20th November. Our German Christmas market will operate between 26th November and 23rd December.

Two new CCTV cameras have been installed, one opposite the Job Centre at the Burghley Road junction and the second close to All Souls Church on Lincoln Road, with both cameras being transmitted wirelessly so there are no ongoing transmissions costs.

The 2010 Perkins Great Eastern Run attracted a record number of runners since its reintroduction to the City in 2006; it has also been awarded a Gold Standard rating by the BARR who are the regulatory body for UK Athletics. The second fastest time for a half marathon in the UK this year was also achieved, 62mins 16secs. Perkins have agreed a new five-year sponsorship deal for the race which will ensure it can continue to be delivered at no cost to the Council.

Preparations for a family event to be held in Cathedral Square on New Year's Eve are well under way. The event will run from 8pm through to 12.30am with Fireworks at midnight from the roof of Queensgate. We are working closely with the Police and the night time economy to ensure the success of the event.

6 IMPLICATIONS

It is anticipated that the Scrutiny Committee will comment on and make recommendations relating to the updates provided in this report in order that delivery potential is maximised for the benefit of our communities.

7 CONSULTATION

Consultation relating to any specific action or initiative contained within this report takes place as required.

8 EXPECTED OUTCOMES and NEXT STEPS

Comments and recommendations made by Scrutiny Committee members will be considered as part of the ongoing development and delivery of specific business areas.

9 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

None

10. APPENDICES

None