

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

SERVICE POLICY PANEL

THE EARL BALDWIN SUITE, DUKE HOUSE, CLENSMORE STREET, KIDDERMINSTER

23RD JANUARY 2007 (6.00PM)

PRESENT:

Councillors: J Holden (Chairman), M J Shellie (Vice-Chairman), Mrs H E Dyke, B T Glass, Mrs S M Hayward, Miss M A Mason, Miss S C Meekings, C D Nicholls, M A Salter, N J Thomas, G C Yarranton.

OBSERVERS:

Councillors J-P Campion, Mrs A T Hingley and J A Shaw.

SPP.40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D R Sheppard and K J Stokes.

SPP.41 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTES

Councillor B T Glass was a substitute for Councillor K J Stokes. Councillor N J Thomas was a substitute for Councillor D R Sheppard.

SPP.42 COMPOSITION AND ATTENDANCE OF PANEL

AGREED:

The attendance of the Panel, as per the Attendance Record Sheet appended to the Agenda be noted.

SPP.43 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were made.

SPP.44 MINUTES

AGREED:

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATE

Members considered a briefing paper from the Housing Services Manager on the progress of the implementation of the Council's Housing Strategy 2004 – 2007.

The Housing Services Manager explained the changes taking place with regard to the housing strategies in the area and went on to explain the four main priorities that fell within the housing strategy. These priorities were:

- Meeting the affordable housing need
- Tackling homelessness and providing housing options
- Maintaining the independence of older and vulnerable people through housing and support
- Improving conditions within private sector housing

The Housing Services Manager explained that many authorities ran a Sanctuary Scheme, which helped those who suffered domestic violence to be more secure in their homes. This scheme had assisted two people in the District to date.

The Housing Services Manager explained that a Choice Based Lettings Scheme changed the way in which property would be allocated in the future. This system would give people priority so that they would be able to bid for vacant properties that became available. There was concern from Members about this system as if applicants were able to do this via the internet, it would disadvantage those applicants who did not have internet access or who were unable to use new technology, meaning that those with the greatest need would probably be further disadvantaged by the scheme. The Housing Services Manager explained that it would be based on the Wychavon model, which had been up and running for a while. Safety nets were in place to support those who were not bidding. It would not be introduced in Wyre Forest until there was satisfaction that the scheme would work properly.

(Councillor Mrs H E Dyke arrived at 6.15pm)

The Housing Services Manager explained that there was the possibility of a Foyer Scheme being developed to meet the needs of young homeless people who needed support and training. It was currently operating in Worcester, Malvern and Shropshire. Single homeless people needed supported housing accommodation as they could not be left to support themselves. The foyer was run by the Housing Association and charitable organisations and would be a block of self contained flats with input from workers from Connexions and Social Services. This was to assist them with training, education, employment and trade and industry. It was a comprehensive support package.

Members felt that the disposal of land by public bodies would give hope in terms of providing more sites for social housing.

When asked whether he thought 155 units of social housing was a sufficient

amount, the Housing Services Officer said that, in terms of needs identified, the level of people on the Council's waiting list and the initial findings of the Draft South Housing Market Area Assessment, this was not sufficient to meet local housing needs. There was a significant requirement for affordable housing both for social rent and increasingly for intermediate housing (shared ownership). There was also likely to be a need for proper low cost housing targeted for people on lower incomes.

A member asked whether being part of a larger area housing group which contained districts in Warwickshire, would mean that Wyre Forest lost out because the Council had made provisions and did not need the same amount of capital as other districts. The Housing Services Manager explained that to date, there had been no difficulty from the Housing Corporation's views in putting money into the District even though the Council had funding available. There had been no signals to suggest any difficulties but it was a fast changing policy environment and was unpredictable. He was looking to secure as much Housing Corporation capital as possible in the bidding round for 2008 – 2010.

RECOMMENDATION: to Cabinet

Officers carry out a 'light touch' review of the current Housing Strategy and Action Plans during the Summer 2007, notwithstanding any further guidance on Housing Strategies being forthcoming.

SPP.46 CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN 2006/07 – PROGRESS REPORT

The Panel considered a briefing paper from the Senior Health and Sustainability Officer on the Climate Change Action Plan 2006/07 Progress Report.

The Senior Health and Sustainability Officer explained that there had been a Task and Finish Group exercise in 2005 which investigated climate change issues. Wyre Forest District Council had signed the Worcestershire climate change pledge and this was a progress report based on action taken since signing the pledge. In June 2006, the Service Panel noted an action plan to ensure that the Council had delivered on the pledge.

The Senior Health and Sustainability Officer explained that there had been mixed progress over the year.

There had been a lot of information from national government on climate change and it was highlighted in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) inspection that the Council should be doing more.

The Panel was informed that there would be a joint meeting of the Prosperity Policy Panel and the Service Policy Panel on 12th February 2007 to consider recent consultation documents from the Government on how to deal with climate change nationally.

The Senior Health and Sustainability Officer told the Panel that the Council could consider signing up to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change. Members questioned what the difference was between the two pledges. She explained that both were very similar in aspirations. Under the Worcestershire Climate Change Pledge, the Council would report back to the County Council annually but did not have to make public declarations and did not have to report to the public. Under the Nottingham Declaration, the Council would have to monitor and publish the monitoring report, which would make the Council more accountable.

The Senior Health and Sustainability Officer explained that the Council would need to undertake further work before being able to sign up to the Nottingham Declaration.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet to:

Recommend to Council:

Wyre Forest District Council make a fresh commitment to the Worcestershire Climate Change Pledge and sign the pledge with the additional four key actions for 2007:

- Ensure that our organisation monitors its energy use, for example, through regular accurate meter readings.**
- Use 100% 'green' energy, through procurement and/or generation.**
- Reduce the organisation's energy use. Eg. through switching off appliances when not in use, insulation, using more efficient plant and appliances etc.**
- Develop and implement a staff travel plan at Duke House.**

SPP.47 MINI MOTORCYCLES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Members received a verbal update on the progress of the Mini Motorcycle Task and Finish Group from its Chairman, Councillor M J Shellie.

Councillor Shellie told Members that the Group was currently finalising details of the need for a mini moto site in the District. No-one in the country had ever done an exercise like this so it was therefore difficult to quantify the need for a mini moto site in Wyre Forest.

The Group was also enquiring into existing motorcycle clubs to find out how they would run such a facility if a mini moto site were to exist in Wyre Forest.

There was one other area in the country carrying out scrutiny similar to this and a

letter had been sent but the Group was still awaiting a response.

The Group had approached other areas in Worcestershire but the only other authority interested was Worcester City where there was no available land.

AGREED:

The information be noted.

SPP.48 **COUNTY COUNCIL HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Panel received an update from Councillor J Holden on matters considered by the County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not met since the last meeting of the Service Policy Panel. He told the Panel that the chaplaincy was now paid for by the League of Friends at the hospital but unfortunately one of the chaplains had had a heart attack on 29th December 2006. The next meeting would be in February at Pershore Civic Centre with the intention to visit the new hospital before or after the meeting.

AGREED:

The information be noted.

SPP.49 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel considered its work programme for the current municipal year with regard to the Community Strategy, Corporate Plan, Annual Priorities and the Forward Plan.

The Chairman informed the Panel that a visit to the ice-rink in Cannock had been arranged. Councillors M A Salter, J-P Campion and J Holden would be meeting Mark Johnson there on Monday 29th January 2007.

AGREED:

The work programme for the current municipal year be approved.

SPP.50 **PRESS INVOLVEMENT**

There was currently no need for press involvement.

SPP.51 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

DECISION:

Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 the press and

public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of “Exempt Information” as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

SPP.52 SUMMARY OF MINUTES

The following proceedings were considered after the press and public had been excluded from the meeting. A summary of the minutes relating to these items has been made as “exempt information” would be disclosed if the minutes were published in full.

SPP.53 BID FOR FUNDING FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Members considered a briefing paper from the Principal Housing Officer on a Bid for Funding for Affordable Housing through the Capital Strategy.

The meeting ended at 7.05 pm.