

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

THURSDAY, 4TH MARCH 2010 (6:00PM)

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**Present:**

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), J Phillips (Vice-Chairman), G H Eeles, D R Godwin, P V Hayward, M A W Hazlewood, D J Millis, M Price, J A Shaw, M J Shellie, D R Sheppard, S J Williams, and G C Yarranton.

**Observers:**

There were no members present as observers.

**C&R.86 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K H Prosser.

**C&R.87 Appointment of Substitutes**

No substitutes were appointed

**C&R.88 Declaration of Interests**

No declarations of interest were made.

**C&R.89 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 3rd February 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**C&R.90 Worcestershire Supporting People Strategy Refresh**

The Committee considered a report from the Strategic Housing Services Manager which provided Members with details of the new three year Supporting People Strategy.

Members were advised that the development of this strategy was led by Supporting People and supported by the Supporting People Commissioning Body, of which Wyre Forest District Council was a member along with the other five Worcestershire District Councils, Worcestershire County Adult and Community Services, the three Primary Care Trusts, West Mercia Probation Service, and representatives from both service providers and from the service user group, WAVES.

As part of a consultation, a draft version of the strategy had been circulated to Members in February 2010, and Members were invited to respond with their comments directly to the Supporting People Manager.

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Members were advised that Supporting People had a cross county budget of £15 million, of which the District received a £2 million share which made the District the second biggest recipient within the County.

18:08: Councillor D R Godwin entered the meeting.

A discussion ensued, a summary of which is provided below:

- A Member asked how many District Officers and Members were representatives on the Supporting People Commissioning Body, to which the Strategic Housing Services Manager responded that the commissioning process consisted of two elements, one being the Commissioning Body for contracts over £75,000 per year and also a sub group responsible for commissioning contracts under £75,000 per year, and that she was a District representative on both levels. Furthermore Members were informed that there was no District Councillor representation on Supporting People, and that there was one County Councillor sitting on the Commissioning Body.
- In response to a further question the Officer clarified that the Supporting People Commissioning Body ultimately made the key decisions about allocations of funding, but took suggestions for funding from the County Children and Young People and Health and Well Being theme groups.
- The Officer advised Members that funding was distributed according to two factors, need and equality of distribution, but that the Strategy outlined a desire to move more towards need as a deciding factor. Furthermore, the Officer perceived that the level of funding allocated to the District did match the level of need.
- A Member queried what provision the strategy contained for an increase in numbers of service users, to which the Officer clarified that the level of funding for the Strategy was a diminishing fund which shrunk each year, and that if there were increased levels of service users, then costs would need to be reduced further. Members were advised that costs per household had already been reduced from £150 to £70 per week. Furthermore, research had been carried out which suggested that the £15 million spend on the scheme achieved savings for other services of £49 million.
- In response to a comment from a Member, the Officer suggested that Members might wish to comment on the level of Member representation on the Commissioning Body as part of the consultation which had been undertaken in February 2010.
- The Officer clarified that Supporting People received a grant from central government to fund its administration, which Supporting People was not allowed to exceed, and this was limited to £101,000, meaning that the £15 million budget was entirely for frontline services.
- A Member perceived that the Strategy was preferable to a previous system of funds being allocated by regional decision making bodies.
- A Member suggested that update reports on the progress and performance of Supporting People be provided to the relevant scrutiny committee at least once

every municipal year.

- The Chairman suggested that Councillors who were Board Members of the Community Housing Group may be able to use the Community Housing Group's representation on the Commissioning Body to feed back their views and concerns.

**Agreed:**

- 1) That progress and performance reports relating to Supporting People should be presented to the relevant scrutiny committee each municipal year.**
- 2) To recommend to Cabinet to delegate authority to the Director of Planning and Regulatory Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environmental Services to approve the final strategy.**

**C&R.91 Worcestershire County Housing Assistance Policy**

The Committee considered a report from the Strategic Housing Services Manager which updated Members on the proposed changes to the Housing Assistance Policy from the previous policy agreed in April 2009, the purpose of which was to underpin how the Council determined spending for Disabled Facilities Grants and discretionary financial assistance.

The Strategic Housing Services Manager advised Members that in the current municipal year the Council would assist approximately 210 households through various measures, and that this would contribute towards the Council meeting public service agreement targets.

Members were informed that the introduction of 'Kick Start' would provide additional funding for homeowners through property appreciation loans, which would be registered in the land charges register, in order for the money to be recouped and recycled as a further loan. Further to this, £17,000 had been recouped and recycled within the current municipal year.

A Member commented that, as the money was not recouped until the property was sold, there was likely to be a significant time delay between the granting of funds and their eventual recuperation, and asked whether the loans were fixed or appreciative, to which the Strategic Housing Services Manager acknowledged that there could be a significant delay of up to 10/15 years before funds were recouped, but added that the initial loans which were issued three years previously were beginning to be recouped. Furthermore, the Officer clarified that the existing Council loans were fixed, but that the new Kick Start loans were appreciative, based on increases in house value.

**Agreed: To recommend to Cabinet to approve the Housing Assistance Policy from April 2010.**

**C&R.92 Ribbesford Conservation Area – Results of Consultation on Draft Conservation Area Appraisal**

The Committee considered a report from the Conservation Officer which informed Members of the results of the public consultation on the proposed Conservation Area Appraisal for the Ribbesford Conservation Area.

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Members were advised by the Conservation Officer that five responses had been submitted to the consultation. The responses were mostly supportive but proposed some amendments, and most of those were in relation to works which had been undertaken since the appraisal was written. Members were informed that the responses had been taken into account and the appraisal had been amended accordingly.

A discussion ensued, a summary of which is provided below:

- A Member queried the replacement of horse chestnut trees with lime trees on Horse Chestnut Drive. In response the Conservation Officer advised that the existing horse chestnut trees were suffering from vigorous mould and leaf miner disease, which meant that they could not be replaced by the same type of tree, as this would perpetuate the disease. The Officer clarified that he understood that the trees being planted were a type of lime which did not have the same undesirable characteristics as attributed to many types of lime tree. Furthermore, the Drive in question was privately owned, and the trees being planted were deemed to be an appropriate replacement by the owners.
- A Member queried whether Conservation Area Appraisal Documents were authoritative with regard to planning applications, to which the Conservation Officer advised that whilst it was a complicated area, they generally carried considerable weight with regard to planning applications. The Officer clarified further that it had most weight with regard to new build applications.
- In response to a query from a Member the Conservation Officer explained that Conservation Area Status and Appraisal Documents were important in order to justify and set out why the Council, as a planning authority, deemed particular areas to be special with regard to planning permission. Furthermore, subjecting the Appraisal Document to a public consultation conferred increased legitimacy upon it.
- A Member asked what could be done by the Council or English Heritage in order to encourage the upkeep of Ribbesford House, to which the Officer responded that this was a complicated area. In order for the Council to pursue this issue further, the property would need to be considered structurally unsound. Furthermore, Members were advised that English Heritage had been in contact with the owner to discuss possible works.

18:59 Councillor Kelly left the meeting at this point.

- A Member queried whether Conservation Area Status could deter potential investors or buyers for properties such as Ribbesford Hall, to which the Conservation Officer advised that Grade 1 listing, such as at Ribbesford Hall was far more likely to be such an obstacle.

**Agreed: To recommend to Cabinet to adopt the current Ribbesford Conservation Area Appraisal.**

#### **C&R.93 West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Interim Policy Statement: Provision of New Accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople**

The Committee considered a report from the Principal Forward Planning Officer which

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informed Members of the responses submitted to the West Midlands Regional Planning Body (WMRPB) on the Region's Interim Policy Statement - The Provision of New Accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. It also provided background information on the purpose of the Interim Policy Statement and how it would inform the Wyre Forest District Local Development Framework.

The Principal Forward Planning Officer advised the Committee that the report was to inform Members of a delegated decision which had to be taken prior to the next meeting of the Committee, due to the requirement to meet a sudden and tight deadline.

Members were advised that the responses to the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Three Revision had not achieved a consensus in relation to the allocation of pitch provision figures to Local Authority areas and that the Phase Three Revision had been expedited due to the abolition of the West Midlands Regional Assembly and the introduction of the Strategy for the West Midlands. However, the West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA) and Government Office West Midlands (GOWM) were concerned that until the Strategy was adopted, this could lead to there being a policy vacuum in relation to provision of pitches for Gypsies and Travellers hence the Interim Policy Statement being created.

Members were informed that GOWM had confirmed that the Interim Policy Statement would carry similar weight to a submitted draft Regional Spatial Strategy, and would carry weight in planning enquiries.

Members were advised that the Interim Policy Statement recommended that the District should accommodate 42 Gypsy and Traveller pitches for the period 2007-2017, and also indicated that for the period 2017-2027, a compound increase of 3% per year be applied to the level of existing provision in order to take account of predicted levels of household growth, and that this would entail 74 pitches up to 2027.

The Committee was advised that the Interim Policy Statement contained guidance on the identification of sites, and suggested that a mixture of large and small sites should be preferred.

A discussion ensued, a summary of which is provided below:

- In response to a query from a Member, the Principal Forward Planning Officer advised that the Council would need to take account of the suggested figure of 42 pitches, unless a different figure was suggested by WMRA and GOWM, but that the Council had submitted responses which objected to the number of 42 pitches and reiterated why the Council felt it should be set at 35.
- A Member perceived that the Interim Policy Statement, despite its increased burden of pitches, was preferable to no policy, furthermore the Member felt that pitch development should be focussed more in Kidderminster and Bewdley, as opposed to Stourport-on-Severn.
- A Member queried whether there was a timescale for the Strategy for the West Midlands which would replace the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy in relation to this matter, to which the Officer responded that Officers had not been advised of such a date, and agreed to inform the Committee as and when this information became available.

19:17 Councillor G C Yarranton left the meeting at this point.

- A Member asked why the Interim Policy Statement required 42 pitches, and asked why the Council could not stick to the level it had suggested as part of its response to the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Three Revision, to which the Officer explained that across the County, no consensus had been reached on the numbers of pitches to be provided, and that predictably all of the authorities had opted for the lowest possible figure set out in the RSS 3 Consultation Paper, which left the Region with a considerable shortfall of provision. In the absence of an agreement meeting the required level of Regional pitch provision, WMRA and GOWM had developed a further option within the Policy Statement which re-distributes the remainder of required pitches between the authorities.
- A Member requested that details setting out the required standards for a site be emailed to him.
- A Member queried whether a pitch was for one caravan or two, to which the Officer clarified that according to the Government Circular 01 of 2006, a pitch could accommodate up to two caravans, with some level of ancillary development.
- In response to a query from a Member, the Officer clarified that the County Gypsy and Traveller assessment had identified a need for sites accommodating up to 10 pitches, which would entail a few larger sites being developed, rather than many smaller sites.
- In response to a question from a Member, the Principal Solicitor advised that a new site would be subject to a planning application as would any development and this would address on site services and infrastructure.

**Agreed:**

- 1) The Principal Forward Planning Officer to circulate information to the Committee regarding a replacement Strategy for the West Midlands, as and when it became available.**
- 2) The Principal Forward Planning Officer to circulate via email information to the Committee which sets out the required standards for a Gypsy and Traveller Site.**
- 3) To note the responses to the Final Draft Interim RSS Policy Statement on the provision of new accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show people as attached at Appendix 2 to the report, which were submitted to the West Midlands Regional Assembly in accordance with the consultation deadline of 19<sup>th</sup> February 2010.**

**C&R.94 Renewable Energy and Efficiency Review Panel Update**

The Chairman of the Renewable Energy and Efficiency Review Panel provided a verbal update to the Committee on the progress of the Review Panel.

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Members were advised that the Review Panel had recently held a meeting which looked at available technology. Guests Act on Energy and Worcester Bosch had been invited to this meeting who both gave presentations.

The Committee was informed that the Review Panel's work was ongoing, and that the next meeting was to take place on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, followed by a site visit to Hobson's Brewery, Cleobury Mortimer, at 3pm on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

#### **C&R.95 Feedback from Cabinet**

**Agreed: The contents of the Feedback from Cabinet item be noted.**

#### **C&R.96 Work Programme**

Members were advised by the Chairman that the Work Programme was to be amended to take account of the agreed Cemetery Update in April. Furthermore, the Committee was informed that the Worcestershire Housing Strategy Item was likely to be delayed until June or July.

**Agreed: The changes to the Work Programme be noted.**

#### **C&R.97 Press Involvement**

**Agreed: No items requiring press involvement were identified.**

The meeting ended at 19:35