

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

THURSDAY, 14TH MARCH 2013 (6.00PM)

Present:

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), T Ingham (Vice-Chairman), R Bishop, E Davies, N Gale, J Greener, J A Hart, P V Hayward, V Higgs, H J Martin, D C H McCann, B McFarland, J Phillips, M Rayner, M A Salter, A M Sewell, D R Sheppard, and S J Williams.

Observers

Councillors: A T Hingley and M. Price

OS.94 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: C Brewer, C Rogers, and G C Yarranton.

OS.95 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor M A Salter was a substitute for Councillor G Y Yarranton.

OS.96 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

OS.97 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 21st February 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

OS.98 Recommendations of the Housing Review Panel

The Committee received the recommendations of the Housing Review Panel. These were presented by the Chairman of the Panel, together with the Strategic Housing Manager who outlined the process that the Panel had undertaken to reach the recommendations.

In response to a question regarding 'claw back' and S106 monies the Committee were advised that this would be apportioned between the District and County Council. It would be a matter for negotiation subject to the supplementary planning document and negotiation with the County Council.

A Member commented on the size of the units and parking problems on new developments.

The Chairman thanked the Panel for their work on this matter.

Agreed

Recommend to Cabinet:

- 1. To develop an affordable housing SPD to include more detailed guidance around thresholds, on and off site contributions, size of units, design (including parking) and encouraging the use of modern methods of construction. To refer this document to the Local Development Framework panel for consideration.**
- 2. To include, in standard planning conditions, the ability to claw back (contingent deferred obligations) and similar mechanisms (reassessment of S106 contributions) where we agree to a lesser S106 contribution due to economic viability but the scheme does not immediately get built out.**
- 3. To review the Registered Provider Partnership Agreement and the list of Registered Providers with whom we support new housing development in light of changing funding regimes and markets.**
- 4. To further explore the establishment of a Joint Venture or Local Housing Company approach to delivering housing and developing a revenue funding stream for the Council.**

Worcestershire Infrastructure Strategy – Consultation Draft (January 2013)

The Committee received a report presented by the Planning Policy Manager on the Worcestershire Infrastructure Strategy – Consultation Draft.

OS.99

The Planning Policy Manager outlined the background to the report explaining that the latest version of the document begins to put the options that were considered in July 2012 into a more formal Strategy. Members were further advised of the key infrastructure areas that were important to the future sustainable development of the District, and of those areas that were managed by the County Council, e.g. Waste and Highways, and those managed by separate service providers e.g. Energy and Health.

The Committee discussed at length their disappointment with the consultation document, in particular the lack of connectivity, references to Wyre Forest appeared to be an afterthought, and the County Council had not appeared to take note of the comments from Wyre Forest.

In response to the points raised the Committee considered how best views of Wyre Forest could be included in the consultation document and concluded that a working group of Members should be convened to ensure that a response was formulated that expressed the views of the Council in the strongest terms. The Planning Policy Manager welcomed the support of the Committee.

Agreed

- (i) That a small working group of members be established to consider**

the proposed responses set out in Appendix 2 of the report to consider any changes that could be made to strengthen the District Council's comments

- (ii) That the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee write to the relevant Cabinet Member at Worcestershire County Council and District Council County Councillors to express dissatisfaction at the way proposals have been progressed**
- (iii) That the Media Team be asked to issue a press release giving details of the District Council's comments**

Recommended to Cabinet

That Director of Economic Prosperity & Place be given delegated authority to submit representations the principles of which are set out in Appendix 2 of the report to Overview and Scrutiny to Worcestershire County Council following feedback from a working group of members to ensure a response in the strongest possible terms.

OS.100 Draft Project Plan and Timetable for Production of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule

The Committee received a report from the Planning Policy Manager which gave details on evidence undertaken to inform the potential for the District to progress with a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule.

The Planning Policy Manager explained the background to the report and progress made to date including the draft project plan, timetable and charging schedule setting out the rates to be charged. Members were advised that this matter would be considered by the Local Development Framework Panel at a future meeting. Moreover that there would be a series of workshops to which all Members would be invited.

Agreed: The content of the briefing paper be noted and the appended CIL project Plan and Timetable as attached as Appendix 1 of the report to Overview And Scrutiny be endorsed in order to progress the production of a CIL Charging Schedule for Wyre Forest District.

OS.101 Enforcement Policy – North Worcestershire Water Management

The Committee received a report from the Principal Environmental Health Officer that highlighted the need to have an enforcement policy for work undertaken by the shared service for water management.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer outlined the background to the report and explained that for any enforcement action to be credible and successful, it was essential that the Council had a policy that was clear, proportionate and met the requirements of the Regulators' Compliance Code.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Principal Environmental Health Officer advised that there had been issues with 'run off' from field and that visits were made to farmers to discuss best practice and that best practice guidance literature was available.

Agreed:

To recommend to Cabinet to recommend to Council that:

- 1. Council adopts the North Worcestershire Water Management Enforcement Policy as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- 2. Council amends the Housing Enforcement Policy to remove reference to water management issues as set out in Appendix 2 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

OS.102 Housing Assistance Review Policy

The Committee received a report from the Principal Environmental Health Officer that set out a number of issues in response to the review of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) undertaken by the Housing Review Panel; the need to undertake to the Council's Housing Assistance Policy to implement those recommendations and changes requested in response to external factors as set out in the report.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer outlined the content of the report and the process for the allocation of the grants and the introduction of a process to fast track grants where possible, including the benefits of that mechanism. With regards to the Home Repair Assistance loan it was proposed that the limit for grants be raised from its current level of £5k to £10k as this would allow minor works to be carried out that would otherwise be less than financially practical to be funded through equity release.

Members were advised that there were currently 250 cases waiting for an adaptation.

In response to a question from the Committee, Members were advised that it was too expensive to register charges against the national land register due to the level of charge levied, and all charges that were recovered were recycled.

In response to a question regarding how the Council defined 'vulnerable'; it was explained to Members that 'vulnerable' covered those with medical needs and also encompassed those that were experiencing financial vulnerability. Members were advised that those over 70 years of age would be unable to obtain a mortgage and therefore equity release allowed them to have improvements on their property whilst remaining in their own home.

Members asked that it be noted that the service provided by officers was excellent, timely and well regarded.

Agreed:

To recommend to Cabinet

- 1. That the Housing Assistance Policy be amended to incorporate the following amendments as detailed in paragraph 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 of the report to Overview and Scrutiny;**

- **To remove any reference to Kick-Start due its closure, thus enabling the promotion of alternative provision.**
- **That loans are provided for essential repairs where the property owner has not been able to raise their own finance or they can be demonstrated to be on a low income with less than £150 a week available (following a financial assessment).**
- **Discretionary Adaptation Assistance would be payable, subject to conditions including a charge on the property recoverable upon sale or transfer.**

OS.103 Recommissioning the Home Improvement Agency

The Committee received a report from the Strategic Housing Manager seeking agreement on the process and timetable for recommissioning of the Home Improvement Agency.

Members were reminded of the background and that the service had originally commenced mid 2010 and during that period Festival had worked with the seven authorities concerned to bring services together in a cohesive and uniform manner, as well as delivering Disabled Facilities Grants, Homes Repairs Assistance and Equity Release services to residents. Members were advised that a County wide recommissioning group had been established to lead the process which included Worcestershire Local Authority representatives from housing and procurement, Worcestershire County Council Commissioning Officer, Occupational Therapy, and Foundations; an over arching national body covering home improvement agencies.

In response to a request regarding the impact of the introduction of Universal Credit on the income stream Members were advised that the new benefit would not change the funding as £440k of the funding was from a government grant with the balance coming from the Council's budget.

7.43 – Councillor Greener left the meeting.

Agreed:

To recommend to Cabinet

- 1. That the process and timetable contained within the report, for recommissioning the Home Improvement Agency is acceptable.**
- 2. That authority be delegated to the Director of Economic Prosperity and Place, in consultation with the Procurement Officers at Worcester City Council to agree the evaluation model for the appointment of a new contractor to deliver the Home Improvement Agency service and to award the contract to the successful tenderer.**

OS.104 Feedback from Cabinet

Agreed:

The feedback from Cabinet be noted.

OS.105 Work Programme

The current work programme was noted. The Chairman advised the Committee that Superintendent Kevin Purcell had asked to come and speak to the Committee about new policing arrangements. It was agreed that this may require a further meeting.

Agreed:

That a date would be arranged for Superintendent K Purcell to address the Committee.

OS.106 Press Involvement

The Committee noted that at present there were no future items that might require publicity.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 7.46pm.