

Public Document Pack

Date of meeting	Wednesday, 1st July, 2015
Time	6.30 pm
Venue	Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, Merrial Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, ST5 2AG
Contact	Justine Tait Ext 2250

Economic Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee

AGENDA

PLEASE NOTE REVISED START TIME OF 6.30PM

PART 1 – OPEN AGENDA

- 1 Apologies**
- 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**
To receive declarations of interest from Members on items included in this agenda
- 3 MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING** (Pages 3 - 12)
To agree as a correct record the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 18th March 2015.
- 4 SUPERFAST STAFFORDSHIRE PROJECT**
Paul Chatwin, Project Manager, Superfast Staffordshire will be attending to provide Committee with an update on proceedings.
- 5 ASPIRE HOUSING LETTING SYSTEM**
A verbal update to be provided by the Chair
- 6 Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership** (Pages 13 - 16)
- 7 Newcastle Town Centre Partnership** (Pages 17 - 26)
- 8 Local Government Association Peer Review of Decision Making Arrangements** (Pages 27 - 46)
- 9 Land Asset Disposal** (Pages 47 - 58)
- 10 Newcastle Housing Advice Contract Monitoring Quarter 4** (Pages 59 - 70)
- 11 HIGH SPEED 2**

Discussion to take place regarding the strategic rail connectivity within the Borough and the protection of the HS2 route.

12 RYECROFT REGENERATION AND REDEVELOPMENT

A verbal update to be provided by the Executive Director, Regeneration and Development.

13 WORK PLAN

(Pages 71 - 74)

To discuss and update the work plan to reflect current scrutiny topics

14 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Any member of the public wishing to submit a question must serve two clear days' notice, in writing, of any such question to the Borough Council.

15 URGENT BUSINESS

To consider any business which is urgent within the meaning of Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972

16 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 2nd September 2015, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1

Members: Councillors Burgess, Hambleton, Holland, Huckfield, Johnson, Loades, Matthews, Northcott, Stringer (Chair), Stubbs and Williams (Vice-Chair)

PLEASE NOTE: The Council Chamber and Committee Room 1 are fitted with a loop system. In addition, there is a volume button on the base of the microphones. A portable loop system is available for all other rooms. Should you require this service, please contact Member Services during the afternoon prior to the meeting.

Members of the Council: If you identify any personal training/development requirements from any of the items included in this agenda or through issues raised during the meeting, please bring them to the attention of the Democratic Services Officer at the close of the meeting.

Meeting Quorums :- 16+= 5 Members; 10-15=4 Members; 5-9=3 Members; 5 or less = 2 Members.

Officers will be in attendance prior to the meeting for informal discussions on agenda items.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 18th March, 2015

Present:- Councillor David Stringer – in the Chair

Councillors: Baker, Holland, Matthews, Owen, Wallace and Williams

Outside Parties: Chair of Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership
Roebuck Centre Manager

Officers: Executive Director Regeneration and Development Services
Regeneration and Economic Development Manager
Planning Policy Manager
Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Loades and Wilkes.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

Minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 3rd December 2014 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. KIDSGROVE TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

The Chair of Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership (KTCP), Community Interest Company (CIC), provided Committee with an update on events occurring within Kidsgrove.

Branding

Following on from a successful application to the Association of Town and City Management for place branding support, KTCP had developed the 'Go Kidsgrove' brand and were using it across all media platforms wherever possible.

Marketing

The website www.gokidsgrove.co.uk was now live but more work was still required.

Go Kidsgrove were notified that the Alsager branch of the Co-operative Bank was closing in December and produced a flyer promoting Kidsgrove as an

alternative for banking. Since December, the Kidsgrove branch had seen a significant upturn in transactions.

Events

The town had run several Christmas shopping challenges as well as a Halloween challenge and were linking in with a local historian who was organising walking trails.

The first ever Christmas tree was bought for Kidsgrove from the support of Kidsgrove Rotary Club who sponsored the tree and would also sponsor a growing tree to be planted later this year. Negotiations were also ongoing with other organisations.

The canal project received great media attention. A small application was being prepared for £10k of Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) to provide an interactive map for the canal noticeboard. The application would be submitted in April 2015.

The following questions were asked and responses provided:-

Q1 There was concern on the governance; it had been stated you were going to increase the number of Directors, have you still only got the same six?

A1: It was confirmed that there were still only the six. The difficulty was the commitment from people, time and key skills. There was still a lack of marketing expertise.

Q2: The problem was the website not being very informative. You had received a grant from the Borough Council, had further funds been secured?

A2: They were looking forward to securing more membership within Go Kidsgrove.

Q3: If there was a change in administration or priorities and there would no longer be support financially, would the CIC carry on and would there still be support of Officers from Newcastle Borough Council?

A3: It was confirmed that there were funds that could be accessed as a CIC.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Development confirmed that the allocation of funding to the Newcastle Town Centre Partnership was to fund the managerial position which would cease at the end of December 2015.

In the case of Kidsgrove the £10,000 was to pump-prime establishment of the partnership to see whether it could be a viable arrangement. It

was confirmed that the Officer time was built into the service plan and it was envisaged this would continue to support the town centre to strengthen its economy.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centres, Business and Customer Services advised the achievements KTCP had accomplished within twelve months were very good. They had identified what the future was for Kidsgrove but now need to concentrate on a couple of projects to deliver.

Q4: Would future aspirations go beyond the next twelve months, for example planters?

A4: KTCP were looking at sustainable projects and would be reviewing working documents. Preparations were in place to establish a Chairs meeting.

Q5: Has there been any analysis carried out on the potential tourism the Waterfront Project could generate?

A5: Approximately 25,000 people per annum pass through this stretch of canal on boats. It is not rich in heritage but a proposal had been suggested that targeted promotions could be undertaken, for example when a boat was hired the client would receive vouchers to purchase merchandise from the shops in Kidsgrove Town Centre.

Q6: It had been mentioned that Kidsgrove Town Council (KTC) and KTCP have refused to work together, as a Committee could a resolution be passed to the Portfolio Holder?

There was a need to facilitate the Kidsgrove Town Council CIC and other stakeholders so that the priorities and responsibility areas were set out.

A6: The Executive Director of Regeneration and Development advised the Borough Council was at the final stage in negotiations with a District Deal with Staffordshire County Council and it acknowledged that Kidsgrove required a master plan to highlight key work streams and identified, with great clarity, which organisation was leading.

RECOMMENDED:-

That the Executive Director of Regeneration and Development Services act as a representative on behalf of KTCP at meetings with Staffordshire County Council regarding the District Deal and deliver an output to Committee at its next meeting.

5. NEWCASTLE TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

An update was provided by the Chair of the Town Centre Partnership. Unfortunately Quarter 4 Chair's report was not available.

Footfall Figures

January saw an increase over the January sales period.

Retail Index Figures

Although still not at an average, businesses reported the Christmas trade had been exceptionally good.

Christmas Lights Switch On

The only negative feedback was that the town had been too busy. Ideas were in place on how to deliver this year's project.

The Council had committed to a three year funding of the Newcastle Town Centre Partnership which would come to an end in December 2015; the partnership would then need to become self-financing through a Business Improvement District (BID) or membership scheme. The Council would support the TCP to undertake a ballot for the proposed BID for July 2015. Officer support from the Regeneration and Economic Development Team would continue to be provided to both the TCP's based on one day per week.

Discussions were taking place as to how the BID levy could be set and would be complete April/May time.

The following questions were asked and responses provided:-

Q1: When the TCP had got their Business Plan would efforts be made to see a positive result?

A1: The BID Steering Group would submit the Plan to the Board. If successful the BID company would take over. The TCP would undertake a separate role.

Q2: What would happen if businesses did not wish to partake in the BID?

A2: If the majority were in favour it would go ahead.

Q3: There was a lot of opposition two years ago regarding the formation of the TCP, but that had changed and well done.

A3: A lot of the work was down to the support of the Newcastle Borough Council Officers.

The TCP had been advised to work on an Action Plan and by the end of the next Board meeting an Action Plan would be available to be delivered.

The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager advised there was an increasingly positive feeling in the town centre, including the introduction of some new businesses offering different products.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centres, Business and Customer Services thanked the Chair of Town Centre Partnership and her team on behalf of the Committee.

RECOMMENDED:-

That Committee receive the update for Quarter 4.

6. NEWCASTLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY - YEAR FOUR ACTION PLAN AND YEAR THREE REVIEW

The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager presented the Newcastle Economic Development Strategy: Year Three Review and Year Four Action Plan.

In May 2012 the Borough Council approved a five year Economic Development Strategy (2012-2017) in order to focus its efforts for stimulating growth and bringing jobs to the Borough. An annual action plan was provided each year to show what actions were being taken to take this forward. These actions were grouped under the following four headings:-

- Promoting enterprise and supporting local businesses grow
- Improving the skills of the local workforce
- Marketing and development
- Strengthening the vitality and appeal of the town centres

The Committee was opened up for comment on each action.

Promoting enterprise and supporting local business grow

Successfully delivered the Newcastle 'Business Boost' competition, including new sponsors. It was proposed planning for Business Boost 2015 to begin April 2015. The amount of sponsorship would determine whether it would go ahead and in what format. Explore further opportunities for town centre business awards through Business Boost competition 2015. There was a need to identify the right mentor of certain businesses. In taking the initiative forward there needs to be a more robust check and level of support from the mentors.

It was asked for a crib sheet to be distributed to Members to enable the correct information/point of contact to be passed on to businesses to ensure they could access business support/advice.

The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager advised that any Officer in their team would be able to assist but initially it would be the

Business Development Officer. Additionally there was the direct line at North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce.

Work was to continue with the Local Enterprise Partnership and Staffordshire Economic Development Officers Group to secure external investment in the Borough. It was agreed that the Regeneration and Economic Development Manager provide Members with a copy of the European Regional Development Funding Update 2014-2020.

Improving the skills of the local workforce

Work to continue with partners to further develop the employment and skills across the Borough and to explore opportunities for a consortia approach through the Newcastle Employment and Skills group to secure additional funding and resource for the area.

It was proposed to work with Talent Match to identify alternative routes, such as mentoring community buddies and creative routes such as digital media. A full time Newcastle Co-ordinator was appointed January 2015.

It was asked what progress had been made in encouraging employers to provide more work place training?

The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager advised that there was an issue of the project not materializing locally with the Education Trust. Presently there was a locality project in place to continue to work with partners to further develop the employment and skills across the Borough and to explore opportunities for a consortia approach through the Newcastle Employment and Skills group to secure additional funding and resource for the area

A Member recommended that this project be actively pursued by Newcastle Borough Council.

Marketing and Development

Continued to work with the Make It inward investment team to attract prospective investors and employers to the area and secure more jobs including the publication of new 'North Staffordshire Development Sites' brochure specifically aimed to publicise investment opportunities in Stoke and Newcastle.

It was proposed to secure agreement with Henry Davidson Developments for the development of the Ryecroft site which met the expectations of the two Councils with regard to occupier content, scheme design and financial return and, if so, to proceed towards completion of a formal Development Agreement.

It was asked if Newcastle Borough Council could ensure to include public conveniences as part of the development plans.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Development advised that this would be difficult to secure but pointed out the likely inclusion of restaurants and cafes, which would include such facilities.

It was asked to what extent would the Keele Master Plan include the infrastructure?

A Member advised that the Borough Council needs to ensure, through links with the website, that tourism played an important part.

Strengthening the vitality and appeal of the town centres

Supported the Newcastle TCP and other partners to build on previous successful events programmes such as Lymelight Festival, The Homecoming, Paint the Town Pink and the Christmas lights switch on.

The Executive Director for Regeneration and Development Services pointed out that, apart from procuring external advice to carry out Keele Options appraisal and master planning study, there had been little direct cost to the Borough Council in delivering a wide programme of activities set out within the Strategy (reflecting the Council's enabling role).

RESOLVED:-

- (a) That a crib sheet be forwarded to Members showing the correct procedures to follow for advice and support in relation to their business.
- (b) That Members are provided with a copy of the European Regional Development Funding Update 2014 – 2020.
- (c) The Newcastle Borough Council continue to work with partners to further develop the employment and skills across the Borough.
- (d) That tourism is encouraged through links with the Borough Council's web site.

7. JOINT LOCAL PLAN

Members were updated on the progress in preparing the Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Local Plan (Joint Local Plan).

The Plan was currently in the pre-production phase. This phase involved two stages: Stage 1 involved the assembly of relevant and up to date evidence, critical to driving the strategic direction of the plan strategy and Stage 2 included the adoption of a joint Statement of Community Involvement.

The draft Joint Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was approved for public consultation purposes by Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council on the 15th October and 30th October 2014 respectively. The six weeks consultation period began on the 10th November and ended on the 19th December 2014. The results of the consultation

exercise and proposed amendments to the draft SCI would be reported first to the Council's Planning Committee so that their views could be considered by Cabinet in June 2015. The final decision to adopt the final SCI would be made by Council, anticipated to be July 2015.

In respect of the commissioning of supporting evidence the contract for preparing a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) had been awarded to Turley Economics in partnership with demographic consultancy Edge Analytics with a final draft report to be published week commencing 20th April 2015.

A Member commended the progress that had been made but asked if more information could be obtained regarding the timetable?

The Planning Policy Manager advised more information would be available late autumn.

A Member commented that the latest report researched into the Borough's housing and employment concluding April 2015 and asked would there be a presentation to Members and when this information became available for it to be dispatched to Members.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Development confirmed that the information would be made available at the earliest appropriate opportunity or advance warning would be given to Members when the information would become available.

RESOLVED:-

Information to be dispatched to Members once available, or advance warning to be given when the information would become available.

8. NEWCASTLE HOUSING ADVICE CONTRACT PROGRESS

RESOLVED:-

Quarter 4 update report to be provided at the next meeting.

9. NEWCASTLE HOUSING ADVICE CONTRACT MONITORING

The Executive Director Regeneration and Development provided an update on Quarter 3 performance statistics.

In Quarter 3 there was a downward trend and since the last meeting Aspire Housing had formed their own letting policy. Future comparative data to be explored to see if there was a continuing trend.

A Member commented that it seemed unfair Aspire Housing were undertaking their own letting system.

The Executive Director Regeneration and Development advised that Aspire Housing were entitled to carry out this approach in relation to properties unaffected by the Council's nomination rights.

It was asked if an Officer from Aspire Housing could attend the next meeting to explain their letting system.

RESOLVED:-

That an Officer from Aspire Housing be invited to the next meeting to provide an account of how their letting system operates.

10. SUPERFAST STAFFORDSHIRE PROJECT

The Chair provided an update on the Superfast Staffordshire Project. Within the next fifteen months all of the cabinets would had been upgraded.

RESOLVED:-

That Paul Chatwin, Project Manager, Superfast Staffordshire to be invited back to the next meeting to provide an update on proceedings.

11. WORK PLAN

RESOLVED:-

That the following items are added to the work plan:-

Aspire Housing – Letting System

An Officer from Aspire Housing to be invited to the next meeting to provide an account of how their letting system operates.

Newcastle Housing Advice Contract Progress

Quarter 4 update to be produced at the next meeting.

Superfast Staffordshire Project

Paul Chatwin, Project Manager to be invited to the next meeting to provide an update on proceedings.

High Speed 2

All Members were in agreement for the High Speed 2 Working Group to continue, as once a decision was made on a preferred route, it would be important to optimise the economic benefits.

12. URGENT BUSINESS

A Member asked for a cross-party scrutiny group to be established to listen to the views of residents regarding green space assets disposal.

A vote took place showing; 4 in favour, 1 against and 6 abstained.

RESOLVED:-

That Cabinet, at its meeting on Wednesday 25th March 2015, make a decision to have a Capital Programme Cabinet Panel or for a cross-party Scrutiny Group to be established.

COUNCILLOR DAVID STRINGER
Chair

Go Kidsgrove Update July 2015

March AGM

The Go Kidsgrove AGM was held on 25th March 2015 and was attended by about 25 people comprising businesses, residents and partners. Following a presentation about the achievements in the past year two topics were discussed. The first was Christmas lights where three options were presented and the consensus was to look at icicle lights similar to those used in Alsager. The second topic was printed communications and after quite lengthy discussion the attendees agreed that Go Kidsgrove should make use of Kidsgrove News to publish information about their activities but that there should still be a Go Kidsgrove newsletter published twice a year with summary information.

CHRISTMAS

Planning for the Christmas lights in Kidsgrove is well underway. Two companies have visited the town to quote for lights – MK Lighting and Blachere. Although both quotes were above the amount available, Blachere gave a modular option which would allow us to do Liverpool Road and The Avenue as in previous years but also add some lights in the King Street Parade. This included purchase of the lights so there is scope to add more lights year on year even with a reducing contribution from the council.

We were hoping that the Blachere solution for Liverpool Road would avoid the need for column testing but it looks like this may still be necessary. Electrical testing is also required, which further reduces the budget available. However, the Board has agreed to transfer the money that would have been spent on the signage strategy into Christmas lights as this would have more immediate impact on the town.

Go Kidsgrove funding will be used to provide a power source to the bed in which the Christmas tree will be located. Graham Williams has been tasked with arranging this with EON – their response is awaited.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The proposed Chairs group (comprising Go Kidsgrove, the LAP and Town Council) met in January, although there was no representative from the Town Council. Several dates have been proposed since then, but it has proved difficult to get all parties together particularly with purdah and the elections intervening (although Go Kidsgrove has been able to accept all dates suggested). The most recent meeting was set for 9th June but had to be cancelled and will be rearranged for as soon as possible.

SIGNAGE

An application has been submitted to Heritage Lottery Funding, an application for £10k of HLF funding to provide an interactive map for the canal noticeboard. This will use innovative technology to provide additional heritage information to canal users with smart phones and tablets, building on the excellent network coverage available in the area. The library, local history group, and Kings School will also be involved in the project if the application is successful.

Go Kidsgrove are also going to fund a noticeboard for the flower bed by the King Street shops.

PLANTERS

Go Kidsgrove has agreed to fund 10 lamp column planters and had also secured some private sector sponsorship for a further 4 to be erected and maintained by the borough council. However, this project will not be going ahead as the Borough Council has not been able to get permission from the County Council to use the lamp columns due to safety considerations. By the time Go Kidsgrove got this confirmed at the May meeting it was too late this year to be able to organise any other planting.

Cash Flow

Due to circumstances beyond our control some predicted expenditure has not taken place. This includes:

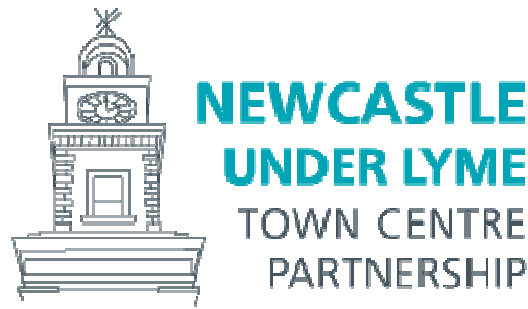
- An order has been placed for the town centre signboard but payment is on delivery and it will not be installed until we know whether or not we have the HLF funding.
- The £1000 Signs contribution to the HLF interactive map project has been moved to August (by which we should know if we've got the HLF funding).
- The board agreed in May to put £1000 allocated to the signage strategy into Christmas lights when we found out we needed another £1000 for electrical testing
- Power supply to the King Street bed is waiting on a response from Eon. £250 has been added to the figure as we may need extra for a pole to take lights to King Street shops.
- Due to problems with the website, Pikemere have not yet issued us with an invoice. This will not be paid until the website is fully functional.
- The anticipated spend on lamp column planters has not taken place because these have been deemed unsafe by the County Council. By the time this was established it was too late in the season to do anything else. The spend has been moved to Feb/Mar 2016.

Kidsgrove Town Centre CIC

Cashflow / cash requirement summary (June 2015 - May 2016)

		2015				
		Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Balance b/f	£'s	1225	225	225	225	875
Expenditure:						
Re-imburement of set up/other costs		500				
Website				550	750	
Signboard		500				
Artisan market					500	
Signs contribution to electronic s/board				1000		
Heritage event					100	
Paint the town pink						200
Halloween event						100
Victorian market						
Power supply in King Street bed			1250			
Brand launch/AGM						
Promotional material				250		
Newsletter				200		
Christmas lights						
Canal booklet/promotion			500			
Floral display contribution						
Advertising			250			250
Total		1000	2000	2000	1350	550
Funding requirement			2000	2000	2000	
Balance c/f		225	225	225	875	325

		2016			2016			
Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May		Total
325	725	475	225	475	475	225		
								500
			250					0
								500
								500
								1000
								100
								200
								100
100								100
								1250
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	250							0
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3000								3000
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725	475	225	475	475	225	225		<hr/> <hr/>



Newcastle Town Centre Partnership Report to Scrutiny July 2015

Business Improvement District

The TCP has been focussed on delivering the Business Improvement District Ballot, this included the launch of the BID Business Plan on 19th May at the Newcastle Performing Arts Centre. Through engagement with local businesses a business plan was developed to take into account the needs and aspirations of business owners.

The three key themes are:

- 1) Promote Newcastle-under-Lyme
- 2) Develop the distinctive Newcastle Experience
- 3) Growth, Development and Investment



The BID ballot commenced in June with a closing date for votes of 16th July. The TCP BID Steering Group comprising nine local business representatives are now promoting the Business Plan to ensure that business rate payers are aware of the proposals and return their ballot paper with a yes vote.

Recent Events



Unfortunately this year's Lymelight Festival was dampened by the weather, however the event was successfully managed with many visitors enjoying the wide range of music and entertainment offered over the Bank Holiday. It was well received by the media and as the weather improved through the weekend, the numbers attending increased as did the benefit to the town's businesses.



The Jazz and Blues Festival has grown to provide entertainment at 20 venues with 63 bands performing in many sessions. With reducing Council funding for the event the Partnership has worked hard to expand the sponsorship and support for this increasingly popular event. This year saw the addition of more outdoor events including live music in the

Guild Hall square, as well as a record fair on the Sunday, and bands from as far afield as Holland playing at the festival. Aspirations are to continue to expand this event in this manner. Signal broadcast from the event, the annual charity and plant market, and family fun activities took place to bring the outdoor market in the festival.

Planned Events

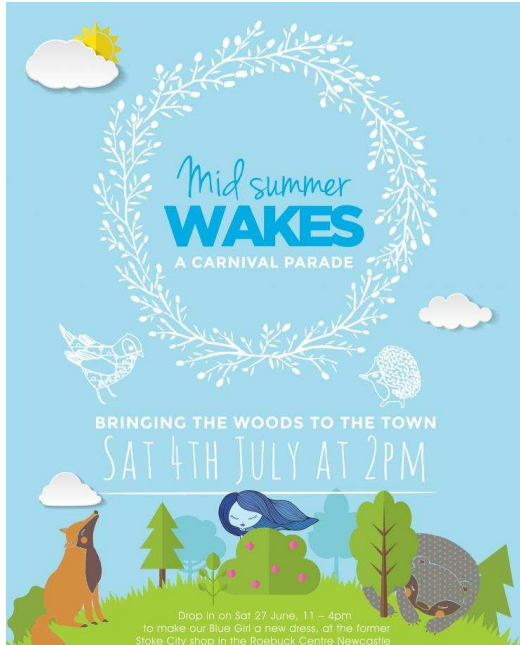


Circus is coming home to its roots again this June, thanks to the Town Centre Partnership, and funding from the Arts Council England.

The spectacular Homecoming 2015 will take place in the town centre in honour of Newcastle-born Philip Astley, acknowledged as the 'father of the modern circus'. Acrobats, dancers and actors will take over Newcastle on June 27 with a full day of free performances from some of the country's most exciting new circus companies. This includes wire-working acrobats, creative dance displays, a female strong-man act, interactive shows and much more.

As well as the main event - which will take place on Saturday 27th June - there will be the opportunity to 'become a circus great' yourself! As part of the interactive 'Great Spavalδος' you will don goggles and headphones and be part of a fantastic experience that will take you away from the high street and into the world of the circus performer. Not for the feint hearted, but an experience to be sampled by even those with a bit of adventurousness. This will be available from June 25th-27th in the town centre between 10am-1.30pm and 3pm-6.30pm.

The rest of the performances are free to watch and will take place in various locations throughout the town centre from 10am to 4pm on Saturday 27th June. Locations include the Ironmarket, The Stones Market, High Street and Castle Walk.



Thanks to a grant from Awards for All, there will be a procession through town with music, costumes and artistic creations with a theme dubbed Midsummer Wakes. This is in response to public demand since the renowned Newcastle Carnival was pulled ten years ago, following problems with health and safety and policing issues. But now there is an appetite to bring a procession back to the town, which will take place on July 4 alongside the existing Global Groove music and dance performance event.

Residents and visitors will be able to get involved by going along to free workshops on June 27 at which the whole family can engage in creating artistic materials and costumes for the parade, ahead of being in the procession themselves.

The free craft workshops will take place at the former Stoke City shop at the Roebuck Shopping Centre on High Street, next to Lloyds Bank between 11am-4pm

Visitor Survey

The TCP are keen to ensure that town centre users whether people working here, local shoppers or leisure visitors enjoy their experience to ensure that people continue to use the town centre and that local businesses continue to have customers. The attached survey outlines the findings of the Visitor Survey and will be used to develop projects for the town centre.

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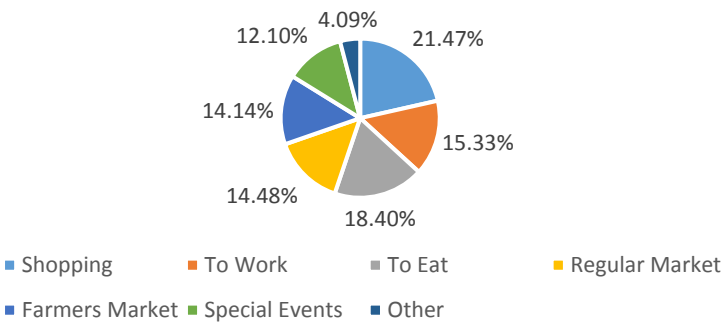
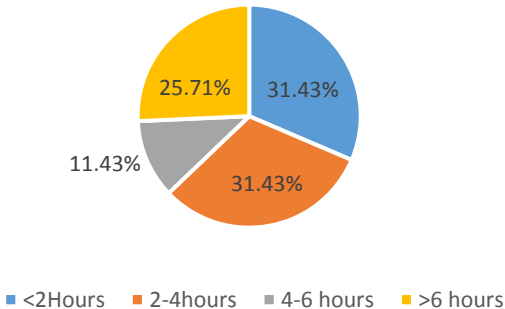
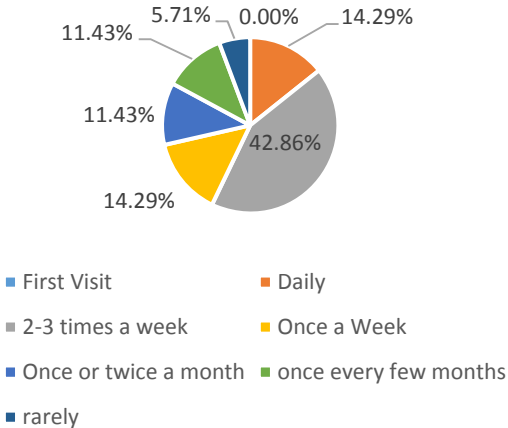


**NEWCASTLE
UNDER LYME**
TOWN CENTRE
PARTNERSHIP

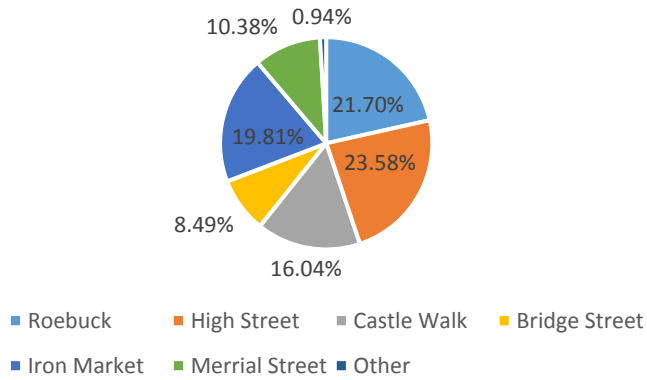
Visitor Survey 2015

The Newcastle under Lyme Town Centre Visitor Survey was carried out during Lymelight Festival Event (1st May to 4th May 2015). Of the responses 47.06% were female and 52.94% were male.

The respondents and 55.88% were from Newcastle under Lyme and the 44.12% were from Stoke on Trent.

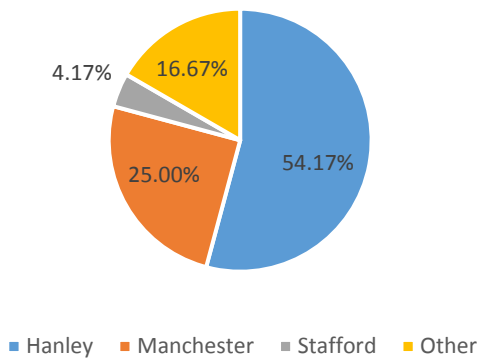
	Compared to 2014 survey
<p style="text-align: center;">Reason for visit to Newcastle under Lyme for</p>  <p>■ Shopping ■ To Work ■ To Eat ■ Regular Market ■ Farmers Market ■ Special Events ■ Other</p>	<p>To Shop (-0.34%) To Work (+3.58%) To Eat (-0.71%) Regular Market (-0.58%) Special Events (-0.27%) Other (-4.63%)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Expected Length of Visit to Newcastle under Lyme</p>  <p>■ <2Hours ■ 2-4hours ■ 4-6 hours ■ >6 hours</p>	<p>Up to 2 hours (1.49%) between 2 and 4 hours (-6.15%) between 4 & 6 hours (-6.4%) more than 6 hours (11.06%)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Frequency of visits to NUL</p>  <p>■ First Visit ■ Daily ■ 2-3 times a week ■ Once a Week ■ Once or twice a month ■ once every few months ■ rarely</p>	<p>First Visit (none) Daily (-13.27%) 2-3 Times a Week (21.07%) Once a Week (-8.79%) Once or Twice a Month -3.95() Every Few Months (6.94%) Rarely (1.22%)</p>

Where do you generally shop when you Visit NUL Town Centre?



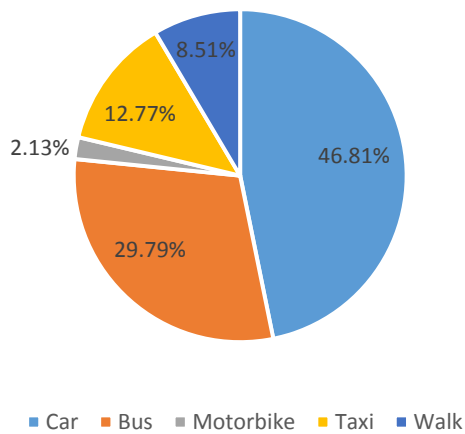
Roebuck (1.5%)
 High Street (-0.15%)
 Castle Walk (-3.57%)
 Bridge Street (1.82%)
 Iron Market (1.18%)
 Merrial Street (9.52%)
 Other (-1.61%)

Where Else Do You Shop Besides NUL



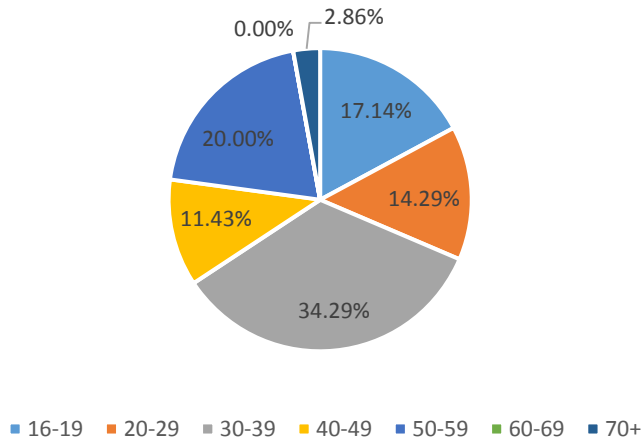
Hanley (8.29%)
 Manchester (2.65%)
 Stafford (-4.46%)
 Other (-6.47%)
 Other: Longton, Trentvale, Liverpool, Woolstanton, Wolverhampton & Birmingham

How do you travel to NUL



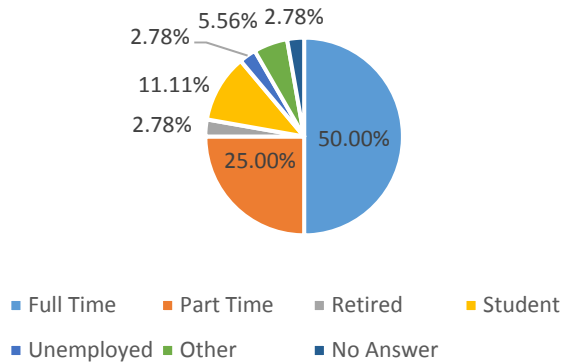
Car (-5.19%)
 Bus (12.29%)
 Motorbike (1.13%)
 Taxi (8.27%)
 Walk (-14.99%)

Which age bracket do you fall into?



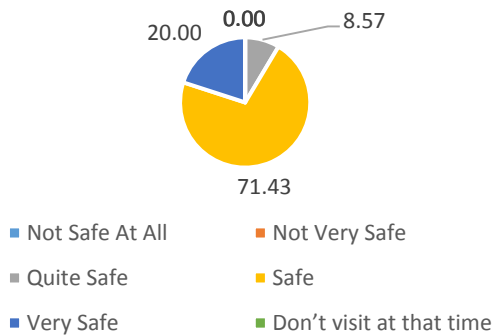
16-19 (1.76%)
 20-29 (-1.74%)
 30-39 (16.98%)
 40-49 (-4.06%)
 50-59(16.54%)
 60-69 (10.6%)
 70+ (none interviewed this year)

What is your current employment status



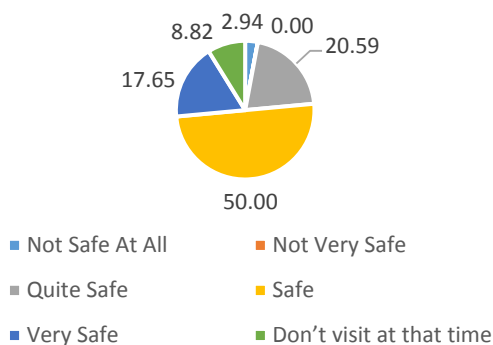
Full Time (17.28%)
 Part Time (8.95%)
 Retired (-13.89%)
 Student (-4.32%)
 Unemployed (-5.86%)
 Other (-2.46%)
 No Response (0.31%)

How safe do you feel when you visit NUL during the Day



Not Safe At All (no responses in 2015)
 Not Very Safe (no responses in 2015)
 Quite Safe (-2.98%)
 Safe (30.05%)
 Very Safe (-26.15%)
 Don't Visit at that time (no responses in 2015)

Evening (5pm to 8pm)



Not Safe At All (0.96%)
 Not Very Safe (no responses in 2015)
 Quite Safe (4.87%)
 Safe (14.1%)
 Very Safe (-7.35%)
 Don't Visit at that time (-6.56%)

<p style="text-align: center;">Late Evening (8pm to 11pm)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> ■ Not Safe At All ■ Not Very Safe ■ Quite Safe ■ Safe ■ Very Safe ■ Don't visit at that time </p>	<p>Not Safe At All (2.03%)</p> <p>Not Very Safe (-7.32%)</p> <p>Quite Safe (9.54)</p> <p>Safe (-0.45)</p> <p>Very Safe (12.26)</p> <p>Don't Visit at that time (16.06%)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Night (11pm to 2am)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> ■ Not Safe At All ■ Not Very Safe ■ Quite Safe ■ Safe ■ Very Safe ■ Don't visit at that time </p>	<p>Not Safe At All (1.77%)</p> <p>Not Very Safe (5.99%)</p> <p>Quite Safe (3.81%)</p> <p>Safe (7.13%)</p> <p>Very Safe (11.24%)</p> <p>Don't Visit at that time (-47.59%)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day Economy - Do you think we need more of?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> ■ Independants ■ High Street Names ■ Department Stores ■ Restuarants ■ Specialist Market ■ Other </p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Night Economy - Do you think we need more of?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> ■ Independent Restuarants ■ Big Brand Eateris ■ Traditional Ale Pubs ■ Live Music ■ Late Night Bar / Night Club ■ Other </p>	

Highlighted within the survey was a common theme of the following that would encourage visitors to the town: increased seating areas, fill vacant premises and make vacant properties more appealing, Primark, reduce parking charges and increase number of events.

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Local Government Association Peer Review of Decision Making Arrangements

Submitted by: Chief Executive

Portfolio: Finance IT and customer

Ward(s) affected: Non-specific

Purpose of the Report

To advise Members on the recommendations of the LGA Peer Review and to request feedback on the recommendations.

Recommendations

- (a) That the Committee consider the recommendations for changes to the Council' democratic decision-making arrangements, Peer Review Recommendations 1 and 2 and draft Council report in as far as they relate to the work of the Committee.
- (b) That the Committee comment on the wider proposals made by the Peer Review recommendations 3, 4 and 5 having particular consideration of these matters in respect of the work of the Committee.
- (c) That the Committee record the summary of its responses on these matters so these can be collated with the comments of all other Committees and considered by the Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee.

Reasons

Resolution by the Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee on Monday 15th June 2015.

1. **Background**

- 1.1 In the autumn of 2014 an LGA Peer Review team carried out a review of the council's democratic decision-making arrangements. The team made their report in January 2015. In light of this the Group Leaders asked the Chief Executive to draft a report which could be considered by Council to give effect to the recommendations made by the Peer Review report. The draft council report sought to implement the Peer Review recommendations but also to take account of some initial comments which had been made by the Group Leaders on the Peer Review Report.

2. **Scrutiny of Peer Review recommendations**

- 2.1 In view of the fact that the proposals made by the Peer Review have implications for all of the Council's Committees it has been considered prudent for the proposals to be considered by the relevant Committee.
- 2, 2 The attached report was considered by the Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 15 June. The Committee has resolved that each Committee be asked to consider the proposals made by the LGA Peer Review and the draft report to Council in as far as they relate to that particular Committee and to feedback these comments.

Actions for the Committee

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to consider the recommendations for changes to the Council's democratic decision-making arrangements, Peer Review Recommendations 1 and 2 and draft Council report in as far as they relate to the work of the Committee.
- 3.2 To comment on the wider proposals made by the Peer Review Recommendations 3, 4 and 5 having particular consideration of these matters in respect of the work of the Committee.
- 3.3 The Committee is asked to record the summary of its responses on these matters so that they can be collated with the comments of all other Committees and considered by the Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee.

4. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 4.1 There are no legal implications directly associated with this report although it may affect the Council's Primary Charter status.

4. Equality Impact Assessment

- 4.1 There are no equalities implications directly associated with this report.

5. Financial and Resource Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial or resource implications other than your officers' time at meetings.

7. Major Risks

- 7.1 There are no major risks associated with this report.

8. Key Decision Information

- 8.1 The proposals within this report are not regarded as Key Decisions in the sense that it should be included within the Forward Plan. However, as this is not regarded as a non-Executive function, a Cabinet (executive) decision is required to give effect to the proposals.

9. Appendices

Report to the Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

10. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee on 15th June 2015.

REPORT ON CHANGES TO COMMITTEE ARRANGEMENTS

Submitted by: Chief Executive

Portfolio: Communications, Policy & Partnerships

Wards affected: All

Purpose

To update Members on the outcome of a review undertaken by a Local Government Association peer review team of the democratic decision-making structures of the Council. To make recommendations to the Council to implement changes to the Council's Committee arrangements in line with the recommendations of the Peer Review report.

RECOMMENDATIONS:-

- (a) That the Council approves the following changes to the Committee arrangements
 - i. Merge the Audit and Risk and Standards Committees
 - ii. Disband the Staffing Committee
 - iii. Disband the Joint Parking Committee
 - iv. Disband the Member Development Committee
 - v. To create the Constitution Working Group as a Committee of the Council and to title it the Constitution Review Committee.
- (b) That the number of places on the Public Protection Committee be set at 15.
- (c) That the Constitution Working Party be asked to make recommendations for changes to the Council's Constitution to give effect to recommendation (a) above and make a report to the next meeting of the Council.
- (d) That the Council approves the Audit and Risk Committee and Standards Committees to operate as a combined Committee until the appropriate changes are made to the Council's Constitution as required consequentially by recommendation (a) above to request the Group Leaders to nominate the same named individuals to both the Audit and Risk Committee and the Standards Committee with immediate effect.
- (e) That the Group Leaders be requested to nominate the same named individuals to both the Licensing Committee and the Public Protection Committee with immediate effect.
- (f) That the Constitution Working Party be asked to undertake a review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements and to bring forward recommendations consistent with the objectives and recommendations of the Peer Review to improve the efficiency of the Council's democratic arrangements.
- (g) That the Council approves the transfer of the powers and duties of the Staffing Committee to the Head of Paid Service acting with the agreement of the Portfolio Holder for human resources with immediate effect and until the appropriate changes

are made to the Council's Constitution as required consequentially by recommendation (a) above.

- (h) That the Constitution Working Party be asked to consider recommending to the Council conventions which could be adopted to improve the efficiency of formal meeting which are consistent with promoting effective debate, efficient use of Member and officer time, and facilitate the involvement of the public, consultees and others in the work of the Council's formal meetings.

1. Context

- 1.1 In December 2014 the Council invited an LGA Peer Review team to conduct a review of its democratic decision making structures. The review reported in January 2015 and a copy of the report is contained in full at Appendix 1 of this report.
- 1.2 The review was commissioned as part of a wider organisational drive for further efficiency. It was specifically designed to help the council look at the way in which its various committees and panels are organised and identify potential options to consider.

2. Findings of the Peer Review

- 2.1 The Peer Review noted that the current democratic decision making arrangements demand a lot of time from both Members and officers. This arises from the extensive array of formally constituted committees and panels. The review team noted that the number of committees and committee positions is very large when compared with similar district and borough councils benchmarked by the team. They noted that the number of meetings (well over 100 per year) is amongst the highest of the benchmark authorities. Similarly the number of committee positions is 3.6 per councillor for this councillor compared to an average of 2.6 amongst the comparator councils.
- 2.2 The Peer Review team undertook a detailed analysis of the implications of these headline findings and these are set out in the report.

2.3 Peer Review recommendations

The Peer Review Report makes recommendations for a number of committees to be merged, combined or disbanded. The specific recommendations are as follows:

- Merge / amalgamate the Public Protection Committee and Licensing Committees
- Merge / amalgamate the Audit and Risk and Standards Committees
- Merge / amalgamate the Active and Cohesive Communities and Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee
- Review the continued need for the Staffing Committee
- Review some of the historical / legacy arrangements, such as the Joint Parking Committee and Conservation Advisory Working Party, and whether the Council should continue to service these bodies

Each of these recommendations is considered in detail below.

Merge / amalgamate the Public Protection Committee and Licensing Committees

The Peer Review Report proposes that the Public Protection Committee and the Licensing Committee be amalgamated. It is noted that a single committee covering all of the functions of those two committees is common practice in other councils. However, it should be noted that these two Committees are responsible for two discrete areas of licensing working under two distinct sets of statutory provisions. The Public Protection Committee under the provisions of the local government Act 1972 and the Licensing Committee under the Licensing Act 2003 and Licensing Act 2005.

Given the semi-judicial nature of these Committees care needs to be taken to ensure that Members serving on them are given adequate training. Members will be aware that to facilitate the participation of businesses and their representatives where this is required sub-committees of the Licensing Committee have met during the daytime. It should be noted that on occasion, due to other commitments on the part of some Committee Members, it has been challenging for a suitable quorum of Members to be assembled. It may therefore be prudent in making changes to these committees to enlarge the size of the Public Protection Committee to standardise the number of Members on each Committee at 15 places. In making nominations, Group Leaders should advise their Members of the daytime meeting requirements of these roles.

Whilst the Peer Review recommendation to amalgamate the two committees has merit, some eminent legal authorities maintain that Parliament's intention under the Licensing Act 2003 was to create a standalone licensing committee. This being the case it may be prudent at this time for the Council to retain the separate entities of a Licensing Committee and a Public Protection Committee but that identical nominations be made to the two Committees and that meetings be scheduled so that they run sequentially on the same occasion. On the basis of the amount of business over recent years for the two committees this is considered to be a practical proposal. This arrangement would give efficiencies since the officer time required in supporting the meeting would be less where the businesses of the two Committees is conducted on a 'back-to-back' basis.

It is proposed therefore to accept the principle of Peer Review recommendation and to bring together the operation of two existing committees but to retain the two legally distinct Committee roles.

Merge / amalgamate the Audit and Risk and Standards Committees

The Peer Review report makes the case for the Audit and Risk and Standards Committees to be merged to create an Audit and Governance Committee. There is a high degree of synergy between the work of the two existing committees and it is therefore proposed to accept the Peer Review recommendation and to merge the two existing committees.

Merge / amalgamate the Active and Cohesive Communities and Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee

In relation generally to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees the Peer Review team observed that they “appear to operate like service committees”. However, the only proposed change to scrutiny arrangements made by the Peer Review team is the merger of the Active and Cohesive Communities and Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee.

Feedback from Members has indicated a strong desire to retain a separate Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. In light of the experience of Stafford Borough and the comments made by the Francis Inquiry (in relation to Stafford General Hospital) it would be advisable at this time to recommend the retention of the separate Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. It is suggested that the Constitution Working Group should be asked to review and recommend the revision of the terms of reference of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to ensure that recommendations from the Francis Report and the experience of Stafford Borough Council have been embedded in this Council’s arrangements.

However, in light of the comments made by the Peer Review about the work of scrutiny committees it is recommended that the Constitution Working Group be asked to undertake a short task and complete piece of work to make recommendations for improvements to be made to the Council’s scrutiny arrangements particularly to ensure that these are efficient and effective and in line with best practice.

Review the continued need for the Staffing Committee

The Peer Review report states that the team was not certain of the role of the Staffing Committee and how it adds value to decision-making. Concerns were expressed that it may add unnecessary delay to the process of getting relatively minor policy updates approved, or escalates issues which might be resolved more quickly and collaboratively at a lower level. The team expressed the view that most of the functions of the Staffing Committee “appear to be in the remit of the Head of Paid Service”. It is therefore proposed to disband the Staffing Committee and to amend the Constitution to pass the functions currently performed by the Committee to be discharged by the Head of Paid Service in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for human resources as appropriate. The Constitution Working Group will be asked to oversee the task of recommending the required changes to the Constitution.

Review some of the historical / legacy arrangements, such as the Joint Parking Committee and Conservation Working Group, and whether the Council should continue to service these bodies

The Joint Parking Committee has naturally come to an end with effect from 1 April 2015 as a result of the County Council’s decision to commission its Civil Parking Enforcement service through a single provider. It is therefore recommended that this Committee be disbanded.

The Conservation Advisory Working Party is an advisory Committee which makes comments to the Planning Committee on matters which affect the historic built environment and in particular on applications for planning permission in Conservation Areas, listed building consent, conservation area consent, consents for advertisements, passing comment on applications for historic building grants and to

recommend on conservation policy. It is held on a 3-weekly cycle in order to facilitate efficient decision-making on applications for permission or consent. Its members are drawn from Borough Councillors (5), 7 representatives of local organisations and a representative of each Parish Council.

In terms of officer resources it is supported by one specialist member of staff. In view of the importance of achieving good quality design in historically important parts of the built environment it is considered that there is merit in retaining this advisory group, particularly in view of the relatively modest demands placed upon the Council. It is proposed that the Conservation Advisory Working Party be retained in its current form.

The Member Development Committee was set up on a task and complete basis to advise on improvements to the support arrangements for elected Members. The Committee has reviewed the arrangements and recently made recommendation for the future use of ICT arrangements in line with those which exist for officers and in accordance with good practice. It may be considered that the Committee has now completed its task and should be disbanded.

The Constitution Working Group is technically a Committee of the Council. When this was first established it was done on a task and complete basis with the remit to update the Council's Constitution. Whilst the bulk of the substantive task was completed a year or so ago, the Council has subsequently retained the good practice of keeping the Constitution updated on a rolling basis and the Constitution Working Group has continued to undertake this work. The working group has been kept small and operated on a cross-party basis. It is proposed that this group should become a full Committee of the Council and that the Constitution should be amended to reflect this.

At its meeting on 26 November 2014 the Council established a Committee to look at the future of election cycles and the size of the council. This Governance Committee was established on a task and complete basis with a requirement to report its findings to the Council no later than September 2015. It is proposed that this Committee be retained for the duration of its current remit.

Timing of meetings

Although not considered as part of the brief of the Peer Review there has been discussion within the Council about the timing of meetings. By convention the majority of the council's formal meetings start at 7pm. As part of wider moves to ensure that the council is efficient in the way it conducts its business it has been suggested that consideration be given by Members about whether this is the most convenient time in view of the other demands on the time of both Members and officers.

It is suggested that the Constitution Working Party be asked to give this matter greater consideration and to make recommendations for whether there are ways in which meetings could be scheduled to be more efficient on the time of Members and officers. In doing this the Working Group would also be asked to make recommendations about other practices which could be adopted by convention which may assist the business management of meetings to promote efficient use of time and also to consider this in relation to meetings where members of the public, consultees or others are in attendance.

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A review of the democratic decision-making structures at Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

January 2015

1. Introduction

Background and scope of the review

Like many other local authorities and other public sector organisations, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is facing financial challenges as a result of reduced Central Government funding to local government. In dealing with these challenges, the Council has introduced the 'Newcastle 2020' programme which is designed to identify efficiencies, cost savings and improvements across all aspects of the Council in terms of its organisation and also the services it delivers.

This review was commissioned as part of that wider drive for further organisational efficiency. It was specifically designed to help the Council look at the way in which its' various committees and panels are organised and identify potential options to consider. The review will feed into the planned local democracy review, and inform and complement the work the Council is already doing. As such the review has been commissioned as a 'light-touch' review focussing on improving current structures and arrangements, not a fundamental examination of the governance model.

Methodology and approach

The review has been undertaken by local government peers, drawing on the principles of sector-led improvement and informed by the following activity:

- Desk top analysis of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council's committee terms of reference, committee membership, and agendas and reports.
- Benchmarking exercise, comparing Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council with other district and borough councils in terms of numbers of committees, numbers of committee positions, and frequency of meetings. (Appendix 1)
- Stakeholder engagement facilitated through an online survey to all councillors (and relevant officers) (Appendix 2), face-to-face engagement with committee chairs, vice chairs, senior management and democratic services staff onsite at Newcastle-under-Lyme, plus telephone conversations with other relevant officers (Appendix 3 provides a list of stakeholders engaged during the Review).

The peers who carried out the review at Newcastle-under-Lyme were:

Jane Burns – Director of Strategy and Challenge, Gloucestershire County Council
Councillor Michael Payne – Deputy Leader, Gedling Borough Council
Jeremy Thomas – Head of Law and Governance, Oxford City Council
Paul Clarke – Programme Manager (Local Government Support), LGA

The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and materials they read. This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings.

2. Review Findings

Our findings are divided into sections:

- Section 2.1 below summarises our key observations and recommendations about the current arrangements and practice at Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council. These are essentially the ‘quick wins’ that will help achieve efficiencies.
- In section 2.2 we summarise other areas we think need to be considered as part of the wider work on governance and culture the Council is already embarking on, or is planning to undertake.

2.1 Key Observations

The current democratic decision-making arrangements at Newcastle-under-Lyme demand a lot from both councillors in terms of their participation, and officer time to service an extensive array of formally constituted committees and panels. The numbers of committees and committee positions per councillor is high when compared to the other district and borough councils we benchmarked Newcastle-under-Lyme against (3.6 positions per councillor at Newcastle compared to an average of 2.6 positions per councillor in other councils), and we know there have been examples of you struggling to fill all positions on some committees.

The number of meetings per year (well over 100 meetings) is also amongst the highest in terms of the benchmarked authorities. The time and resource required to service and support these mean officers are stretched and are focused on ‘feeding the machine’ rather than ‘doing the day job.’ The sheer volume may also be compromising the quality of committee servicing and support, evidenced by the high number of supplementary papers and replacement reports correcting errors. This in turn puts additional pressure on those trying to read the reports in advance of meetings, and arguably diminishes the quality of discussion and debate.

We questioned whether demands on councillors in terms of the requirement to attend a high number of committee meetings has a detrimental effect on their time to effectively undertake their frontline councillor roles within communities. The councillors we engaged with did not cite this as an issue. In fact, some suggested they saw being involved in committee meetings as the key role of a councillor at Newcastle-under-Lyme. The perceived importance of having formal and public roles on committees is reinforced by the survey results (Appendix 2) which suggest that councillors highly value the principles of all debates and decision making being carried out in formally constituted committee meetings which meet in public and supported by formal agendas and minutes.

We think given the important role councillors have in the overall relationship between Council and community, lessening the demands of meeting attendance will allow these roles and relationships to develop further and crucially ‘free up’ reducing officer resources to focus on service delivery.

It appears the extensive structures, together with the relative low levels of delegated decision-making to officers and individual cabinet members, mean the Council is operating a de facto committee system alongside a Leader and Cabinet model of executive arrangements with all of the additional demands on officer time that that implies. Some of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees appear to operate like service committees (in that they perceive themselves to be directing the work of officers) and the existence of others, such as the Staffing Committee, are out of kilter with current practice in other authorities and seem focused on operational matters that are usually in the domain of officers.

In particular, given the existence of the Employee Consultative Committee, and the fact most of the powers and functions of the Staffing Committee appear to be in the remit of the Head of Paid Service, we do not fully understand or appreciate the role of the Staffing Committee and how it adds value to decision-making. There is a danger we think that the Committee adds unnecessary delays to the process of getting relatively minor policy updates approved, or escalates issues that might be resolved more quickly and collaboratively at a lower level.

All of the above combine to create a set of current arrangements and practice that puts an unnecessary and unsustainable demand on the organisation and its capacity and resources, which due to the financial challenges facing local government are continuing to decrease. There is definite scope to achieve more productivity and efficiency within the current set-up. For example, there are opportunities to reduce and rationalise the numbers of committees by merging those with complementary remits and functions.

In particular, the Public Protection Committee and Licensing Committee could be amalgamated. One committee covering all the functions of those two committees is common practice in other councils. There are other opportunities too, such as incorporating the functions of the Standards Committee into remit of the Audit and Risk Committee to create an Audit and Governance Committee. Another is to merge the Active and Cohesive and the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committees. The Council may wish to consider being more radical in the reduction of the number of Scrutiny Committees. At the very least, scrutiny committee work-plans should not be agreed without some consideration of the Officer resources available to support them.

The responses to the survey we carried out suggest there is support from both officers and councillors for this. Combining/merging some committees was the type of change most likely to be supported by both councillors and officers (81% of respondents), and many of the specific suggestions for change are reflected in our recommendations. There is also a timely opportunity we suggest to review some of the historical legacy arrangements, such as the Joint Parking Committee and Conservation Working Group. The recent changes made to the arrangements regarding the Sports Council provides a precedent here.

In terms of overview and scrutiny, there are both standing committees and task and finish groups. Scrutiny arrangements need to be flexible enough to adapt

to changing circumstances. The principles of good scrutiny are that they should cover the issues that matter to local people, it should be 'narrow and deep' rather than 'broad and shallow' and that all scrutiny reviews should be properly scoped, task and finish, rather than on-going and have realistic timescales. There needs to be a discipline to ensure scrutiny doesn't drift.

There are also some aspects of how committees are serviced and supported that will benefit from modernising. For example, the way committee agendas are circulated. Currently any member can request to be added to a circulation list, enabling them to receive a hard copy of the committee meeting agenda. This potentially adds significant costs to the servicing of committees. This is something you have already identified and are beginning to address (as per the report 'Use of ICT and ICT Resources' to the Member Development Panel on 2nd October 2014). The recent rule changes enabling councils to send out committee papers electronically will help here too.

The length and style of committee reports was cited as an issue. Reports appear lengthy and many of the officers we spoke to feel they take a disproportionate time to produce. This issue may be being exacerbated by a tendency to establish formally constituted committees and sub-committees for areas and issues that may be served equally well by more informal bodies – especially where they are performing an advisory function (e.g. member development) - meaning a need to generate formal agendas, reports and minutes.

We know you are already looking at report writing and we agree this is an important exercise. Ensuring that report writing becomes more consistent across the organisation, is proportionate to the matter being considered, and that reports can be easily read and digested by councillors are all important facets. There may be an opportunity to also review the style of minutes as part of this work.

We think there are also some underlying organisational and cultural issues, including the perceptions and expectations of councillors that have evolved over time which now need addressing. In particular, the current arrangements appear to be seen by non-executive members as a range of opportunities to feel involved and informed, rather than part of a decision-making system. Our desktop analysis suggests more than 40% of the reports on agendas for meetings during September-November 2014 were 'for information'.

In short, councillors appear to rely heavily on committee meetings and agendas/reports for their information. We understand there used to be a Member's Information Bulletin and suggest it may be timely to consider re-introducing something that enables councillors to be kept informed on major developments so they don't feel the need to attend committee meetings and/or request committee agendas as a way of keeping in touch. There may also be scope to consider ward specific information and tailored briefings for councillors to better support them in their frontline roles.

Recommendations

- 1. Merge/combine/disband some committees that appear to have a similar or complementary role and remit, or have roles that are effectively fulfilled elsewhere in the wider governance arrangements, in particular:**
 - Merge/Amalgamate the Public Protection Committee and Licensing Committees
 - Merge/Amalgamate the Audit & Risk Committee and Standards Committees
 - Merge/Amalgamate the Active and Cohesive Communities and Health & Well Being Scrutiny Committee
 - Review the continued need for the Staffing Committee
- 2. Review some of the historical/legacy arrangements, such as the Joint Parking Committee and Conservation Working Group, and whether the Council should continue to service these bodies.**
- 3. Consider re-introducing a Members' Information Bulletin and critically review any "for information" items on committee agendas.**
- 4. Progress and implement the measures you are already considering to improve business practice, including report format and circulation of agendas.**
- 5. Consider and progress the other issues and areas as identified in section 2.2 of this report (below) – including delegation - drawing on practice from other authorities. They will bring bigger gains and help address the underlying issues.**

2.2. Other observations and areas to consider

You have rightly identified there are potentially a number of other bigger benefits and savings to be gained. Reviewing the frequency of local elections (currently annual by thirds) for example, and reducing the numbers of councillors, (which at 60 is high compared to similar sized district authorities), are likely to result in more significant cost savings. But the bigger prize will be the political stability. All out elections every four years are likely to bring this, and enable more focus on the medium to longer term ambitions and strategic priorities of the Council. It is this vision for the future, including the future shape and function of the Council that will need to inform the wider review of democracy and governance.

We think this should include consideration of the scheme of delegation to individual Cabinet Members which can help manage business more effectively and speed up decision-making. We also think there could be a review of the scheme of delegation to officers with a view to increasing the levels of delegation. As we have alluded to, the levels of delegation to officers at Newcastle-under-Lyme seems low compared to many other authorities.

Reports to Cabinet tend to be presented in the name of the Executive Director and Scrutiny Committees tend to hold officers rather than executive members to account. Individual decision making and reports to Cabinet in the name of the portfolio holder are now common practice in many councils, and will help to reinforce and embed some of the key principles of a leader/cabinet model of governance. It may be something that warrants consideration at Newcastle-under-Lyme.

The principles of good scrutiny may need to be re-emphasised, so they are fully adopted and embedded, and drive how the overview and scrutiny function operates. It may be timely to review the key objectives of overview and scrutiny and consider where the emphasis needs to be to best support the Council in delivering its priorities – so there is a clearer understanding of the balance between holding to account and informing policy, and the focus on internal and external matters. Ensuring scrutiny is positioned to make a timely and effective contribution to strategic policy development and decision-making will become increasingly important as will an external focus, given that in the future the Council might well directly deliver less, and looks to influence and leverage more from external partners and the community.

There may be a need to consider a re-balancing of the role of councillors and the shape and structure of decision-making arrangements required to enable an emphasis on local community leadership in communities as well as attending and participating in formal committee meetings in the civic offices. The organisation will need to consider the best way of supporting councillors in these roles with the resources and capacity available.

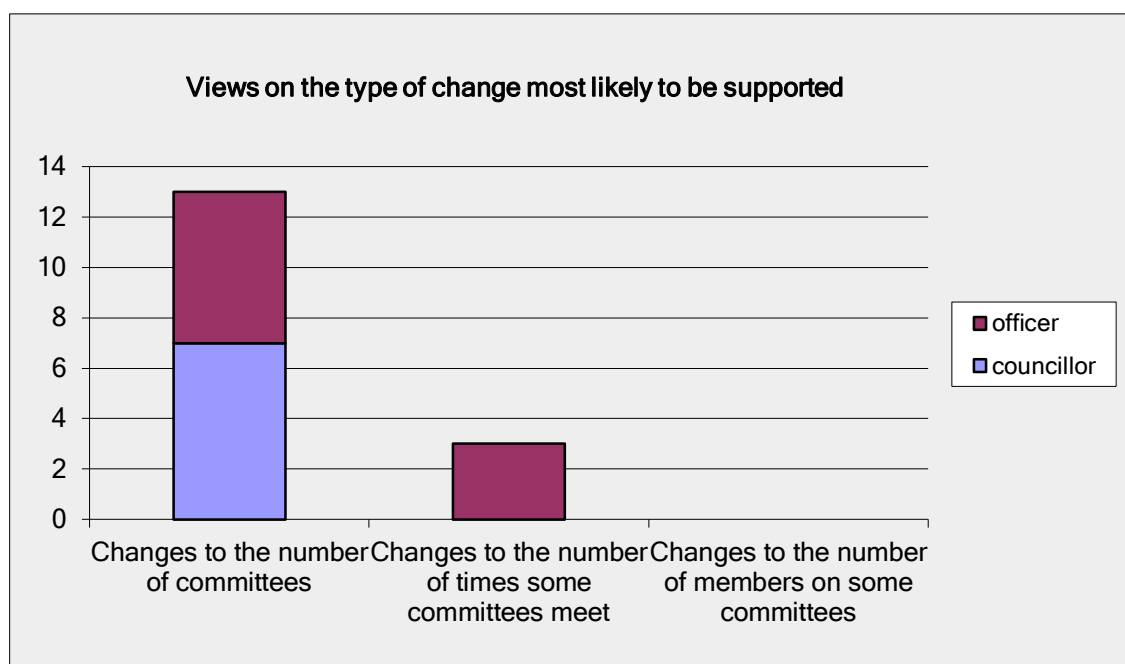
Appendix 1 - Comparison with other councils

	Cotswold DC	Forest of Dean DC	Stroud DC	Cheltenham BC	Tewkesbury BC	Gloucester City	Oxford City	Gedling BC	Ipswich BC	Cannock Chase DC	East Staffs BC	Newcastle-under-Lyme BC	AVERAGE
Current Political Control	Cons (C: 18 / L:9 / LD: 9)	NOC (C: 18 / L:17 / IND: 11 / LD:1 / UKIP:1)	NOC (C: 22 / L:20 / GR: 6 / LD: 3)	Lib Dem (LD 24 / C: 12 / IND: 4)	Cons (C:24 / LD:9 / IND: 5)	NOC (C: 18 / L:9 / LD:9)	Labour (L: 33 / LD: 8 / G: 6 / IND: 1)	Labour (L: 32 / C: 15 / LD: 3)	Labour (L: 35 / C: 10 / LD: 3)	Labour (L: 25 / UKIP: 6 / C: 5 / LD: 3 / IND: 2)	NOC (L: 16 / IND: 4 / C: 18 / LD: 1)	Labour (L: 32 / C:16 / LD: 6 / UKIP: 5/ G:1)	n/a
Total Number of Committees	7	14	9	10	8	11	15	9	12	23	15	16	12
No. of Ctee Positions:No of Members	60:44	114:48	110:40	118:40	82:38	103:36	104:48	95:50	138:48	199:41	45:39	156:60	-
Number of Committee Positions Per Member	1.4	2.4	2.8	3.0	2.2	2.9	2.2	1.9	2.9	4.9	1.2	3.6	2.6
Average Number of Positions Per Committee (Mean)	8.6	11.2	10.9	11.8	8.2	9.4	7	12	11.5	8.6	7.5	9.8	9.7
Total No of Committee Meetings Per Year	48	66	40	51	52	69	114	100	82	120	45	105	74
Average Number of Meetings Per Committee Per Year (Mean)	7	5	4	5	7	6	7	7	7	5	3	7	5.8
Governance Model	Cabinet 6	Cabinet 5	Committee System	Cabinet 8	Fourth option	Cabinet 5	Cabinet 10	Cabinet 7	Cabinet 9	Cabinet 9	Cabinet 6	Cabinet 7	-

Appendix 2 – summary of survey results

All members and a range of relevant officers (senior managers and democratic services staff) were invited to complete a short online survey between 26th November and 10th December 2014. 16 people (9 officers, 7 councillors) completed the survey.

Support for change: The survey responses suggest strong support (81% of respondents) for changing the number of committees, as opposed to changing the numbers of times committees meet (19%) or changing the numbers of members on committees (0%). All councillors (100%) who responded to the survey identified changes to the number of committees as the type of change they would be most likely to support:



Principles and features of governance and decision-making that councillors value the most:

- **Accountability** (which was defined as ‘all debates and decision making are carried out in formally constituted committee meetings with agendas and minutes’) was ranked by 72% of councillors as the principle of governance they value most.
- This contrasts sharply with **Involvement** (which was defined as ‘opportunities for councillors and other stakeholders to be involved in debates and decision making’) which no councillors (0%) ranked as the principle they value most.
- 28% of councillors considered **Transparency** (which was defined as ‘all debates and decision making are carried in meetings that are held in public’) as the principle they most valued.

Specific suggestions for change and consideration: A range of suggestions were put forward by respondents. These included:

- Reduce the number of committees by amalgamating those with obvious synergy
- Get rid of specific committees – e.g. Staffing Committee, Member Development
- Merge the Audit & Risk committee with Standards Committee
- Have less scrutiny committees and/or revisit their remits.
- Less committees and less meetings
- Review the types of agenda items to reduce the number of ‘information only’ items
- Consider the timescales for submission of items to Committee
- Ensure that meetings have a clear outcome/resolution

Appendix 3 – list of stakeholders engaged during the review

The peer team met and/or spoke with the following officers and councillors during the review:

John Sellgren – Chief Executive

Neale Clifton – Executive Director (Regeneration and Development)

David Adams - Executive Director (Operational Services)

Kelvin Turner – Executive Director (Resources and Support Services)

Mark Bailey- Head of Business Improvement, Central Services & Partnerships

Julia Cleary – Democratic Services Manager

Justine Tait – Democratic Services Officer

Geoff Durham – Member Training and Development Officer

Liz Dodd – Audit Manager and Monitoring Officer

Cllr Reginald Bailey – Chair, Active and Cohesive Communities Scrutiny Committee, and member of Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and Public Protection Committee

Cllr Colin Eastwood - Chair of Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, and member of Public Protection Committee and Planning Committee

Cllr Sandra Hambleton – Chair of Standards Committee and Staffing Committee and member of Planning Committee and Audit & Risk Committee

Cllr Derrick Huckfield - UKIP Group Leader

Cllr Hilda Johnson – Vice Chair of Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and member of Active and Cohesive Communities Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Nigel Jones - Liberal Democrat Group Leader

Cllr David Loades – Conservative member of two Scrutiny Committees and Audit & Risk Committee

Cllr Bert Proctor – Vice Chair of Public Protection Committee and Planning Committee and member of Member Development Panel

Cllr Elizabeth Shenton – Deputy Leader of the Council (and Cabinet Member)

Cllr David Stringer – Chair of Economic Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee and member of Finance, Resources and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Gill Williams – Chair of Cleaner Greener and Safer Communities Scrutiny Committee and member of Licensing Committee and Public Protection Committee

Cllr Mike Stubbs – Leader of the Council (and Cabinet Member)

Cllr Joan Winfield – Chair of Licensing Committee and member of Cleaner Greener and Safer Communities Scrutiny Committee and Member Development Panel

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Report to the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1st July 2015

Land Asset Disposal



Report Author: Louise Beeby
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Introduction

The Council at its meeting on the 15th April 2015 resolved that a cross party scrutiny working group be set up to listen to the concerns of local residents before any green space is sold for development.

Background

Asset Management Strategy 2015/16 – 2017/18

In January 2015 Cabinet approved this Strategy. The full document is available to view on the Council's intranet or website but a copy of the key appendices is attached.

At appendix 5 of the Strategy the approved consultation process that is followed once an area of land is identified as having a better alternative use is summarised in a flowchart.

1. Aims of the Consultation Process

The primary aim of this consultation process is to identify any physical, technical or other constraints that might affect the scope/opportunity for alternative use or development being pursued. The outcome of this consultation exercise, taken together with desktop technical assessments, allows the Council as a landowner to consider the future uses of these sites. Importantly the Strategy confirms that the Town Planning processes (Local Plan and Planning Applications) should consider the appropriateness of land or property being developed or used for alternative purposes rather than the Council as landowner making potentially subjective judgements.

2. The Nature of the Consultation Process

The consultation exercise takes place over a 6 week period. This involves Ward Councillors being notified prior to the start of the process. All owners/occupiers adjacent to the site are then sent a consultation letter along with the Parish/Town Council if applicable and any known Residents Association. A notice and plan is also placed on site. Anyone who considers there are reasons why a site should not be put to an alternative use, has any views, concerns or comments are asked to correspond with the Council or their local Councillor. The views are then reported to the Cabinet for its consideration.

3. The Current Position on Land Disposals

Cabinet has previously approved the disposal of the sites listed in Appendix 1 of the Strategy and the public consultation process (as set out above) has been completed in respect of these sites.

Approval has also been granted through the Strategy to explore alternative uses of the sites listed in Appendix 2. The consultation process is underway in respect of Deans Lane, Red Street.

The sites set out in Appendix 3 are identified in the Newcastle-under-Lyme Playing Pitch Strategy 2015-2020 as having no local demand and alternative uses should be explored (subject to the approval of the Playing Pitch Strategy). Cabinet at its meeting on 10th June approved the Strategy and identified 4 sites that had not been used for playing pitch purposes for a considerable length of time and that are therefore no longer playing pitches. Three of these sites: Knype Way, Bradwell, Sheldon Grove, Holditch and Gloucester Road Kidsgrove have also been declared surplus when assessed through the current Green Space Strategy. In accordance with Asset Management Strategy, the consultation process will commence shortly in respect of the sites at Knype Way, Bradwell and Sheldon Grove, Holditch.

4. Asset Management Strategy Approval Process

Members will be aware that it is customary for this Strategy to be prepared for consideration as part of the suite of financial reports brought to Members around January/February each year.

The Strategy has been subjected to a Scrutiny review process for the past few years from both a Property and Finance/Resources perspective.

Green Spaces Strategy Review

As part of the Local Plan preparation/process the Green Spaces Strategy is currently under review and it is anticipated that this will be completed in March/April 2016. The Strategy will identify open spaces that should be preserved and it may identify further sites that are not required to meet open space needs and so alternative uses will need to be explored.

Capital Programme Investment

Members should also recall that at Cabinet in October 2014 Members reviewed the options for funding the capital investment required for the period 2015/16-2018/19 and resolved that as a first resort, the Council would seek to fund its future known capital programme needs through the annual asset management process by identification of land or property in its ownership that is capable of, and appropriate for, disposal. The Council's Capital Strategy identifies that the current estimated funding requirement for the next 3 years is approximately £14.5m. It is estimated (subject to planning permission being granted, there being no significant abnormal costs and the sites selling an open market value) that the capital receipts likely to be generated in respect of the sites listed in Appendices 1,2 and 3 of the current Asset Management Strategy is in the region of £16m.

Questions/Issues to be addressed

1. How do members envisage that any scrutiny working group will interface with the various Cabinet Panels that are being established to address capital programme expenditure and income?

2. How do members envisage that any scrutiny working group will both influence and enable delivery of future Asset Management Strategies (including the identification of future sites for disposal)?
3. What do members consider need to be the key terms of reference?
4. Is it anticipated that this group would review the previously-approved disposals (Appendices 1, 2 and 3 of the current Asset Management Strategy)?
5. Do Members consider they have sufficient information in order to balance private interest with the wider public interest?
6. Are members satisfied with the consultation arrangements set out in the current Asset Management Strategy?

Outcomes

1. Confirmation of the approach to consultation including Member involvement.
2. Greater clarity and understanding of the corporate need for an effective asset rationalisation process to meet service needs and to fund the capital programme.
3. Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the Asset Management process (including rationalisation)

Conclusions

Members are requested to review the current consultation processes and to identify how a cross party working group could be involved in any enhanced process.

Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)

Town Centres' Business and Assets

Local Ward Member (if applicable)

Not applicable – all wards

Background Materials

Cabinet Report – Newcastle-under-Lyme Playing Pitch Strategy 2015-2020
Playing Pitch Strategy 2015-2020

Appendices

Asset Management Strategy 2015/16-2017/18 (particularly Appendices 1, 2, 3 and 5)

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Land and Property Disposals - Approved and ongoing				
2014/15				
Address	Site Area acres	Site Area (Ha)	Position Statement	Site to Market
Plot D Apedale Road Chesterton	4.50	1.82	Brownfield - former (reclaimed) marl hole. Land is being marketed for industrial development purposes. No interest at the time of writing this document..	
Silverdale Road Newcastle	1.38	0.56	Brownfield – former plant nursery. Following a review by Operational Services it has been identified that this land may be required for future operational purposes. If this is not the case then the site will be looked at again for disposal.	
Former St Giles and St Georges School Newcastle			The site is the preferred location for a potential new civic offices hub subject to the outcome of the redevelopment of the current Civic Offices and the former Sainsbury's site (see item below).	
Former Sainsbury's Supermarket Site, Liverpool Road and Civic Offices Merrial Street, Newcastle	6.4	2.59	Brownfield – former supermarket site. Site has been marketed and a preferred developer has been nominated. Co-operation Agreement being prepared to enable progress to be made during 2015 with a view to a Development Agreement being prepared by mid-2015 and a start on site by 2016.	
High Street Knutton, (Recreation Centre site)	5.31	2.15	The disposal of this site has been approved in principle. Site-specific constraints to be overcome prior to formal marketing and awaiting outcome of Playing Pitch Strategy in order that the implications of the 3G pitch can be considered.	
The Square, High Street, Newcastle			The disposal of this site has been approved and terms agreed with the current tenant. Legal documentation is being finalised with the aim of completing the transaction by late 2014 / early 2015.	
2-10 Hassell Street & 15-21 Brunswick Street, Newcastle			The disposal of these premises has been approved and terms agreed with a prospective purchaser. Legal documentation is being finalised with the aim of completing the transaction by the end of the 2014/15 financial year.	

Classification: NULBC UNCLASSIFIED Organisational

2015/16				
Address	Site Area acres	Site Area (Ha)	Current Situation/Position	Site to Market
Lyme Valley Road, Newcastle	0.26	0.1	Brownfield - disused site which is under offer subject to planning permission for residential development.	2015/16
Gloucester Road, Kidsgrove	0.41	0.17	Brownfield - disused garage site not in Green Space Strategy. Cabinet resolution to dispose for development, subject to planning permission. A planning application is to be submitted for residential development.	2014/15
Hillport Ave, Porthill	0.67	0.27	Grassed area within urban area. Although in Green Space Strategy it is only a very small part of Bradwell Recreation ground. Cabinet resolution to dispose for development, subject to planning permission. A planning application is to be submitted for residential development	2015/16
Stafford Ave, Clayton	0.50	0.20	Grassed area within the urban area. Although in Green Space Strategy area identified is only very small part of total area. Cabinet resolution to dispose for development, subject to planning permission. Plans and associated reports to be prepared prior to a planning application being submitted for residential development	2015/16
St Edmunds Ave, Porthill	0.59	0.24	Hardstanding area not in the Green Space strategy. Cabinet resolution to dispose for development, subject to planning permission. Plans and associated reports to be prepared prior to a planning application being submitted for residential development	2015/16
Wedgwood Ave Westlands (adj Community Centre)	0.27	0.11	Former tennis courts currently used as an overflow car park for the Community Centre. Identified in Green Space Strategy as part of the Westlands tennis ground but this area is not currently utilised for sport. Cabinet resolution to dispose for development, subject to planning permission. Plans and associated reports to be prepared prior to a planning application being submitted for residential development and addressing the car parking needs of the Community Centre.	2015/16
Sandy Lane/Brampton Road, May Bank	2.22	0.90	Grassed area within Conservation area and urban area. The Green Space Strategy identifies this land as a site where its use / maintenance regime should be considered i.e. site is considered to have a better alternative use. Cabinet resolution to dispose for development, subject to planning permission. Consultants to be appointed to prepare plans and associated reports and to submit a planning application for residential development	2015/16

Classification: NULBC UNCLASSIFIED Organisational

Bower End Lane, Madeley	0.94	0.38	Former depot site adjacent to village envelope. Although in Green Space Strategy its disposal could be supported if a contribution was secured towards an alternative site for a park/garden in the settlement. Cabinet resolution to dispose for development, subject to planning permission.	2015/16
Kinnersley Street Kidsgrove	1.61	0.65	Grassed area within urban area and not in Green Space Strategy. Approval given in principle to a disposal for affordable housing. Registered Provider expressed interest in the site for an extra care facility and feasibility work underway.	
Cotswold Ave, Knutton	0.44	0.18	Grassed area within urban area. The Green Space Strategy identifies this land as a site where its use / maintenance regime should be considered i.e. site considered to have a better alternative use. Approval given in principle to a disposal for affordable housing. Registered Providers not interested in the land. Site to be marketed	
Heathcote Street Kidsgrove	0.73	0.30	Currently used for informal car parking within urban area and not in Green Space Strategy. grassed area within urban area and not in Green Space Strategy. Approval given in principle to a disposal for affordable housing. Registered Provider expressed interested in the site for an extra care facility and feasibility work underway.	
2016/17				
Address				Site Area acres
Market Drayton Road, Loggerheads	11.50	4.65	Grassed area adjacent to the village envelope and not in Green Space Strategy. Currently let on farm business tenancy. Cabinet resolution to dispose for development, subject to planning permission. Consultants to be appointed to prepare plans and associated reports and to submit a planning application for residential development	2015/16
Eccleshall Road, Loggerheads	5.56	2.25	Grassed area close to the village envelope and not in Green Space Strategy. Currently let on grazing licence. Cabinet resolution to dispose for development, subject to planning permission. Consultants to be appointed to prepare plans and associated reports and to submit a planning application for residential development.	2015/16

Classification: NULBC **UNCLASSIFIED** Organisational

Former Jubilee Baths			Cabinet resolution to dispose for development, subject to planning permission. Terms agreed for disposal for commercial/residential purposes subject to planning permission.	

Classification: NULBC **UNCLASSIFIED** Organisational

Land and Property Disposals - Under investigation and subject to approval

2016/2017 - Anticipated Disposal Date

Residential Sites

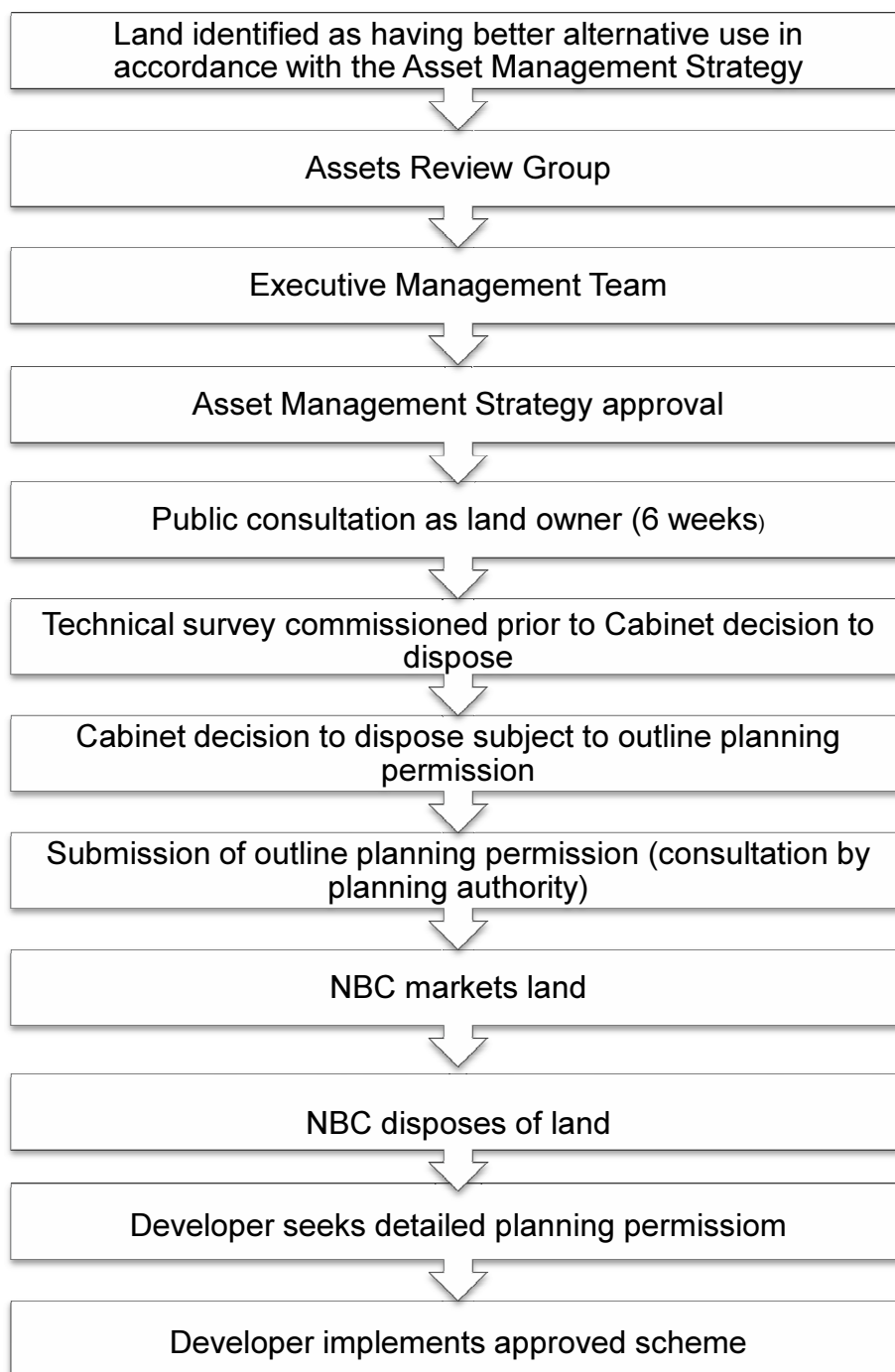
Address	Site Area acres	Site Area (Ha)	Current Situation/Position	Site to Market
Deans Lane, Red Street	3.36	1.36	Grassed area in urban area not in Green Space Strategy. Currently let on a grazing licence	2015/16
Shrewsbury Drive, Chesterton 3– 5 individual plots	0.41	0.17	Small grassed areas within urban area, not in Green Space Strategy	2015/16
St Edmunds Avenue (Single Plot), Wolstanton	0.06	0.02	Grassed area in urban area not in Green Space Strategy.	2015/16

Employment Sites

Brick Kiln Lane, Chesterton	4.76	11.76	Brownfield – reclaimed land	2015/16
Plot E, Apedale Road, Chesterton	10.92	4.42	Brownfield – reclaimed land	2015/16

Appendix 3				
Sites recommended in draft Playing Pitch Strategy as having no local demand - Under investigation and subject to approval				
2016/2017 - Anticipated Disposal Date				
Residential Sites				
Address	Site Area acres	Site Area (Ha)	Current Situation/Position	Site to Market
Sheldon Grove, Chesterton	5.92	2.40	Site not used as playing pitch for in excess of 8 years therefore recommendation in draft PPS to consider disposal	2015/16
Knype Way (Talke Road), Bradwell	6.35	2.57	Site not used as playing pitch in excess of 10 years therefore recommendation in draft PPS to consider disposal	2015/16
Employment Sites				
Crackley Bank	9.9	4.0	No current playing pitches on site therefore recommendation in draft PPS to consider disposal	2015/16

Typical consultation approach in cases where unclear planning policy and NBC seeking planning permission prior to disposal.



NB. Attention is drawn to the council's proposed approach to consultation as both land owner and as local planning authority

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Report to the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1st July 2015

Progress Report on Newcastle Housing Advice Service



Report Author: Joanne Halliday
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Introduction

The Scrutiny Committee have requested a second progress review of the Newcastle Housing Advice Service following the first year of operations of the contract period.

Background

The Council has a statutory duty under the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, to provide homelessness, housing advice and housing register services in the local authority area.

On 3rd September 2014, a progress report was presented to Members of the Scrutiny committee following the award of the Newcastle Housing Advice (NHA) service contract to Midland Heart Ltd. Since then members have been provided with quarterly statistical information to support the performance of the contract and have been updated on matters relating to the service including the review of the allocations policy. This report presents information to update members on the progress of NHA service provision together with key operational challenges.

Questions to be addressed

Following the award of contract and the progress previously reported of the NHA service to members, prioritisation has been given to:

Promotion of the service

The NHA service is delivered from the ground floor shop of 61-63, Lower Street, Newcastle. The shop is identified as NHA, with the name of the service above the shop front and the NHA logo clearly shown next to the name. The service has been easily recognised and found by the general public and partner agencies. The office is open from 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday, with the exception of Thursday morning when the office opens at 10 am. This time allows for partner agencies to visit NHA and to share good practice and general

information. NHA also use this time to attend other agencies team meetings to explain the service. This approach has proved invaluable when dealing with complex cases.

The Council and NHA have been keen to promote the service. The service had a very successful open day following the move the new office and invited partners and Council Members. NHA are keen to invite Members to the office to allow them to better understand the service and to familiarise themselves with the NHA team.

Introduction of Homesdirect

As part of the NHA service Midland Heart have implemented an online housing registration system for housing applications. The Choice Based Letting (CBL) system, known as Homesdirect was introduced 1st August 2014. The service enables customers to register and update their housing register application directly, allowing for applicants to be made live immediately following registration. The approach is based on self-help with the customer taking control of the choices they make. Under this scheme vulnerable people have been protected with continuing support and face to face help provided for customers who are not able to make an online application. The move to Homesdirect has supported both customers and agencies and has proved extremely successful.

Following the implementation of Homesdirect by Midland Heart, the Housing Allocation Policy has been reviewed. Changes from the review of the policy were agreed by Cabinet in March. These changes will now be processed by Abritas, the software developer of Homesdirect, and the revised policy is anticipated to be live by September 15. The Council and NHA are now commencing work to communicate these changes with customers of Homedirect.

Attached to this report is a summary of the Homesdirect customer satisfaction survey that was completed for the period January to April 2015. The feedback is very positive with 90% of customers commenting on helpful staff and the overall satisfaction with the service. A small number of customers commented that they had difficulties completing the online registration form; however, it appears they were not aware of the help available. This has been discussed with the Customer Contact Manager for Homesdirect who has made assurances that help is available for customers when required.

General Service Improvements

NHA attends a variety of meetings with partner agencies to discuss the most vulnerable customers for example Mult Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for victims of Domestic violence and Priority Needs Group, for street homeless customers in the Borough. They are also an active partner in the allocation of properties to the Extra Care Schemes, Millrise and Lea Court.

The NHA Senior Advisor has now had training to improve the NHA web links and NHA website, to keep customers updated. The continuous improvements to the web links allow for customers to access self-help tools to which are enhanced through Homesdirect.

Midland Heart has made improvements to their administration processes and has now introduced a paperless IT system called 'Paperlite'. This has reduced the need to have paper files and recording and is a more efficient way of case handling.

Performance information

Joint “Contract Monitoring” meetings are scheduled quarterly and representatives of Midland Heart attend the meeting with the Housing Strategy Officer, responsible for managing the NHA service contract. The contract and the service standards specification are reviewed and performance information is presented and considered at the meeting.

Attached is the key performance information supplied for the four quarters of 14/15. In addition commentary has been supported below to allow members to analyse and evaluate the performance information with invitation to provide any comment.

Homelessness preventions are lower in Q4, however, overall the number for 14/15 has exceeded the 600 target. Key to the prevention tools available to NHA are the discretionary housing benefit payments administered by the Council, together with access to social housing provided through nomination agreements.

The numbers of households now registered on Homesdirect has increased steadily since the system went live in August 2014. The numbers registered include those with a local connection to Newcastle-Under-Lyme Borough including customers that live in Stoke and Cheshire East. Attached to the report is an update of the social housing allocations and housing register information as from 1st June 2015

The percentage of nominations for quarter 4 was low, this was mainly due to the number of social homes made available by Aspire Housing. A separate breakdown of nominations made by Aspire is shown, to allow members to see the overall performance of the Council's 75% nomination agreement with Aspire Housing for 14/15.

Q: Scrutiny members are requested to comment on the performance information and social housing allocation information.

Key Challenges of Operations

Since awarding the NHA contract to Midland Heart focus has been given to three broad areas of challenge to the service which can be considered by Scrutiny:

Nominations

The Borough Council has agreed service level agreements with housing provider partners including Aspire Group, North Staffs Housing Association, Sanctuary Housing Association and Wrekin Housing Group. Ongoing performance of nominations is undertaken jointly by the Housing Strategy Officer, NHA and the housing providers to ensure fair access to suitable property allocation and mix within agreed nomination rights.

Homelessness Prevention through nominations for social housing are proving more challenging, due to less properties now being advertised through Homesdirect and the length of time it takes for repairs to be carried out. Registered providers also want “clean” references and are unwilling to accept customers with rent arrears or other poor tenancy history. Those customers who need high support to sustain tenancies are also proving

difficult to find suitable accommodation for, due to housing providers not having access to resources to support them

Housing providers are supportive of Homesdirect and relationships are enhanced through the North Staffs Lettings Forum which is hosted by the Borough Council. Performance of nominations is reported and scrutinised against the Homesdirect system. In addition to this, any operational matters are discussed, such as those mentioned above, at one-to-one meetings. These are held regularly with Aspire Housing and other providers as required. This approach is providing for useful exchange of information and encouragement for housing partners to promote and develop their participation with Homesdirect.

Customers with complex needs

Increasingly, the NHA service are seeing customers presenting with complex issues and are seen as “too risky” for the housing providers to accept as a nomination through the Homesdirect, however NHA may still have a duty to assist or secure accommodation for them.

To date, NHA have made one homeless customer, who was owed full duty by the Council, a successful offer of accommodation into the Private Rented Sector. The successful outcome for the customer was aided by ARCH (Staffordshire Housing Group). ARCH provide support for single homeless people through Crisis funding, through the Council’s voluntary grants scheme ARCH provide 5 hours of support to families. This support is enabling NHA to help customers access accommodation into the Private Rented Sector.

In addition, ARCH can provide complementary support services to which customers can access if they are referred through NHA. Not only does this support the customer, it also strengthens the relationship with Private Sector Landlords. The project is proving to be a valuable homelessness prevention tool, which complements the prevention services that are offered through NHA. To date six customers have been helped to be suitably accommodated into the Private Rented Sector through the scheme.

The Council and NHA are encouraging more Private Sector Landlords to be made aware of the scheme, together with ongoing promotion and marketing by ARCH. The Council has supported the scheme for a further six months, with a possible extension following evidence of satisfactory performance and funding.

Q: Do members have a view on the provision of support to homeless households and does the Committee wish to make any comments with regard to the voluntary grant?

Temporary accommodation and B&B usage

There is a need to improve the availability and quality of emergency homelessness accommodation, to reduce the risk of reliance on unsatisfactory alternatives such as bed and breakfast. Funding has been made available for the provision of a two bedroom house with Midland Heart under a separate contract arrangement, which commenced 1 April 2015.

A number of factors have contributed to an increase in the numbers of people presenting as homeless to which NHA have had to assist with interim emergency accommodation. During the four quarters of 14/15, there were 43 households accommodated into temporary accommodation, with the average stay in B&B being 3.2 weeks. The difficulties accommodating most of the households was due to the availability of provision of temporary accommodation to single people with complex needs as there were no vacancies with supported housing providers such as the Salvation Army or Lyme Trust.

The review of funding for supported housing projects by Staffordshire County Council resulted in the decommissioning of Ashfield's Court, which was dedicated to the provision for homeless young single people. This has resulted in no provision for this age group within the Borough. Provision now is limited to hostel accommodation at YMCA Stoke, to which Stoke City Council give priority to customers who live in Stoke. Housing Officers are engaging with Staffordshire County Council as the lead authority for young people in care and other Local Authorities across Staffordshire, to consider the issue of provision for young single people, however it should be recognised that there is no additional funding identified for this type of supported accommodation.

There is a limited amount of suitable B&B accommodation locally, B&B provision is costly and is not a satisfactory way of meeting the accommodation needs of homeless households and because it does not have management and service staff on site it provides no supervision for vulnerable residents. The Council are now undertaking a review of temporary accommodation including B&B provision. Suitable alternatives to support the provision of temporary accommodation are being considered with housing partners to explore options available within the Borough.

Q: Scrutiny members are invited to provide any comment on the three key challenges to the operation of the NHA service and the approach taken by the Council and Midland Heart to develop and improve the outcomes to service users of NHA.

Outcomes

Members of the Scrutiny Committee are asked to provide comment on the areas of the NHA service progress to date and are requested to direct any comments to the Council's representatives.

Conclusions

The Newcastle Housing Advice service provided by Midland Heart has been fully mobilised along with the successful implementation of Homesdirect. The key challenges highlighted will continue to be the focus of development and improvements to the service, together with the monitoring of contract performance and quality of service provision. The NHA service continues to operate satisfactorily.

Relevant Portfolio Holder

Councillor Bert Proctor – Planning and Housing

Appendices

The performance information for the four quarters of 14/15

The Homesdirect social housing allocation update

The customer satisfaction survey, Homesdirect, January – April 2015

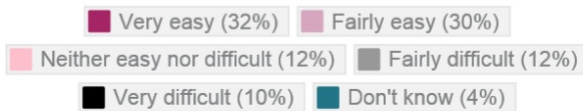
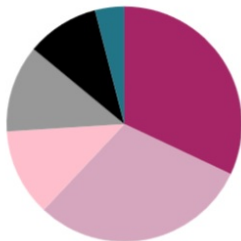
Homes Direct

Customer Satisfaction Survey

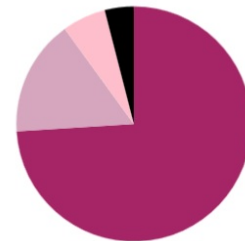
As part of the contract Midland Heart has with Newcastle-Under-Lyme Council, we provide housing options, homelessness and choice based lettings services across the district. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the satisfaction of customers who had accessed the service, provided from Midland Heart's office in Newcastle-Under-Lyme.

A total of 90 customers were contacted who had completed applications on Homes Direct between January and April 2015, 40 of the customers had completed the application without any support the remaining customers answered the following questions about the service they received.

Ease of applying for a property via Homes Direct

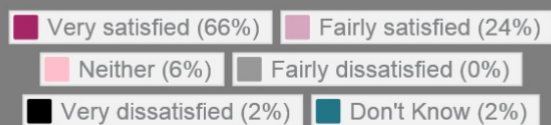


Helpfulness of staff who they had contact with



Overall the results of the study were very positive, highlighting the ease of use of the service and the helpful advice provided. It follows that overall satisfaction was high, which is extremely encouraging considering that the majority of customers who took part in the study were still waiting to be housed. In terms of any potential areas of improvement, the comments indicated that a small number of customers had difficulties completing the application form, due to literacy and IT concerns. However, it did not appear that they were aware of the help and advice Midland Heart could potentially provide in these cases.

Overall Satisfaction with the Homes Direct service



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Scrutiny Report Appendix: NHA Performance – 2014/15

Performance Area	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
1 NHA Activity;				
Calls to service	2481	2975	1777	1948
Housing Options enquiries @ reception	448	415	321	397
Housing Register enquiries @ reception	876	1012	642	696
Emergency out of hours calls	11	7	11	13
Interviews - appointments	143	155	116	152
Interviews – walk ins/emg pres	20	18	24	24
Enquiries/homeless applications	36	28	36	31
Decisions Homelessness (100% within 33 day target)	29	26	28	19
Homeless Preventions	234	143	171	95
Temporary Accommodation	3	1	1	4
2 Service Standards;				
Letters received and responded to within 10 days (100% on target)	21	21	9	1
Emails received and responded to within 10 days	451	442	336	367
Total Housing Register applications received	737 WL 598 Transfer 139	571 WL 365 Transfer 206	441 WL 278 Transfer 163	656 WL 435 Transfer 221
Housing Register Appeals (100% on target)	14	10	9	5
Homelessness Decision Appeals	1	1	1	1
Complaints	0	1	1	0-
Medical Applications (100% on target)	72	42	56	60
3 Housing Register and Lettings;				
Waiting List Applicants	1907	465	613	993
Transfer Applicants	398	295	359	444
Total Applicants	2305	760	972	1437
BME Applicants	95	47	41	55
Lettings	196	232	127	116
Nominations (All RP's) %	87	93	74	62.5
Exclusions	32	39	6	11

Aspire Nominations 14/15

OVERALL NOMINATIONS FOR NEWCASTLE BC 2014-2015	NOMINATIONS	TOTAL LETS	% NOMINATIONS
QUARTER ONE	155	196	79
QUARTER TWO	216	232	93
QUARTER THREE	135	192	70
QUARTER FOUR	100	205	49
TOTAL	606	825	73%

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Scrutiny Report Appendix Social Housing Allocations

Band	Waiting List applicants HD @ 1/6/2015	Transfer applicants HD @ 1/6/2015
1	27	15
2	1	2
3	39	30
4	51	87
5	285	209
6	27	5
7	671	174
Total	1101	522

Table 1

As at 1.6.15 a total of 1623 applicants were registered with Homedirect (HD)

Table 1 provides a snapshot of the number of applicants in each banding. The majority of applicants, in the waiting list are awarded Band 7, which is assessed as no housing need.

Bed	HD @ 1/6/15	WL Lettings HD 1/8/14 - 31/3/15	Transfer (TR) HD @ 1/6/15	TR Lettings HD 1/8/14 – 31/3/15
1	559	120	275	52
2	395	88	162	35
3	126	29	71	14
4	18	4	73	2
5	3	1	1	0
Total	1101	242	522	103

Table 2

Table 2 provides information about the demand (the number of applicants on the housing register) and the supply (actual lettings) of social rented properties by bedroom size within Newcastle-Under-Lyme during the period 1.8.14 to 31.3.15. The greatest pressure is on 1 bed and 2 bed properties.

Bed	WL applicants to bed size need HD @ 1/6/15	TR applicants to bed size need HD @ 1/6/15
1	559	275
2	395	162
3	126	71
4	18	73
5	3	1

Table 3

Table 3 captures information about housing need according to bedroom size. The greatest need is for applicants requiring 1 and 2 bed properties.

Band	Lettings made to WL applicants 1/8/14 – 31/3/15	Lettings made to TR applicants 1/8/14 – 31/3/15
1	21	12
2	0	4
3	63	13
4	20	18
5	92	42
6	3	0
7	43	14

Table 4 The above table provides information on the number of lettings that have been made from 1.8.14 to 31.3.15. A total of 345 lettings were made during this period, 242 lettings to waiting list applicants and 103 to transfer applicants. 55% of overall lettings were made to Band 5 applicants.

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Members: Stubbs, Mrs Burgess,
Hambleton, Holland, Loades, Matthews,
Northcott, Wilkes and Huckfield

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN



Chair: Councillor Stringer
Vice Chair: Councillor Mrs Gill Williams

Portfolio Holder(s) covering the Committee's remit:
Councillor John Williams (Town Centres, Business and Assets)
Councillor Bert Proctor (Planning and Housing)

Work Plan correct as at: Friday 19th June 2015

Remit:

Economic Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee is responsible for:

- Building Control
- Design and Heritage Champion
- Economic Development
- External Regeneration Funding
- Housing and Homelessness
- Inward Investment/Marketing
- Land and Property (Asset Management)
- Local Enterprise Partnership
- Planning Policy and Development Control
- Transport Strategy and Policy (Planning)

Date of Meeting	Item	Reason for Undertaking
1st July 2015 (agenda dispatch 19th June 2015)	Superfast Staffordshire Project	Paul Chatwin to be invited back to provide an update on proceedings
	Aspire Housing Letting System	Item to be kept on the agenda. The Customer Services Manager from Aspire Housing will be attending on the 2 nd September to provide an account of how their letting system operates
	Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership	An update to be provided on developments
	Newcastle Town Centre Partnership	Quarter 4 performance statistics to be reported for information and any variances will be highlighted for consideration
	Local Government Association Peer Review of Decision Making Arrangements	To advise Members on the recommendations of the LGA Peer Review and to request feedback on the recommendations
	Land Asset Disposal	A potential cross party working group to be established to listen to the concerns of local residents before any green space is sold for development
	Newcastle Housing Advice Contract Progress	Quarter 4 performance statistics to be reported for information and variances highlighted for consideration
	High Speed 2	All Members, at the last meeting, were in agreement for the Working Group to continue, as once a decision was made on a preferred route, to optimise the economic benefits
	Ryecroft Regeneration and Redevelopment Project	A verbal update on proceedings to be provided by the Executive Director Regeneration and Development
	Work Plan and Scrutiny Topics for 2015/2016	To discuss the work plan and potential topics that Committee members would like to scrutinise over the forthcoming year
2nd September 2015 (agenda dispatch 21st August 2015)	Newcastle Housing Advice Contract Progress	Quarter 1 performance statistics to be reported for information and variances highlighted for consideration
	Aspire Housing Letting System	The Customer Services Manager from Aspire Housing to attend to provide an account of how their letting system operates
	Work Plan and Scrutiny Topics for 2015/2016	To discuss the work plan and potential topics that Committee members would like to scrutinise over the forthcoming year
2nd December 2015 (agenda dispatch 20th November 2015)	Newcastle Housing Advice Contract Progress	Quarter 2 performance statistics to be reported for information and variances highlighted for consideration
	Portfolio Holder Question Time	An opportunity for the Committee to question the Portfolio Holder on their priorities and work objectives for the next six months and an

Date of Meeting	Item	Reason for Undertaking
		opportunity to address any issues or concerns that they may currently be facing. It is also an opportunity for the Portfolio Holder to flag up areas within his remit that may benefit from scrutiny in the future
	Work Plan and Scrutiny Topics for 2015/2016	To discuss the work plan and potential topics that Committee members would like to scrutinise over the forthcoming year
Date of Meeting	Item	Reason for Undertaking
24th March 2016 (agenda dispatch 11th March 2016)	Newcastle Housing Advice Contract Progress	Quarter 3 performance statistics to be reported for information and variances highlighted for consideration
	Work Plan and Scrutiny Topics for 2015/2016	To discuss the work plan and potential topics that Committee members would like to scrutinise over the forthcoming year

Task and Finish Groups:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Speed 2
Future Task and Finish Groups:	
Suggestions for Potential Future Items:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Infrastructure Levy • Superfast Broadband • High Speed 2 – potential requirement for a future report • Ryecroft Redevelopment – an update report to be provided on the final scheme

DATES AND TIMES OF CABINET MEETINGS:	Wednesday 10 th June 2015, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1
	Wednesday 22 nd July 2015, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1
	Wednesday 16 th September 2015, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1
	Wednesday 14 th October 2015, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1
	Wednesday 11 th November 2015, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1
	Wednesday 9 th December 2015, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1
	Wednesday 20 th January 2016, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1
	Wednesday 10 th February 2016, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1
	Wednesday 23 rd March 2016, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1
	Wednesday 8 th June 2016, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1

