

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 2nd September, 2015

Present:-	Councillor David Stringer – in the Chair
Councillors	Burgess, Hambleton, Holland, Huckfield, Johnson, Loades, Matthews, Northcott, Stubbs and Williams Kidsgrove Town Council Representative, Councillor J Williams Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing
Officers	Head of Housing and Regeneration Services Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the Executive Director, Regeneration and Development.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair advised that the next meeting of the Strategic Transport Working Group, formerly HS2, had been arranged for Tuesday 8th September 2015.

4. ASPIRE HOUSING LETTING SYSTEM

A presentation was carried out by Aspire Housing's Customer Services Manager and Head of Housing on how Aspire's letting system operated.

Aspire Housing have got 8,340 rental properties in Newcastle and 186 properties in Cheshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The aims of the policy were:-

Band A – transferring tenants of Aspire requiring an emergency move.

Band B – transferring tenants of Aspire with a defined housing need with top priority awarded to those with community contribution.

Band C – Non Aspire tenants with top priority awarded to those with community contribution.

The following questions were raised by Members and answers presented:-

Q1: How difficult would it be to downsize and were there properties to accommodate this?

A1: The tenant would have to apply to the letting system, Home Hunt, and to Newcastle Housing Advice to be included on their waiting list. Any

nomination sent over would be considered. There was a specialist team, as well as an allocations team, who provide a money advice service which worked on those most at risk.

Q2: It was commented that the percentage of nominations that were let in Quarter One was significantly below the target of 75%.

A2: It was reported that this fell with the agency who managed the nominations.

A Member objected to this comment, informing Aspire they were wrong to blame the agency who managed the nominations, in light of not applying for the contract themselves.

A Member objected to this comment.

Q3: How was equity assessed?

A3: Individual cases were considered.

Q4: The residents of Newcastle need to have priority over residents outside the Borough.

A4: Priority was given to residents living in Newcastle.

Q5: Home Hunt seemed a complicated system, were there other ways a resident could access Home Hunt rather than the internet?

A5: Home Hunt was internet based but there were Officers who supported customers.

Q6: How many new builds does Aspire Housing own at the end of the financial year?

A6: Aspire Housing to supply the information on their new build programme.

Q7: What was your policy when a dependent family member of a disabled child became ill?

A7: The policy would be to find the most suitable property.

Q8: As a housing authority are you encouraging development?

A8: Yes from social landlords but it was Newcastle Borough Council's responsibility to identify the need.

Q9: Most residents felt Aspire Housing was being unreasonable with allocations.

A9: In terms of the upsize the eligibility rules had changed. Customer satisfaction was measured alongside the letting process.

Q10: Over the last twelve months what number of customers had down sized and how many evictions had there been?

A10: There had been no evictions due to the bedroom tax. The Officer did not have figures available on the number of customers who down sized.

Resolved:-

- (a) Aspire Housing to supply Committee with the following information:-
1. A written explanation of the reason for their nominations being significantly below target for quarter one.
 2. The number of new builds completed at the end of the financial year.
- (b) That Aspire Housing is invited back to Committee on the 24th March 2016 to provide a further update.

5. NEWCASTLE HOUSING ADVICE CONTRACT MONITORING - QUARTER ONE

The Head of Housing and Regeneration Services presented quarter 1 statistics on Newcastle Housing Advice (NHA).

Targets were being met on homelessness applications and good customer satisfaction was being received. There had been a significant drop in Aspire Nominations. Regular meetings were being held with Aspire and Newcastle Borough Council to address this concern.

It was asked how many residents, outside the area, had been awarded lettings and why were Aspire Housing selling properties at auction and not re-letting?

It was advised that Aspire Housing had a disposal policy to dispose of properties that no longer met the needs of their clients or business, this included low demand 3 bed homes, certain types of properties and those that were in a high value areas.

Resolved:-

Committee received the report.

6. NEWCASTLE TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP - QUARTER ONE

The Head of Housing and Regeneration presented Newcastle Town Centre Partnership Quarter One report.

Focus had been based on delivering the Business Improvement District which resulted in a successful ballot. A new Business Improvement had been established with the new company to commence on the 1st October 2015 with letters being dispatched mid-September 2015.

Key Performance Indicators

The vacancy continued to show the town centre being successful in attracting new businesses and retaining businesses. There had been a 4% drop in vacancies.

Footfall

There had been a high number of visitors on festival days. The website had been attracting between 250 and 300 hits every day, with greater interest on event weekends.

Ryecroft Development

The Town Centre Partnership was seen as a key development that will revitalise the town and attract further essential investment.

Events

Discussions were ongoing with Harvest Festival Event, Market Square Group, Pink Week and Britain in Bloom. Ways were being looked at in supporting the town centre lights.

Student Night Initiative

The group had been doing a lot of work with the bar and food operators, including new energy from two recently opened bars.

Purple flag Accreditation Scheme

Fully supported.

Liaison with Market Traders

The Town Centre Manager had been tasked to encourage Market Traders to establish a resilient operational relationship with TCP/BID to become the county's Best Market Town.

CCTV Monitoring Volunteer Project

Discussions were going ahead with Newcastle Partnership against business crime.

The Chair asked that his thanks be passed on to the author of the report, Doug Morris.

Resolved:-

That data from the Retail Index Scheme be presented at the next meeting.

7. KIDSGROVE TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

The Portfolio Holder for Town Centres, Business and Assets reported that he had spoken to Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership and chaired a meeting with the partners and interested parties, who agreed to work together. The Partnership wished to concentrate on the economy of the town.

A discussion took place surrounding the Joint Local Plan and Kidsgrove wished to be part of the Plan and wanted to look at the Local Plan for Kidsgrove.

"Go Kidsgrove" had made plans for the Christmas lights. They would also seek to secure extra funding for projects such as the signage at the canal.

The Partnership was looking to hire a different company for their website.

Bi-monthly meetings were being held.

The Chair was pleased that progress had been made and was reassured that the £10,000 allocated would not be withdrawn.

It was asked if colleges had been approached to design their website. The Portfolio Holder advised he would take this suggestion back to the next meeting.

A Member reported that Kidsgrove Town Council were producing a Neighbourhood Plan for the five wards and were going to submit it to Full Kidsgrove Council.

Resolved:-

That Committee received the update.

8. PORTFOLIO HOLDER QUESTION TIME

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing presented Committee with two topics:-

- Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Local Plan
- Progress made in implementing the Action Plan agreed by Council in response to the report of the Planning Peer Review Team

Joint Local Plan

Members were reminded that the Joint Local Plan was currently in the pre-production phase.

A Member raised concern that the report demonstrated that some of the projects, which formed the overall Local Plan Programme, had experienced slippage. The Member went on to ask if the problems experienced were outside the Council's control?

The Member was advised the problems were not outside the Council's control. The slippage had been unavoidable.

A Member asked for assurance that Newcastle Borough Council was putting pressure on Staffordshire County Council and to see evidence that, as an authority, we had ensured that Staffordshire County Council was fully aware of the need of this Council to interact and engage as regularly as possible.

Planning Peer Review

A Member commented that some of the action related to the creation of new posts and Planning seemed to have resource problems.

The Portfolio Holder advised that a recruitment process was in place for more staff to be employed as soon as possible.

Action 5 – "That Officers be authorised to spend up to £20,000 on the securing of short term assistance to the Development Management Function." A Member informed that Person Specifications and Job Descriptions were not going to be produced as it was employment of Consultants, which the Council was undergoing a number of discussions with. This paragraph did not reflect this and asked for the paragraph to be amended.

Resolved:-

That Action 5 on the Planning Peer Review report is amended.

9. WORK PLAN

Resolved:-

That the following items are added to the Work Plan:-

2nd December 2015

Housing Strategy
Homelessness Strategy
Community Infrastructure Levy

24th March 2016

Aspire Housing are invited
Joint Local Plan
Planning Peer Review

10. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

11. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Business.

12. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 2nd December 2015, 7.00pm in Committee Room 1.

COUNCILLOR DAVID STRINGER
Chair