

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 3rd September, 2014

Present:-	Councillor David Stringer – in the Chair
Councillors	Holland, Loades, Matthews, Owen, Mrs Simpson and Wallace Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Assets and Planning
Officers	Executive Director of Regeneration and Development Head of Housing and Regeneration Services Head of Planning Services Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Miss Sophia Baker, White and Wilkes

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 2nd July 2014 were agreed as a true record.

4. NEWCASTLE HOUSING ADVICE SERVICE

The Chair welcomed David Taylor from Midland Heart Limited to the meeting.

Midland Heart Limited were awarded the Newcastle Housing Advice (NHA) contract, which commenced on the 1st April 2014 for a period of three years, with the possible extension of a further three years following evidence of satisfactory performance and funding.

The NHA service was now delivered from the ground floor shop of 61-63 Lower Street, Newcastle.

Prior to the commencement of the contract, work began with the Council's Communication Department to market the new service at its new address, an 0300 telephone number for users, email addresses, web site information and all correspondence linking to the NHA service.

An official launch of the NHA service was scheduled for 24th September 2014.

The Chair asked if all Members had been advised of the latter. The Head of Housing and Regeneration Services advised that invitations were sent to all Members to attend a drop in session during April and it was attended by ten Members. The Chair advised that a flyer be distributed to Members informing of the official launch.

An online housing option advice toolkit and online registration for housing applications would commence with a new Choice Based Letting (CBL) system called "Homes Direct", from the 1st August 2014. This system would enable customers to register and update their housing register application directly, allowing for registrations to be made live immediately following registration. Every customer who registers online would have an ID number.

It was asked if the existing register of users was entered onto the system. David Taylor replied it had, but the objective was to get applicants to register on line.

Following implementation of Homes Direct by Midland Heart, the current Housing Allocation Policy would be reviewed by Officers of the Borough Council and a service level agreement would be agreed following engagement with Aspire Housing and other Registered Housing providers within the Borough.

Members discussed the monitoring statistics that were attached; one question asked related to the large number of exclusions (132 for quarter 1). It was confirmed that the reason for the exclusions was that 114 were excluded for no local connection to Newcastle, as per the eligibility criteria in the policy.

When Aspire Housing managed the housing register they also had a list for all their properties so they accepted applications for Stoke-on-Trent Housing and their new properties that they acquired in Stafford. When Midland Heart took over the contract to manage the Council's housing register, some of the customers for Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford were still coming to NHA. These people, with no local connection, were excluded as per the Council's local connection policy. This had been clarified with Aspire Housing and they were now marketing their own Home Hunt applications process to their customers, resulting in a likely decrease in the number of exclusions in the future quarters.

It was requested that these figures are brought to the Committee quarterly and for Midland Heart to be invited back to Scrutiny on 18th March 2015.

RESOLVED:-

- (a) That the Head of Housing and Regeneration Services distribute flyers to Members informing of the launch on the 24th September 2014.
- (b) That Newcastle Housing Association monitoring statistics are submitted to Scrutiny quarterly.
- (c) That Midland Heart is invited back to the meeting to be held on the 18th March 2015.

5. JOINT HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW

The Head of Housing and Regeneration Services advised on the review of the Joint Housing Allocations Policy and the reasoning behind it.

The Joint Allocations Policy had been operating effectively with Aspire Housing since 2010 and allowed for 75% of Aspire Housing stock to be made available through a Choice Based Letting system. Aspire Housing had made the decision to devise their own policy with their aim to let homes quickly and to offer choice to customers by giving them an opportunity to express their preference for the area and type of housing that they want to live in.

The Policy would still enable an existing Aspire Housing customer, in housing need, to apply to the revised policy and be given reasonable preference.

Concerns were raised about a perception that Aspire Housing were “breaking away” from the Borough Council. It was agreed that these concerns would be raised with Aspire Housing.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Assets advised that he was a Member on the Aspire Board and advised that Aspire Housing wanted to make properties available for single or joint working as a private landlord. It was purely a commercial decision that they chose to not pursue a bid for the NHA contract.

Housing register applications within Homes Direct would be reviewed annually, on the anniversary of their application. Under the current policy, applications were reviewed every six months.

Weekly information on forthcoming vacancies would be published “on line” through the advertisement of properties.

Customers would have the ability to make three bids per weekly cycle with the Homes Direct system. This allowed better management of customers’ applications and monitoring of nominations.

A Member asked what offences would exclude an applicant.

The Head of Housing and Regeneration Services advised that according to legislation certain types of anti-social behaviour, for example, arson would exclude an applicant from applying.

The Localism Act 2011 enabled Local Housing Authorities to better manage their housing register by giving them discretion to determine who could qualify for social housing within their area. For example, soldiers who have left the armed forces within the last two years could apply.

It was proposed that the review of the Joint Allocation Policy be undertaken by a policy review group set up by Officers. The Policy review was scheduled for completion by January 2015. The working group would include Aspire Housing and other Registered Providers within the Borough.

RECOMMENDED:- That Committee receive the report.

6. TOWN CENTRE PARKING

In 2013 the Council received a number of approaches from the business community (via the Town Centre Partnership) to review its town centre parking charges in the hope that concessions may help to generate greater footfall with the consequent benefit to businesses and the overall town centre economy. The Council considered it appropriate to review options and decided upon a range of actions to strike a balance between the potentially adverse impact upon the Council’s revenue budget and the expectation of direct benefit being achieved by town centre businesses.

The Council approved 3 key initiatives; Nipper Parking, Double Ticket refund scheme and Enhanced Free parking days. Alongside an offer from a national supplier of car

park management systems to install, as a 12-month trial, cashless parking with an ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) systems at no cost to the Council.

Members were asked to consider the following alternative options for concessionary parking:-

- a) Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday afternoons requires 23 half days (equivalent to 11.5 days).
- b) Wednesday after 2.00pm could be promoted to tie into the promotion of Christmas late night shopping. This required six full days and six afternoons, however offering the Saturday mornings would be most expensive as this was the peak period. An estimation of the costing was in the region of £10k which would need to be found from another budget.
- c) Every afternoon after 3.00pm could be offered, this would require 35 sessions, there would be a marketing logic to this as it could be easily advertised and understood by customers. There would not be a significant impact on the budget.

Resolved:-

- (a) To extend the successful Double Ticket Refund Scheme on Council maintained car parks.
- (b) That the Town Centre Partnership should be allowed to offer free parking after 3.00pm in the run up to Christmas.

7. THE STOKE-ON-TRENT AND STAFFORDSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP PLANNING CONCORDAT

A report was submitted to advise Members that LEP launched a Planning Charter Mark initiative in February 2012 to encourage its Local Planning Authorities to demonstrate a proactive and business-focussed approach to planning applications.

No formal award of the 'Charter Mark' was subsequently made to any of the Staffordshire Authorities that were part of the LEP. In July 2013 the LEP commissioned the Planning Co-operative consultancy to undertake a review of planning policies and practice across the county. The consultants' final report and recommendations went before the LEP Board at its meeting on the 11th July 2014 and are understood to have been approved.

Members were asked to focus on the four recommendations of the LEP

- Agreeing to actions to undertake those elements of the Concordat which are not currently being provided and implementing these within an agreed timeframe, probably within six months.
- Setting in place monitoring arrangements to provide data, including business customer satisfaction information
- Participating in annual reviews of actions and outcomes

- Contributing to case studies of examples of where a positive and helpful approach had been taken to development proposals.

A Member advised that certain recommendations made by LEP were good

The Executive Director of Planning and Regeneration advised that LEPs were set up as a business-led response to aid economic recovery following the recession caused by the global banking crisis in 2008. The Concordat was an initiative to demonstrate that local the planning authorities are supportive of business growth as a matter of principle (in the manner in which they delivered the service) and that this should be reviewed annually.

The Chair advised that training is vital to every Member not just those on the Planning Committee and everyone should know about planning for their particular area.

Resolved:-

That the LEPs Planning Concordat be commended to Cabinet.

8. NEWCASTLE TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

The latest trading and footfall figures for the Town Centre Partnership were presented, but these statistics were indecipherable to the Committee so it was agreed to postpone discussion to the next meeting.

Resolved:-

That the Town Centre Partnership Manager be invited to the next meeting on the 3rd December 2014 to provide an update on the key performance indicators.

9. KIDSGROVE TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

The revised Action Plan for Kidsgrove Town Centre was presented. However despite requests for attendance neither the Borough Council's representative on the CIC nor the Chair of the CIC were present. As a number of Members had expressed a wish to ask questions of clarification it was decided to postpone discussion on this item to the next meeting.

Resolved:-

- (a) That the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Assets ask the Leader of the Newcastle Borough Council to liaise with the Chair.
- (b) That the Chair of Kidsgrove Town Centre CIC be invited to attend the next meeting to be held on the 3rd December 2014.

10. HS2 WORKING GROUP

The Head of Planning Services provided the Committee with a brief update of developments with respect to HS2 Phase 2.

HS2 Limited would be receiving a summary of the different issues the consultation responses contained which they would then use to look at any possible changes to the proposed route before making recommendations to the Secretary of State for Transport. A final route for phase 2 is expected to be announced by the end of 2014.

Resolved:-

To retain the HS2 Working Group and for the Group to meet with Stoke-on-Trent City Council regarding the progress of its proposal for an alternative route.

11. WORK PLAN

Resolved:-

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

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- Newcastle Town Centre Partnership (Newcastle Town Centre Partnership Manager to be asked to attend)
- Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership (The Chair of Kidsgrove Town Centre Community Interest Company to be asked to attend)
- Councillor Terry Turner (Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economic, Regeneration, Business and Town Centres) to be invited for Portfolio Holder Question Time.
- Newcastle Housing Association Quarterly Statistics
- Joint Housing Allocations Policy
- Review of Newcastle's of the World Alliance

12. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions had been received from the public.

13. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

14. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 3rd December 2014, 7.00pm in Committee Room 2.

COUNCILLOR DAVID STRINGER
Chair