

REGENERATION SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

20 November 2014

The meeting commenced at 9.30 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Robbie Payne (In the Chair)

Councillors: Kevin Cranney, Keith Dawkins and Dr George Morris.

Officers: Denise Ogden, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Damien Wilson, Assistant Director, Regeneration
David Worthington, Head of Culture and Information
Maggie Heaps, Learning and Skills Manager
Nigel Johnson, Housing Services Manager
Garry Hutchison, Building Control Manager
Dave Hammond, Energy Management Officer
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

70. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Stephen Akers-Belcher, Rob Cook and Pamela Hargreaves.

71. Declarations of Interest

None.

72. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 October, 2014

Received.

73. SHOUT (Social Housing Under Threat) *(Assistant Director, Regeneration)*

Type of decision

Non-key decision.

Purpose of report

That Members consider Council supporting the SHOUT (Social Housing Under Threat) campaign which was launched in June 2014.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Assistant Director, Regeneration reported that SHOUT was a Campaign for Social Housing, to remain, Affordable, Flourishing and Fair with a “manifesto to save and extend social rented housing” that had cross political party support. The SHOUT aim was to raise awareness by building and maintaining social rented homes at social or affordable rents which residents could afford. This was important nationally but in particular in Hartlepool which had a large section of the community on lower incomes.

Members indicated that much depended on the definition of ‘affordable’ and the Council’s ability to get affordable housing included in all new developments. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods commented that in the rented market there were two definitions of ‘affordable’ rent; social, the rent charged by social landlords, and affordable, which was around 80% of market rate and there was significant pressure to move social rents to this level. In terms of affordable to buy, then the property would only be affordable for that first buyer; subsequent sales would be at the market price.

The Housing Services Manager added that those on the benefits in the rented sector could often find themselves in financial difficulties. Housing benefit would normally cover their rent in the social sector but there could still be a gap between their housing benefit and their rent if they were in private rented accommodation.

Decision

That the Council supports the SHOUT campaign.

74. Proposed Collective Energy Switching Scheme (Assistant Director, Regeneration)

Type of decision

For Information only.

Purpose of report

To provide details of a further Collective Energy Switching scheme.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported that at the meeting of the Committee on 18 September it was agreed to approve the promotion of a second Collective Energy Switching scheme and that details of the proposal be reported back to Committee.

The new Energy Switching scheme would be launched on 2 December 2014 and the auction will take place on 3 February 2015.

Offers would be sent out to participants on 13 February and the process would close on 16 March 2015. The scheme would utilise the current NEPO framework for Collective Energy Switching schemes which was

awarded to iChoosr.

Staff from the contact centre would receive training from iChoosr enabling them to assist any resident who does not have access to the online switching process. A dedicated phone line would be provided to enable residents to contact those staff dealing with the switching scheme. Staff would then assist members of the public to complete the required process. Information about the Energy Switching scheme would be provided at Community Centres, Libraries and a range of other venues.

Members considered that the launch before Christmas may be missed by many in the build up to the holidays and it was therefore suggested that a second launch be undertaken early in the new year.

Decision

That the report be noted and that a second 'launch' of the scheme take place early in January 2015.

75. Quarterly Report – Adult Education *(Assistant Director, Regeneration)*

Type of decision

For Information only.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to update members about the work of the Adult Education service for the current academic year.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Learning and Skills Manager provided an update on the activities of the Adult Education service from the beginning of the academic year 2014-2015. At the present time the academic year had just started and the total number of learners often changed within the first six weeks. A clearer picture would be available at the end of term 1.

The Learning and Skills Manager indicated that the Adult Skills Budget was an allocation provided for the delivery of a range of skills provision. For the academic year 2014-2015 the allocation had decreased by 27%. This would lead to a reduction in the numbers of learners who can be supported through skills provision.

The Learning and Skills Manager highlighted the numbers of students enrolled in education and training courses and outlined some case studies for the Committee's information.

Decision

That the report be noted.

76. Culture and Information Services Quarterly Report – July- September 2014 *(Assistant Director, Regeneration)*

Type of decision

For Information only.

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report was to inform and update members on the work of the Culture and Information Services Section for the period 1st July – 30th September 2014.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Head of Culture and Information updated the Committee on the wide range of activities and initiatives being undertaken in libraries and community centres across Hartlepool and the numbers involved. The Chair particularly referred to the Summer Reading Challenge where 1387 children participated in the 2014 Summer Read, with 1242 children completing the challenge of reading six books during the summer holidays. The number of children completing the challenge being 31 higher than in 2013. The Chair asked the Head of Culture and Information to write to the staff involved congratulating them on this excellent initiative.

Decision

That the report be noted.

77. Quarterly Building Control Report April - June 2014 *(Assistant Director, Regeneration)*

Type of decision

For Information only.

Purpose of report

To update the Regeneration Services Committee regarding the key areas of the Building Control Service including the fee earning and statutory enforcement activity, during the first quarter of 2014/15.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Building Control Manager reported that while operating in a competitive market, the service had achieved a market share for the reported period of 83% and although this had dropped 5% from last year's overall figure it remains well above the current national average of around a 60%.

The report updated Members on the fee earning performance of the service. The total number of new Full Plans, Building Notice and Regularisation applications submitted for the reported period was 102. Those applications brought in a total fee income of £19,836.55. The total number of new individual building work starts for the reported period was 97. Those starts brought in a further fee income of £21,557.22. The total

number of inspections carried out by surveyors for the reported period was 678 (23.7% increase on last quarter figure of 548). The Building Control Service has approved 80% of the applications submitted in the reported period.

Members questioned how many applications were now coming through electronically. The Building Control Manager indicated that the Council utilised the national on-line application system (Submit-a-plan) and currently around 20% of the team's work was coming through that system.

Decision

That the report be noted.

78. Quarterly Housing Report April- September 2014/15 (Assistant Director, Regeneration)

Type of decision

For Information only.

Purpose of report

To update the Regeneration Services Committee about progress across key areas of the Housing Service relating to empty homes, enforcement activity, Selective Licensing, Disabled Facilities Grants, housing allocations, the impacts of Welfare Reform and housing advice and homelessness prevention during the first two quarters of 2014/15. The report also outlined the activity ongoing with regards to Housing Management Services, 2015/18 Affordable Housing Allocations and review of Housing Strategies.

Issue(s) for consideration by the Committee

The Housing Services Manager outlined the key elements of the report for Members information. In relation to the empty homes strategy, the Council target for bringing long term empty homes back into use during 2014/15 was 60 and a total 35 properties were brought back into use during the first two quarters of the year. The Council was therefore on track to meet this target by the end of the financial year. In September 2014, the Council held an open day at a newly refurbished property on Duke Street, which was attended by 70 people. This gave residents the opportunity to view the standard and condition of the properties being offered to let by the Council and publicised the service. A second open day would be held in the Oxford Road area in November 2014 to advertise upcoming properties.

The first Selective Licensing designation came to an end on 30 April 2014 and while there was no longer a requirement for any new licences to be issued, there were 693 remaining in force at the end of the designation and these would continue to be monitored and enforced until each individual licence expires. Consultation on proposals for a further designation for Selective Licensing within the town commenced during Quarter 2 and the Committee was scheduled to receive a report detailing the outcome of the consultation and the final proposals for a further designation at the meeting

in December, in line with the original decision making timescales.

During the first two quarters of 2014/15, 48 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) were completed in Hartlepool and the average time taken was 227 days. The Housing Services Manager indicated that based on the current waiting list, there was sufficient budget remaining to complete all of the outstanding adaptations by the end of the financial year. A waiting list would obviously be created if further requests came forward, though the Assistant Director, Regeneration commented that this was the best position the DFGs had been in for some time.

The report also informed Members of the current position in terms of allocations, the impact of the welfare reforms, Housing Advice and Homelessness prevention activity, housing management services and affordable housing allocations.

Members raised concerns at the current situation in Borrowdale Street. There were a number of properties boarded up and one had an illegal tenant. The Housing Services Manager commented that there had been a lot of action taken regarding properties in the street and legal action had been instigated by the landlord of the property referred to. A Member also commented that there was little street lighting in the street which was a concern raised by residents. Officers took the comments on board and the Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods stated that a further report on street lighting was to be submitted to the Neighbourhood Services Committee in the New Year.

The Chair requested that a report be submitted to the Committee setting out the financial details of the empty homes programme.

Decision

That the report be noted and that further financial details of the empty homes programme be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

79. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

The Chair indicated that the next meeting of the Committee scheduled on 18 December 2014 will commence one hour later at 10.30 am.

The meeting concluded at 10.00 am.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

PUBLICATION DATE: 28 NOVEMBER 2014