

PLEASE NOTE VENUE

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM AGENDA



Monday 19 February 2007

at 3.00pm

**in Training Room 3, Municipal Buildings,
Church Square, Hartlepool**

MEMBERS: NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM:

Councillors S Allison, Brash, Clouth, R W Cook, Cranney, Gibbon, Hall, Henery, Lilley, Rayner and D Waller.

Resident Representatives: Ann Butterfield, Ian Campbell and Linda Shields

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

No items.

4. RESPONSES FROM THE COUNCIL, THE EXECUTIVE OR COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL TO FINAL REPORTS OF THIS FORUM

No items.

5. CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR SCRUTINY REVIEWS REFERRED VIA SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

No items.

PLEASE NOTE VENUE

6. CONSIDERATION OF PROGRESS REPORTS/BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK DOCUMENTS

- 6.1 Corporate Plan (BVPP) 2007/08 – Proposed Objectives (*Assistant Chief Executive*)

7. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Scrutiny Investigation into 'The Performance and Operation of Private Sector Rented Accommodation and Landlords' :-

- 7.1 Housing Staffing Levels - Verbal Presentation (*Strategic Housing Manager*)
- 7.2 Evidence from the Rent Service:-
 - (a) Covering Report (*Scrutiny Support Officer*); and
 - (b) Verbal Presentation by Alan Simpson, Valuation Team Manager, the Rent Service.

8. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS ARE URGENT

FOR INFORMATION

- i) Date of Next Meeting Wednesday 21 March 2007, commencing at 2.00 pm at Owton Manor Community Centre, Wynyard Road, Hartlepool

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

19 February 2007



Report of: Director of Neighbourhood Services and Assistant Chief Executive

Subject: CORPORATE PLAN 2007/08: PROPOSED OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the opportunity for the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum to consider the proposed objectives and actions for inclusion in the Corporate Plan 2007/08.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Government introduced the Best Value regime as part of its programme to modernise local government and the Corporate (Best Value Performance) Plan for 2007/8 must be approved and published by the Council by 30 June 2007. This is the Council's top-level corporate plan. It sets out the Council's top priorities and contributions for delivering the Community Strategy aims in 2007/8.
- 2.2 The Corporate Plan is an important document because it formally communicates the council's vision and priorities. The process for producing the plan has been designed to ensure the risk is minimised and that the Corporate Plan is fit for purpose.
- 2.3 The focus of the Corporate Plan for 2007/8 is on priority activities for improvement at a strategic level rather than day to day service delivery objectives. The operational service delivery objectives are picked up through Departmental service plans which are reported to individual portfolio holders.
- 2.4 At a meeting of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee held on 19 January 2006 it was agreed that the Corporate Plan proposals should be considered by each of the Scrutiny Forums. Each Scrutiny Forum will see the proposals relating to the Community Strategy themes that fall under their remit.

- 2.5 The comments/observations of each Forum will be fed back to the meeting of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee to be held on 19 March 2007 and will be used to formulate the formal Scrutiny response to Cabinet on 16 April 2007.

3 THE CORPORATE PLAN

- 3.1 As in previous years the plan will be produced in two parts. Part 1 describes the Council's overall aim, contributions to the Community Strategy aims and organisational development priorities.
- 3.2 Part 2 will continue to contain the detailed supporting information relating to performance statistics which the Council is required to publish. This will include the Best Value performance indicators for 2006/07 and targets for 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10. This information can not be collected until after 31 March 2007, and is therefore not available at present.
- 3.3 **Appendix A** details those objectives and actions that are proposed for inclusion in the 2007/08 Corporate Plan that fall under the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum remit.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum:-
- (a) considers the proposed objectives and actions for inclusion in the 2007/08 Corporate Plan as attached at **Appendix A**.
 - (b) formulates any comments and observations to be presented to the meeting of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee to be held on 19 March 2007 to enable a formal response to be presented to the Cabinet on 16 April 2007.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Appendix A – Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum - Proposed Objectives and Actions for inclusion in 2007/08 Corporate Plan

Health and Care

Ref	Objective	Actions	Responsible Officer	Associated PIs
HC 02	Be Healthy (Children and young people will be physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually healthy, lead healthy lifestyles and choose not to take illegal drugs)	To provide a school meals service which actively contributes to the health and future well-being of the children of Hartlepool	Denise Ogden	LAA HC21 New – NS1
HC 06	To safeguard and improve health and well-being for people working, living and visiting the borough	To deliver an effective Health Development Service	Ralph Harrison	
		Deliver of the Public Health Strategy	Peter Price	

Community Safety

Ref	Objective	Actions	Responsible Officer	Associated PIs
CSO3	Improved neighbourhood safety and increased public reassurance leading to reduced fear of crime and anti-social behaviour	Co-ordinate and develop NAP resident forums, ensuring links are made with the safer Hartlepool Partnership and Neighbourhood Policing	Denise Ogden	New – NS3
		Actively work with Neighbourhood Police teams and social behaviour unit to reduce Anti Social Behaviour (ASB)	Denise Ogden	
		Embrace new and existing legislation in developing strategies and initiatives	Ralph Harrison	

Environment

Ref	Objective	Actions	Responsible Officer	Associated PIs
EO2	Improve the quality of the local environment by having cleaner, greener and safer public, private and community spaces and by reducing the gap in aspects of liveability between the worst wards/neighbourhoods and the district as whole, with a particular focus on reducing levels of litter and detritus	Improve and maintain the design and appearance of the natural and built environment.	Denise Ogden	BVPI 199 BVPI 218
EO3	Provide a sustainable, safe, efficient, effective and accessible transport system	Deliver the Hartlepool Local Transport Plan (LTP)	Alastair Smith	BVPI 99
		Develop and implement an integrated Transport Strategy	Alastair Smith	
EO4	Make better use of natural resources, reduce greenhouse gases, minimise energy use and reduce the generation of waste and maximise recycling	Develop knowledge and action on Environmental Sustainability	Denise Ogden	New – NS2 BVPI 82 BVPI 84
		To work in partnership to develop and implement a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan for Hartlepool	Ralph Harrison	
EO5	Improve the natural and built environment and ensure the proper planning of the area	Improve Physical access to buildings	Graham Frankland	BVPI 165 BVPI 216
		Develop and integrated capital and asset strategy to maintain and develop buildings, land, highways and coastal structures	Graham Frankland	
		Review and implement planning policy guidance relating to the historic environment	Sarah Scarr	

Strengthening Communities

Ref	Objective	Actions	Responsible Officer	Associated PIs
SCO1	To empower local people to have a greater voice and influence over local decision making and the delivery of services	To establish Neighbourhood Management as a guiding influence in Service Delivery across the Council	Denise Ogden	
SCO6	Creating a fairer world	Promote Hartlepool as a Fairtrade Town	Ralph Harrison	LAA SC25 LAA SC26
SCO7	Ensure communities are well prepared to respond to emergency incidents	Develop and implement communication strategy	Denis Hampson	
SCO8	Ensure Cleveland Emergency Planning Unit delivers on behalf of the Council a comprehensive Emergency Planning and Resilience Service	Deliver the actions identified in the annual plan of the Cleveland Emergency Planning Unit	Denis Hampson	

Organisational Development

Ref	Objective	Actions	Responsible Officer	Associated PIs
ODO5	Put in place arrangements to ensure the structure of the authority and support arrangements are fit for purpose	To ensure a strategic approach to the control and management of property through the change management process and beyond	Graham Frankland	

Associated Performance Indicators

Reference	Description
LAA HC21	Number of schools achieving the Health Eating module of the new Healthy Schools Status
New – NS1	Percentage take up of nutritionally balanced school meals
New – NS3	Number of joint operations with partnering agencies
BVPI 199	Local Street and Environmental Cleanliness
BVPI 218	Abandoned vehicles
BVPI 99	Road Accident Casualties
New – NS2	Number of people attending environmental awareness training course

BVPI 82	Household Waste – recycling/composting/energy sources/landfilled
BVPI 84	Household Waste collected per head
BVPI 165	Percentage of pedestrian crossings for disabled people
BVPI 216	Contaminated land
LAA SC25	Number of retail establishments offering Fairtrade as an alternative
LAA SC26	Number of catering establishments offering Fairtrade as an alternative

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

19 February 2007



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERFORMANCE AND OPERATION OF PRIVATE SECTOR RENTED ACCOMMODATION AND LANDLORDS IN HARTLEPOOL – EVIDENCE FROM THE RENT SERVICE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Forum that Alan Simpson, Valuation Team Manager from the Rent Service has been invited to attend this meeting to provide evidence in relation to the ongoing investigation into the performance and operation of private sector rented accommodation and landlords in Hartlepool.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Members will recall that at the meeting of this Forum on 25 October 2006 the Terms of Reference and Potential Areas of Inquiry/Sources of Evidence were approved by the Forum for this scrutiny investigation.
- 2.2 During the course of the meeting held on the 29 November 2006, members of the Forum discussed a variety of other issues and requested additional information on the way in which the housing allowance is set. Details of the issues discussed are detailed in the minute extract attached at **Appendix A**.
- 2.3 In order to provide the requested information Alan Simpson, Valuation Team Manager from the Rent Service has been invited to attend this meeting to provide evidence.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members of the Forum consider the views of the Valuation Team Manager and take into consideration the issues and comments made during the formulation of the final report.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background paper was used in the preparation of this report:-

- (i) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled 'Scrutiny Investigation into the Performance and Operation of Private Sector Rented Accommodation and Landlords – Scoping Report' presented to the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum held on 25 October 2006.
- (ii) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled 'Scrutiny Investigation into the Performance and Operation of Private Sector Rented Accommodation and Landlords – Setting the Scene Report' presented to the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum held on 25 October 2006.
- (iii) Minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum held on the 29 November 2006

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM MINUTES

29th November 2006

Minute Extract

67. Scrutiny Investigation into the Performance and Operation of Private Sector Rented Accommodation – Further Information (*Head of Public Protection and Housing*)

As part of the ongoing investigation into the Performance and Operation of Private Sector Rented Accommodation, the Housing Strategy Manager presented a report which provided further details and information as requested at the last meeting of this Forum on 25th October 2006. The areas covered included:

- i) Housing benefit issues
- ii) Voluntary accreditation scheme for private landlords
- iii) Selective licensing
- iv) Housing market renewal
- v) Shared ownership

A discussion followed in which Members raised the following issues:

- i) Rent assessments were based on the size of the property, but if the property was below standard how was this affected? The Housing Strategy Manager indicated that if a property was in poor condition, this may be reflected in the amount of Housing Benefit allocated which would impact on the tenants.
- ii) Would housing benefit be applicable where there was shared ownership of a property? The Housing Strategy Manager reported that housing benefit would be applicable for the rented part. Help towards the interest payments on the mortgage could be provided through income support.
- iii) Members supported the third of the proposed options outlined in the report for the lobbying of Rent Officers for 'more realistic' rent assessments, however, concern was expressed regarding what powers/resources the local authority had to do this. The Housing Strategy Manager indicated that the local authority had no power in relation to what assessments rent officers make, but a push to

get a reassessment for Hartlepool as a whole should be considered. A representative from the Citizen's Advice Bureau added that from 2008, the local housing allowance would be based on a tenant's needs not accommodation. If the assessment of rent benefit was higher than the cost of their chosen accommodation, the tenant keeps the difference.

- iv) It was noted that there would be a rent convergence in 2012 whereby there would be no difference between private and registered social landlords. Members questioned whether there was any benefit in lobby for changes to the system when this would occur in 2012 anyway. The Housing Strategy Manager indicated that there had already been numerous delays with this system as a result of which there was no definite date for implementation.
- v) Further attention was drawn to the possibility that the review of the way in which the housing allowance is set, as detailed in paragraph (iii) above could result in a duplication of the problems experienced with the system currently in place for under 25's. In view of this, and the issues raised around the feasibility of lobbying for more realistic rent assessments in light of the rent convergence proposals in 2012 it was requested that Rent Officers be invited to a further meeting of the Forum to discuss the matter further.
- vi) The Senior Environmental Health Officer indicated that consultation had been undertaken with residents and that the preliminary findings had given a good indication. The Scrutiny Support Officer informed Members that a further report would be submitted to this Forum once a full evaluation of the results had been undertaken.
- vii) In relation to the Voluntary Accreditation Scheme Members queried if there was any quantifiable evidence to show the effect of the accreditation scheme introduced? The Landlord Liaison Officer reported that:-
 - (a) It was difficult to prove although from the inspections recently undertaken standards were improving, in particular with regard to smoke alarms being fitted and working and security of the property. The scheme was aimed at encouraging good practice; and
 - (b) Figures were not to hand in terms of the effect of the scheme in particular in relation to the creation of larger numbers of stable tenancies. These figures would, however, be compiled for consideration by the Forum at a later meeting.

- viii) How many landlords had opted out of the scheme? The Landlord Liaison Officer informed Members that one landlord had opted out of the scheme after being challenged although new landlords were being recruited all the time. A number of landlords were increasing their portfolios of properties which were resulting in an increase in rented properties but not landlords. There were currently 1500 properties covered by approximately 380 landlords.
- ix) The Programme Manager from New Deal for Communities indicated that the voluntary scheme of selective licensing had proved positive but that practice elsewhere to deal with anti-social behaviour needed to be examined. It was felt that anti-social behaviour was a major barrier to the regeneration of particular areas of the town.
- x) The proposed shared ownership schemes were discussed and that options were currently being examined where empty homes were being offered through shared ownership arrangements, although it was felt that this would be more attractive if it was offered on new build.
- xi) It was suggested that should the introduction of a Selective Licensing Scheme go ahead then the most appropriate course of action would be to continue to run the Voluntary Registration Scheme alongside it for landlords in those areas outside the area chosen for selective licensing.
- xii) Members felt that the implications of the introduction of a Tenant Referencing Scheme needed to be looked into further as part of the investigation and requested that a further report be provided. Members also highlighted the importance of landlord licensing, tenant referencing and enforcement as key elements in dealing with anti-social behaviour.
- xiii) Members commented on the need for a package to be in place to help landlords with 'tricky' tenants and for good tenants to ensure that they were, and what type, of help they can get.
- xiv) It was suggested that the introduction of a scheme should be looked into whereby single tenants in three or four bedroom houses would be given the option of downsizing. This would assist in releasing the types of properties that are in short supply in the town.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to a very interesting and informative discussion. The Scrutiny Support Officer informed Members that a Focus Group had been arranged for 13th December to discuss these issues in more detail. A press release had been issued

and all Residents' Associations would be invited to participate at this meeting.

Decision

- i) That the report and discussions which followed be used to inform the on-going investigation.
- ii) That rent officers be invited to a further meeting of the Forum to discuss the way in which the housing allowance was set.
- iii) Figures be provided in relation to the effect that the Voluntary Accreditation Scheme had, in particular in relation to the creation of larger numbers of stable tenancies.
- iv) That a further report be provided in relation to the implications of the introduction of a Tenant Referencing Scheme.

GERARD HALL

CHAIRMAN