

MINUTES of a meeting of the POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on WEDNESDAY, 2 OCTOBER 2013.

Present: Councillor J Coxon (Chairman)

Councillors J Cotterill, D Everitt, D Howe(Present as substitute for Councillor N Clarke), J Geary, V Richichi, A C Saffell, S Sheahan and M Specht.

Officers: Mr S Bambrick, Mr R Bowmer, Mr C Clarke, Mr P Coates, Mrs S Hallam, Mr C Lambert, Mr J Richardson, Mrs S Stevenson and Mrs R Wallace.

In attendance: Councillors R Bayliss, D De Lacy and R Johnson.

8. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N Clarke and N Smith.

9. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

10. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no questions received.

11. MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2013.

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2013 be approved and signed as a correct record.

12. DRAFT "PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013-2018" AND ASSOCIATED ACTION PLAN

The Housing Choices Team Manager gave a short presentation to the group regarding the draft strategy before inviting questions or comments from Members.

Councillor D Howe received the following responses to questions:

- There had been 24 house purchases under the Right to Buy Scheme so far this year.
- There were no plans currently to build new homes to replace the ones lost to the Right to Buy Scheme. The current focus was on the Decent Homes Programme as it was important to get the housing stock up to standard, however it could be an option for the future. It was confirmed that the Housing Choices Team did work with developers in relation to affordable housing with Housing Associations.

Councillor S Sheahan raised points and received responses as follows:

Chairman's initials

- Regarding the quarterly updates referred to within the report, Councillor S Sheahan asked what information would be reported and who would receive it. The Housing Choices Team Manager responded that the lead of each of the priorities as detailed within the report would be asked to develop milestones and it would be information regarding the achievement of these milestones that would be reported to the North West Leicestershire District Homelessness Forum. It was confirmed that the Housing Portfolio Holder was regularly provided with updates which included statistics.
- Councillor S Sheahan asked how the strategy would be measured for effectiveness. The Housing Choices Team Manager explained that a record was kept of cases where people returned to the Authority for further assistance within a two year period, this has to be submitted to National Government. North West Leicestershire has only had one case in the last two years, this indicated that the strategy was successful and was making a difference. In response to Councillor S Sheahan's suggestion to use case studies for monitoring purposes, it was explained that due to the sensitive nature of the cases, this was not something that was undertaken. The Housing Choices Team Manager took on board the comments that a clearer way of showing the effectiveness of the strategy should be included and would take it away for consideration.
- With reference to paragraph 4.2 of the draft strategy, the Housing Choices Team Manager confirmed that the discretion to discharge the Authority's homelessness duty through a Private Rented Sector Offer, as introduced through the Localism Act, had not been utilised and to do so would initially need to be considered by Cabinet.
- With reference to paragraph 4.6 of the draft strategy, Councillor S Sheahan asked for more information to be included to quantify, clarify and explain the impact of the new care pathway.
- Councillor S Sheahan referred to paragraph 4.9 of the draft strategy regarding the increase in the national number of households accepted as homeless and asked if it was the opinion that it was a common trend for the future. The Housing Choices Team Manager stated that she did not have the exact figures at the meeting but the numbers were consistent for the area. She went on to explain that there were schemes in place both locally and County wide which included free advertising for landlords.
- Councillor S Sheahan referred to the large increase in households in temporary accommodation and asked if there were sanctions in place for cases when families were in temporary accommodation for six weeks or more. The Housing Choices Team Manager responded that families should only be placed in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation in an emergency and then for no more than six weeks. She was unsure about any sanctions as the Authority did everything possible to ensure that the timeframe was no longer than six weeks. In response to a question from Councillor D Howe, the Housing Choices Team Manager explained that unfortunately the Authority would never be able to completely dispense with the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families, as there would always be out of hours emergencies and occasions when houses set aside for this type of use would still be fully occupied. She assured Members that the bed and breakfast accommodation used by the Authority did not insist that tenants vacate during the day as some may have done in the past.
- With reference to paragraph 4.14 of the draft strategy, Councillor S Sheahan asked

for more information to be included regarding the success rate in each area for the action plan.

- With reference to paragraph 4.19 of the draft strategy, Councillor S Sheahan asked for more information to be included regarding the success rate of moving people back into employment.
- With reference to paragraph 5.11 of the draft strategy, Councillor S Sheahan asked for an explanation to be included regarding the housing need and stock turnover, especially comparison information with other authorities.
- Councillor S Sheahan felt that the Authority was far too reliant on the private sector and more focus was needed as people's needs were not being met.

In response to a question from Councillor D Everitt, the Housing Choices Team Manager explained that if a teenager approached the Authority claiming to be homeless they would initially contact Social Services for a Child in Need Assessment, they would then try to mediate with the parents but if it was not safe for the teenager to return home then they would be placed in emergency housing. If there was no availability it would have to be bed and breakfast accommodation. She added that the Authority currently used Durban House run by East Midlands Housing and in the past, the YMCA in Leicester to house young people. In response to a further question from Councillor D Howe, it was explained that there were hostels available for victims of domestic violence, plus a Sanctuary Scheme to add security to allow victims to stay in their own home.

In response to a question from Councillor S Sheahan, the Housing Choices Team Manager stated that a corporate action team had been set up to assess the impacts of Welfare Reform and address issues that may arise. The 20 or so households affected by the benefit cap had been identified and contacted by Council staff offering advice and the 500 plus Council tenants affected by the new under occupancy rules had been contacted by Housing Officers, either in person or by telephone, the majority of whom had opted to stay and pay. Councillor D Howe suggested that the provision of additional financial support for people who were affected by the benefit changes be considered.

The Housing Choices Team Manager, in response to a question from Councillor M Specht, stated that if people that were accommodated by the Authority in the private sector were a cause of anti social behaviour, the usual mechanisms for dealing with anti social behaviour would be used.

RESOLVED THAT:

The comments made by the group be considered by Cabinet as part of the formal approval process.

13. REFUSE AND RECYCLING POLICY

The Head of Community Services presented the report to Members and highlighted the summary of changes to existing practice as detailed at appendix 1 of the draft policy.

In response to a question from Councillor J Coxon, the Head of Community Services confirmed that the new smaller refuse bins would only be issued as replacements for damaged bins and to new properties, the Authority were not replacing all of the bins within the district.

Chairman's initials

In response to a question regarding reports of non collections from Councillor S Sheahan, the Head of Community Services reassured Members that there would be some exceptions where a return journey to collect the bins would be made, for example elderly people or due to illness where collections posed a health hazard. In response to a further comment from Councillor S Sheahan, the Head of Community Services stated the risk of fly tipping had been considered but it was felt it would not create anymore of an issue than it was currently. Any fly tipping would be dealt with in the usual manner.

Councillor J Geary referred to the waste charter and asked how people could view it if they did not have access to the internet as the report indicated to the website only. The Waste Services Team Manager explained that the calendar would be printed and distributed to all households in the usual way following ratification by Cabinet. In response to a further question from Councillor J Geary, the Head of Community Services explained that there would be some exceptions regarding the size of the general waste bin issued, for example the households which used solid fuel may need a larger bin.

In response to questions from Councillor D Everitt, the Waste Services Team Manager stated the following:

- If textiles were left out in carrier bags, they would be collected by the Authority to be recycled. If left in charity bags this could not be collected by the Authority and belonged to the charity.
- Clean aluminium packaging had been collected in the red box since 2011, this information was on the website. Further work would be undertaken to promote what items could be recycled.

Councillor D Howe raised the point that the collection times varied from week to week leading to confusion; he suggested that this could be the reason why people were missing collections and reporting it as a non-collection. The Waste Services Team Manager explained that there could be many reasons for collection times to vary such as road closures, route efficiencies or a change in driver; this was why it was always recommended for bins to be presented for collection by 6.00am. He added that drivers were encouraged to take regular collection routes but unfortunately this could not be guaranteed.

Councillor A C Saffell reported that the current collection calendar for his area was incorrect as it stated the wrong colour bins for collection. The Waste Services Manager reassured Members that the calendars would be correct when circulated. In response to a further question from Councillor A C Saffell, it was explained that a bin would not be classed as missed until it was reported; therefore a bin purposely not presented for collection would not be classed as missed.

RESOLVED THAT:

The comments made by the group be considered by Cabinet as part of the formal approval process.

14. GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET DRAFT PROPOSALS 2014/15 AND 2015/16

The Head of Finance presented the report to Members.

Chairman's initials

Councillor S Sheahan commented that £5million was a very large reserve for the Authority to hold and he felt it should be released in graduated amounts to help prevent cuts and to protect services and jobs. The Head of Finance responded that the reserves were earmarked for specific purposes and that the Authority had agreed with its external auditors to keep a £1million minimum reserve. The remaining £2million was available for Invest to Save expenditure as set out in the Cabinet report. Whilst the use of reserves could delay budget reductions in the short term, it would mean bigger savings would be needed in the medium term. He added that the reserves were reviewed frequently and resources released appropriately.

Councillor A C Saffell raised concerns regarding charging for the collection of green waste, he felt that it would encourage people to stop using the service and therefore stop recycling. He questioned whether the Authority could make money and continue to maintain recycling rates. The Head of Community Services reported that Melton Borough Council had been consulted as they had introduced a charge and they still had a 40 percent take up rate. He explained he was aware that some green waste would be placed in the general waste but the Authority would encourage home composting and disposal at the Recycling and Household Waste sites.

In response to a comment regarding the correct legislation for setting car parking charges for maintaining car parks and not for Council income, the Head of Finance confirmed that there was legislation for accounting in relation to car park charges but in this case the levels were relatively low and he was confident that the Council was operating its car parks within the law.

For clarification, the Head of Community Services explained the proposed charges for the collection of green waste. Councillor D Howe suggested a charge of £20 per year as that was the fee Charnwood Borough Council was charging.

Councillor J Geary stated that it was 'a sorry state of affairs we are in' and made the following comments:

- The Leader of the Council made a statement in Vision Magazine making it clear there would not be cuts to services as a result of freezing the Council Tax rate. Councillor J Geary felt that it was sad that the first cut proposed was to discontinue producing Vision Magazine, he believed this decision would 'come back to haunt' the Leader of the Council.
- Residents were not happy about being charged for the collection of green waste but he believed it was sensible to pay as it was cheaper than disposing it at the Recycling and Household Waste Sites. He stated he would be encouraging people to burn their green waste as he would be doing himself.
- Councillor J Geary asked what the cost would be to collect the unwanted bins. The Head of Community Services explained that plans were currently being worked on as the bins would be collected in stages to make it as cost efficient as possible.
- Councillor J Geary asked if there was currently any income for the recycling of green waste and also why was the implementation of the charge not being introduced until 2015. The Waste Services Team Manager explained that the Authority received recycling credit income for green waste collection but did not receive any sales income. He reported that the timeframe for introducing the charge was necessary to provide sufficient time to install waste management software into the waste collection

vehicles and to prepare for the administration of the charge, for example setting up direct debits. The timeframe was a sensible one.

Councillor S Sheahan strongly objected to the introduction of charges for the collection of green waste and believed it was a poor policy on the grounds of the time consuming and costly set up, the additional work involved in processing invoices and direct debits, and it encouraged people to not recycle. He believed this policy would result in many complaints.

Councillor D Everitt concurred with Councillor S Sheahan and he felt that all of the work carried out with recycling rates would be undone with the introduction of the charges for the collection of green waste. He added it was a shame to destroy a wonderful service.

The Director of Services stated that the budget pressures had already been explained at Council and Cabinet meetings, and the administration would be looking for alternative proposals rather than an objection only. He encouraged Members to think seriously about putting forward proposals to encourage a serious debate for Cabinet. Councillor S Sheahan stated that Members were not at the meeting to assist in setting the budget, that discussion would come at a later stage. He believed strongly that the proposal to charge for the collection of green waste would be difficult to administer and would be a disaster.

Councillor J Geary questioned the high cost of the refuse vehicle software and whether it had been planned for in the budget proposals. The Head of Community Services explained that there was money available in reserves which had been ring fenced for the investment.

In response to a question from Councillor M Specht, the Head of Community Services confirmed that the payment for the collection of green waste would not be included as part of the Council Tax payment.

In response to a question from Councillor A C Saffell, the Head of Finance reported that approximately £1million had been saved by staff reductions over the past five years which equated to approximately a ten per cent reduction in staff numbers. At Councillor J Geary's request the Head of Finance agreed to provide all Members of the group with a breakdown of figures regarding staff reductions after the meeting.

Councillor S Sheahan queried what would happen to the services which were proposed to be transferred to the Parish Councils if they decided not to take them. The Director of Services explained that it was inevitable if the services were not taken on then they would stop.

The Chairman encouraged Members to put forward any counter proposals for consideration by Cabinet but none were put forward.

RESOLVED THAT:

The comments made by the group be considered by Cabinet as part of the formal approval process.

Chairman's initials

15. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Questions were raised regarding the 'Delivering Growth and Prosperity in Coalville' report which had been requested at the previous meeting. It was confirmed that the report had currently been taken off the work plan for Cabinet but as soon as it was re-scheduled then a report would be brought to the group also.

RESOLVED THAT:

The following items be included on the work plan:

- 1) A report to give an update on the current situation of Coalville Market.
- 2) A report to explain how the Council was currently dealing with its empty homes including derelict properties.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.20pm.

Chairman's signature