

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 17 March 2011 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

Panel Members Present: Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)
Councillor D. Anson (Vice-Chair)
Councillor M. Ahmed
Councillor I. Azam
Councillor D. Coughlan
Councillor S. Coughlan
Councillor L. Harrison
Councillor I. Shires

Other Members Present: Councillor P. Bott

Officers Present: Mike Tichford – Assistant Director (Regeneration)
Andrea Potts – Head of Housing
Steve Law – Asset Manager
Debbie Parkes – Strategic Housing Manager
Mike Smith – Regeneration Manager – Planning Policy
Jackie Hodgson – Team Manager – Asset Management
Chris Knowles – Lead Accountant
Craig Goodall – Scrutiny Officer

64/10 APOLOGIES

An apology was received from Councillor B. Twedde.

65/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

66/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

67/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 11 and 21 January 2011, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

68/10 QUARTER 3 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION 2010/11

Members were informed of the predicted revenue and capital outturn position for 2010/11 based on performance for quarter 3 (October to December 2010) for services within the remit of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance

Panel.

The Lead Accountant reported that there was currently a predicted net revenue underspend of £81,000 and a capital underspend of £3,365,000. He highlighted the further detail in the report which provided a breakdown of spending across the Directorate including risk areas.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

69/10 COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

The Panel was informed of current Government policy on community asset transfer (CAT), the extent to date of CAT in Walsall and the issues that needed to be considered when contemplating a CAT strategy.

The Team Leader (Asset Management) reported on current work being undertaken with Walsall Partnership to develop a CAT. This included: piloting CAT and learning lessons, developing a range of criteria for CAT in the long term, identifying options for funding and investing in CAT and how to manage risk and affordability.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- It was felt that previous unsuccessful attempts to transfer assets to community associations had failed due to a top down approach. It was believed that for CAT to be successful in the future then the transfer of assets needed to be carried out in a flexible way that was mutually beneficial.
- It was important for the Council to build capacity within local community groups if CAT was to be possible. Groups would need to be strong and robust to successfully take on and manage physical assets.
- Neighbourhood Management should be given a lead role in building capacity and identifying opportunities for CAT. It was believed that current resources were not adequate to complete this task in addition to current responsibilities.
- A strong definition of a community organisation should be developed to ensure that CAT only took place to genuine community organisations and not private sector organisations who would then make a profit. It was agreed to circulate the current CAT criteria.
- It was important that opportunities for CAT were advertised openly with a transparent application process.
- A handful of local examples of potential buildings that could be the subject of CATs were discussed.

In closing the item the Chair suggested that the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel (CSSPP) led on this area. This was due to the cross cutting nature of the issue with the development of the voluntary and community sector to create the Big Society that was within the remit of the

CSSPP. Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel Members would be invited to attend and contribute to all meetings where the issue was to be discussed.

RESOLVED:

THAT:

- 1. current neighbourhood management arrangements be utilised to build capacity in the voluntary and community sector and identify opportunities for community asset transfer;**
- 2. opportunities for community asset transfer be advertised openly with a transparent application process;**
- 3. the criteria for community asset transfer be circulated to Members;**
and;
- 4. the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel lead on the issue of community asset transfer with Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel Members invited to attend and contribute at meetings where the issue is likely to be discussed.**

70/10 COUNCIL OWNED VOID PROPERTIES

The Panel considered a report on Council owned void properties.

The Asset Manager presented the report highlighting the current void properties and their status. He explained that the current stagnation in the property market meant that the Council was holding a number of properties that it would ordinarily have sold. A number of properties were being held vacant due their links with strategic regeneration projects which had also stagnated. He also reported that the sale of any school related premises needed to be approved by the Department for Education (DfE).

The following are the principle points of the ensuing discussion:

- It was important that property assets were not simply disposed of for their cash value in times of economic hardship. It was important that the long term value of land and property needed to be recognised.
- Consideration should be given to reusing council owned void property for employment purposes – including the development of ‘incubator units’ for new businesses. This was an idea currently being explored by the Business Start Up Working Group.
- The cancellation of Building Schools for the Future (BSF) funding had a large impact on the disposal of school sites. Capital receipts from a number of school sites were previously to have been reinvested into the BSF programme. The loss of the BSF programme meant that new uses needed to be found from the sale of school sites and approved by the DfE.

A request was made for information relating to the future use of capital receipts for surplus school sites in Willenhall.

- The current situation of property companies wishing to keep section 106 contributions to a minimum was discussed. The Panel noted that it was important that contributions were still sought where development would have an impact on the local area.
- It was suggested that when properties are demolished the site should be fenced to prevent anti-social behaviour such as fly-tipping.
- It was noted that the guardian scheme for properties that would otherwise have been left void was working well.
- The demise of Walsall Regeneration Company and the opportunities it provided to promote investment in Walsall was discussed. It was anticipated that the new Local Enterprise Partnership would take on this role in the future.

RESOLVED:

THAT:

- 1. the issue of Council owned void properties be considered again with the following additional details provided:**
 - a. the condition of the land/property;**
 - b. how long the property has been void for;**
 - c. what are the potential opportunities for the property;**
 - d. what are the barriers/problems with the property;**
 - e. what size is the property;**
 - f. how much is the property worth.**
- 2. consideration be given to fencing sites where property has been demolished to prevent anti-social behaviour;**

and;
- 3. Members be advised of the proposed use of the capital receipts from the disposal of vacant school and school related premises in Willenhall.**

71/10 ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT AND KEY REGENERATION PROJECTS

Members were informed of key achievements and issues identified in the 2009/10 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). An update was provided on how the policies and proposals in the Walsall Local Development Framework (LDF) were being implemented and whether they were effective. The AMR was linked to progress to date with key regeneration projects.

The Regeneration Manager – Planning Policy gave a presentation on the AMR and key regeneration projects (annexed).

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- A discussion took place on the recently announced coal excavation that was proposed to take place on the former IMI site in Darlaston. A Member expressed concern about the potential impact of the excavation on the local environment as well as increased levels of traffic around the site. The Member expressed the view that in the long term the local park should retain its current location. The Panel felt it was important that local Members and residents were kept fully informed with developments at the site. This should include the use of social media. A briefing note on the proposals for the site was requested for all Panel Members.
- The impact of the Morrisons development on Willenhall Market was discussed. Anecdotal evidence suggested that footfall to the market area had increased but effect on traders was variable.
- The issue of encouraging registered social landlords (RSLs) to improve energy efficiency in new and existing homes was discussed. Members were advised that there was currently an opportunity to gain funding from the Homes and Communities Agency for this matter and the Council was encouraging local RSLs to apply.
- The Black Country Core Strategy ensured that a strategic approach to land use took place between the four Black Country boroughs.

RESOLVED:

THAT:

- 1. local residents and ward councillors be kept fully informed of proposed developments at the former IMI site in Darlaston;**

and;
- 2. a briefing note be provided to the Panel on the proposals at the former IMI site in Darlaston.**

72/10 IMPACT OF THE LOCALISM BILL ON REGENERATION

Members considered the impact of the Localism Bill on services within the remit of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

The Regeneration Manager, Planning Policy gave a presentation to the Panel on the impact of the Localism Bill on services within the remit of the Panel (annexed). It was noted that proposals in the Bill were draft and were subject to change.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- The Bill proposed ending life long tenancies for social housing tenants. Individual RSLs would be able to choose the length of tenancies they awarded to new tenants.
- A Member suggested that a false position of perceived need for social

housing would be created if the criteria for being eligible for social housing was altered so only those in high need could go on a waiting list.

- There was some concern that it would be difficult to meet targets to deliver new housing if neighbourhoods were in control of development.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel consider the impact of the Localism Bill once it has become an Act.

73/10 FORWARD PLAN AND WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11

The Panel considered the latest version of Cabinets Forward Plan of key decisions and their work programme.

17/11 – Former Mellish Road Church

A Member requested further information on the framework for the decision to demolish the property and reclaim the cost. He also asked if this framework could be used on other properties in the borough such as 'Daintys Building' in Stafford Street, Willenhall.

18/11 – Community benefit clauses in the sale of Council owned land

Further information was requested including if the money raised from the sale of the land would stay in the community were the land was located.

RESOLVED:

THAT:

- 1. further information be provided to Members on Forward Plan decision 17/11 'Former Mellish Road Church' including details on:**
 - a. the framework for the decision and reclaiming the cost;**
 - b. how the framework could be used on other properties in the borough, for example, Danitys Building, Stafford Street, Willenhall.**
- 2. further information be provided to Members on Forward Plan decision 18/11 'Community benefit clauses in the sale of Council owned land' including details on whether the receipts raised would be spent in the area where the sold land was located;**

and;
- 3. the following items be considered at the next meeting of the Panel:**
 - a. Local Economic Assessment;**
 - b. Sustainable energy/low carbon retro fit for housing;**
 - c. Development Plan Documents;**
 - d. Local Enterprise Partnership.**

74/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 27 April 2011.

The meeting closed at 8.27p.m.

Signed:

Date: