



MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 5 JANUARY 2006 9.30 AM

PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Pam Bosworth (Chairman)
Councillor David Brailsford
Councillor Mrs Joyce Gaffigan (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Yvonne Gibbins

Councillor Stephen Hewerdine
Councillor Peter Martin-Mayhew
Councillor Mrs Judy Smith
Councillor Mrs Mary Wheat

OFFICERS

Corporate Director Regulatory Services
Senior Planning Officer (Policy)
Housing Solutions Manager
Partnership & Project Officer
Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny Support Officer

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Mrs Frances Cartwright

49. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Mrs Patrick from the District Compact asked if the Wardens could be notified in advance of tenants moving in to council accommodation especially sheltered accommodation as there had been recent instances where the Warden had left Friday evening, a new tenant had been moved in over the weekend and the Warden had return to work Monday knowing nothing about the new resident. The Corporate Director Regulatory Services informed Mrs Patrick that she would inform Valerie Hayllor, the interim Director of Tenancy Services accordingly. Stamford Town Councillor Ray Lee also asked that better attention be given to those tenants who needed special care especially within sheltered accommodation and that wardens were notified accordingly of any problems.

50. MEMBERSHIP

The Panel were notified that Councillor Martin-Mayhew would be substituting for Councillor G Taylor until the next annual meeting of the Council and that Councillor Brailsford was substituting for Councillor Sandall for this meeting only.

51. APOLOGIES

None.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

53. ACTION NOTES

That the action notes from the meeting held on 10th November 2005 were accepted as a correct record with the following amendment:-

Page 7 last paragraph should read:

“The Portfolio Holder responsible for community safety referred to the proposed changes concerning the police and informed the panel that the ODPM had said that 59 new Community Police Support Officer units would be deployed in the County. Eight of these units would be deployed in the South Kesteven area, probably two per main town. He stressed that the District Council needed to continue to have close partnership working with the Police.

It was requested that in future where questions were asked and answers given that the answer could immediately follow the question.

54. FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The Scrutiny Officer reminded the Panel that a special meeting of the Council would be held that afternoon to decide the LSVT Strategic Choice of Landlord.

55. COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Conclusion

- (1) That the Community Strategy be referred to the Engagement DSP for their consideration.***
- (2) That the Community DSP has expressed concern that the report demonstrates problematic cross agency linkages.***

The Panel noted and endorsed report DCS36 on the Community Strategy. Reference was made to cross agency linkages which had been identified as a problem however, a panel member replied that work had been done in this area to change forecasts which would help to strengthen cross agency linkages.

56. REVIEW OF HOUSING STRATEGY

Decision

- (1) That the Community DSP recommends that the Cabinet adopt the***

draft strategy following an Equality Impact Assessment.

- (2) That the outline “Affordable Housing Policies within the Housing Strategy” as identified in Section 7 of report DRS25 be included and also to include these proposals within the supplementary planning documents.***
- (3) That the Community DSP recommends Cabinet to include the Private Sector Housing Strategies within the overall Housing Strategy as identified in section 4 of report DRS25a.***
- (4) That the Community DSP recommends Cabinet to include the outline policy proposals within the Housing Strategy as identified in Section 4 of Report DRS25b and seek inclusion of the proposals for gypsies and travellers within the Local Development Framework.***

The Corporate Director Regulatory Services submitted report DRS25 which had been circulated with the agenda together with the following supplementary reports DRS25a, DRS25b and DRS28. She apologised for the lateness of the latter reports but this had been due to having to wait for other draft reports over the Christmas period.

The Council's Housing Strategy had been under review and subject to consultation. The revised strategy had taken account of previous feedback from GOEM and also the outcome of the Strategic Housing Inspection.

In May Fordham Research Limited had been commissioned to undertake a combined Housing Needs Survey and Private Sector Stock Condition Survey. Three reports had been received back on Housing Needs Study report, Private Sector Stock Condition Survey and Gypsy and Travellers Study. Fordham's had briefed the Portfolio Holder, the Corporate Director Regulatory Services and the relevant senior managers on their findings and they would be available in the future to speak to the Panel of their findings if the Panel wished. The executive summaries of the various reports were appended to the individual reports. The strategy had also taken account of the emerging Government policies including Sustainable Communities: People, places and prosperity, Homes for All Plan and the Consultation Paper on a new Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3). The Corporate Director Regulatory Services introduced the Senior Planning Officer for Policy to the Panel, Rachel Armstrong as some of the Housing Strategy recommendations would have an impact on the housing part of the Local Development Framework (LDF).

The Housing Needs assessment and the need for affordable housing was measured in two different ways. By following the Basic Needs Assessment model an estimated requirement of 646 affordable dwellings per annum was required. The “balancing housing market” methodology estimated new dwellings per annum of 460 units, both highlighting a substantial need for affordable housing in the district. Affordable housing needed to be across the range including the rented sector, private rented, owner/occupier, shared

ownership and the report detailed the analysis undertaken by Fordham's and the various factors involved. The Housing Need Survey had implications for the LDF and in particular to Supplementary Planning documents.

The Senior Planning Officer for Policy then briefly outlined the LDF which would comprise a number of different documents including two main policy documents – a Core Strategy and a Housing and Economic Development Plan Document. It would also include a number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD). The Housing and Economic Development Plan Document would set the policies that concern affordable housing and the information from the Fordham research would be used as evidence.

The timetable for the preparation of these documents extends to the Autumn of 2007 when hopefully they will be formally adopted. Consultation is in three stages with the first stage nearing completion. The Senior Planning Officer then outlined the current national policy guidance and the recent publication of a consultation draft of Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) which sought to change some of the underlying principles of the current national policy. In particular the consultation PPS3 redefined “affordable housing” and reduced the minimum size threshold to 15. The report then listed the proposed new affordable housing policies for South Kesteven.

Various comments were made about the report and its sobering message especially to young people trying to gain access to the property ladder. Another question was asked about conflict between authorities, who arbitrated to which the Senior Planning Officer indicated that as the District Council determined the planning application it was up to them however, it was hoped that a protocol would be put in place in the LDF to establish a “pecking order” when disputes arose. Questions were also asked about the threshold numbers and the rural exceptions policy to which Mrs Armstrong replied. Further questions were asked about what was classed as affordable housing and shared ownership to which the Partnership and Project Officer replied.

Report DRS25a was a supplementary report to DRS25 and concerned Private Sector Stock Condition. The Corporate Director Regulatory Services informed the panel that it was the first time such a survey had been undertaken. The stock condition survey looked at two main indicators, fitness and disrepair as laid out in S.604 of the 1985 housing Act and it also took account of energy efficiency, decent homes and the new requirements of the Housing and Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

The survey showed that the Private sector stock was in a reasonable condition in relation to the rest of the East Midlands and Nationally. The main problem areas in terms of the amount of money needing to be spent was in relation to walls, fences, paved areas and outbuildings on houses in disrepair also those dwellings constructed between 1919 and 1944. Unfit dwellings accounted for 2.7% of the housing stock which compared to an unfitness rate nationally of 4.2% and 4.0% in the East Midlands was comparatively low. The report found that private rented dwellings tended to be the most likely to be unfit as were the pre1919 dwellings and converted flats. The research took account of the

Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) system for home energy ratings. The average SAP rating for homes in South Kesteven was estimated to be 50 which was comparable with the national average. The survey suggested three main ways in which energy efficiency of dwellings could be improved:

- Add/increase insulation for hot water cylinders, lofts and cavity walls.
- Upgrade or install heating systems to gas powered programmable central heating.
- Upgrade all windows to double-glazing.

The report concluded that improving energy efficiency by 30% in South Kesteven was possible but difficult to achieve. The Corporate Director Regulatory Services said that private sector grant allocation from the government was decreasing only £52,000 had been allocated to South Kesteven this year. Other councils had received more as they spent more on the private sector. In order that the money was best utilized the Corporate Director Regulatory Services indicated that the council would be looking at energy efficiency measures, as this would assist more people. The decent homes aspect of the survey had found that 19.7% of homes failed the decent homes standard compared to 32% nationally. The HHSRS took into account potential hazards of the dwelling such as areas where trips and slips could occur 8.4% of dwellings required a mandatory response which was above the estimated level of unfitness in the district of 3%. The survey then looked at the total cost of repairs and energy efficiency improvements required and evaluated the extent to which households were able to fund the necessary improvements and these were listed within the report. The report concluded with policy implications which had been identified for inclusion within the Council's Housing Strategy one of the key issues was to improve the energy efficiency of dwelling stock and to seek partnerships with energy efficiency organisations.

Comments were then made about the issues raised. It was asked if the Council's DWO could carry out work and with regard to houses in multiple occupation whether the council was pro-active or re-active.

The Corporate Director Regulatory Services indicated that equity release was something that needed researching to see if it would be feasible with regard to private sector stock. The issue of houses in multiple occupation was something that the housing solutions team would be looking at in detail once all the posts had been filled and they were aware of the current issues. One member referred to the care and repair service that was offered in other authorities and the Corporate Director Regulatory Services indicated that this was something that would be looked at in the future as historically housing had just looked at the landlord function, however with the new structure in place a broader view of housing could be undertaken.

Report DRS25b concerned the findings of Fordhams research on the study of gypsies and traveller housing needs in South Kesteven. The Housing Act 2004 required the Council to include gypsies and travellers in their local housing needs assessments.

The study considered five key issues and these were listed in the report. South Kesteven had a relatively small gypsy and traveller population although it had seen a 60% rise in the last two years which pointed to a rise in unauthorised encampments.

The stakeholders consulted had identified three key issues:

- More sites are needed although no overall consensus about the type of sites that need to be delivered.
- Assistance to be provided to gypsies and travellers wanting to buy their own land.
- A case for a fulltime liaison officer within the county to understand the needs of gypsies and travellers, including the relations with the settled community, and their ability to travel and maintain a traditional lifestyle whilst accessing services such as health and education.

Site capacity was also an issue and the report suggested that up to twenty authorised pitches would be needed with authorised transits pitches increasing by five. The report concluded with a list of recommendations. The Senior Planning Officer for Policy highlighted two sides with regard to planning, to identify sites within the LDF for gypsy and travellers or to have a policy with regard to any planning application that came in. There was also the possibility of extending the current site in the district. The LDF would work closely to find the best route, however any site proposed had the potential to be contentious.

Members felt that a co-ordinator for the traveller's site was a good idea and the idea of partnerships with other local authorities was also beneficial. The recommendation that site capacity on council sites be reviewed every three to five years was queried and it was suggested that maybe this should be every three years otherwise the time frame would slip to five.

It was agreed that the recommendations within the reports be forwarded to Cabinet.

57. HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Decision

That Councillor Martin-Mayhew joins the Strategic Housing Working Group.

The Corporate Director Regulatory Services introduced the Housing Solutions Manager to the Panel. He introduced report DRS28 which concerned a copy of a letter that had been received from the ODPM and the response from the Leader of the Council which had highlighted the areas where major improvements and the development of the housing service were being carried out. The Housing Solutions Manger said that regular contact was being kept with the GOEM and south Kesteven were seeking help where it was available.

The 90-point improvement plan, which had been approved last May, was mainly on target although there had been some slippage due to problems with recruitment but the GOEM was aware of the problems being encountered.

The Corporate Director Regulatory Services informed members that an informal visit by one of the Inspectors would be taking place between the 25th & 27th January to see if the Council was moving in the right direction. She asked if the Working Group could hold a meeting before this date. Reference was then made to the composition of the working group and it was agreed that Councillor Martin-Mayhew would join the group.

A question was asked about the vacant posts and the pressure that this was putting on the other members of the team. The Corporate Director Regulatory Services then briefly detailed the processes that had been undertaken in the Housing section with regard to selection and recruitment and although the process had not gone as well as expected they had come a long way and she was confident that the posts which were outstanding would be filled in the near future and she paid thanks to the work of the Council's Human Resources Section in their help with the work that had been undertaken. The GOEM was aware of the issues and they were happy with the progress to date and the Council's commitment.

58. REPORTS FROM WORKING GROUPS

The Scrutiny Officer informed that Panel that the Voids working group was still waiting for a property in the Deepings to view. He had learnt that a property had become vacant but members of the Working Group would need to look at the property at 9.30am the next day. Members felt that this was too short notice and unless the two panel members not present at the meeting were able to attend to look at the property then they would wait for a further property to become vacant in the Deepings before submitting a final report to the DSP.

59. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Members noted the current BVPI figures. The Housing Solutions Manager referred to the two sheets appended to the BVPI figures which gave members more details concerning the affordable housing projects.

60. WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer submitted an up to date work programme for members' information. A question was asked about Worth Court to which the Corporate Director Regulatory Services replied. She also informed members that the HRA business plan would be taken off the forward plan as this item would not be dealt with until the ballot to tenants had been undertaken and the outcome known.

61. REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Members noted the report.

62. ANY OTHER BUSINESS, WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASONS OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, DECIDES IS URGENT

Members decided to hold the next meeting of the Community DSP in the Corn Exchange Bourne. The meeting to start at 10.00am.

63. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 11.55am.