

REGENERATION AND HOUSING PANEL

Wednesday, 21st August, 2019

Present: Councillor Loraine Cox (in the Chair), Councillors Jean Battle, Tony Dobson, Stewart Eaves and Parkins

Apologies Joyce Plummer

51 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Plummer. Councillor Ayub was absent from the meeting.

52 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest submitted at the meeting.

53 Minutes of Last Meeting held on 10th June 2019

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Regeneration and Housing Panel held on 10th June 2019 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

Agreed - **That the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.**

54 Housing Renewal Funding

The Head of Regeneration and Housing updated Members on housing renewal funding and provided details of progress on projects. He explained that a lot of work had been carried out during the last 18 months in Council owned buildings including work on asbestos, health and safety matters and advised that systems were now in place to ensure that repairs and maintenance would be maintained.

The Regeneration and Property Manager explained that Hyndburn Council had numerous assets for a small authority and referred to the challenges of cost, resources and the time required to maintain them in an adequate condition.

Members asked for updates on the old Homeless Unit, Burnley Road and on the Cannon Street property. The Regeneration and Property Manager reported that the old Homeless Unit on Burnley Road was checked every week and was secure. She advised that there had been recent enquiries about this property and the Cannon Street property from potential purchasers. The Head of Regeneration and Housing confirmed that the Council was trying to achieve best consideration.

Establishment of a Working Group

The Chair referred to the proposal to establish a Member Working Group. She reported that the Panel would look at the Housing Renewal Funding allocation and administration of Disabled Facility Grants. Two Members from each party would comprise the Working

Group and it was proposed that these Members were the Chair, Councillor Loraine Cox, Councillor Battle, Councillor Dobson and Councillor Marlene Haworth.

- Agreed**
- (1) That the report be noted; and**
 - (2) That a Working Group be established to consider the Housing Renewal Funding allocation and administration of Disabled Facility Grants, comprising of two members of each party including the Chair of the Regeneration and Housing Panel.**

55 Capital Programme and Projects

The Head of Regeneration and Housing referred Members to the report submitted on behalf of the Regeneration Manager in respect of the Regeneration and Housing Funding Programme. Members were provided with information on the progress with the 2019/20 Regeneration and Housing Funding Programme (capital and revenue).

- Agreed** - **That the report be noted.**

56 Town Centre Shop Front Scheme - Presentation

The Regeneration and Property Manager gave a presentation on the THI Shop Grants Update and referred Members to the map contained within the report and detailed the THI boundary and colour coded areas of priority. She reported that the funding deadline and permissions for grants was due to expiry on 29th September 2019 and gave details of the approved purposes of THI funding. She informed the meeting that the take up rate of grants for shop restorations had only improved with the increase of the grant rates to 90% and indicated that Heritage Lottery had been asked to extend the deadline until September 2020. Grants would be allocated on a first come first serve basis. Members were given details of planned shop restoration schemes including Varsity, the former bank and the Burton's building. A number of options for over commitment were set out.

Councillor Dobson asked for details of the plans for the shop restorations and to clarify if a number of shop had to apply for grants before funding was approved by Heritage Lottery.

The Regeneration and Property Manager reported that that there was no minimum take up rate before Heritage Lottery would provide funding and explained that each grant would be tailored to the requirements of each property and considered on its merits. In response to comments from Members about buildings that were considered eye sores, she pointed out that businesses could not be made to take up the grants.

Members referred to the benefit of the scheme to the town and to other investments which may be carried out on the back of these schemes, and especially if improvements were made to the Burton, Varsity and Bed Centre buildings. Councillor Parkins referred to the need for enforcement for a clean-up at the site of the former 61 – 77 Burton Building. The Environmental Protection Manager indicated that he would inspect the area.

Members referred to the importance of promoting commercial properties in Accrington Town Centre. The Regeneration and Property Manager was requested to raise the issue with the Business and Marketing Co-ordinator.

- Resolved**
- (1) That the Environmental Protection Manager inspects 61 -77 Burton Building and undertakes any necessary enforcement action;**

(2) That the Regeneration and Property Manager raises the issue of promotion of town centre commerce with the Business and Marketing Co-ordinator.

57 B with Us Allocations Policy Review

The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager submitted a report to update Members on the review of the B with Us Allocations Policy. She reported that the Council was in partnership with Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Councils as well as local Registered Partners to create a choice based lettings partnership called B with Us. She indicated that a review of the allocations policy was currently being undertaken to make it more fit for purpose and in line with more recent legal changes and new guidance. She referred to a number of areas that required change as below:

- Clarity in eligibility and qualification criteria and the removal of suspensions.
- Local connection which will be exempt from some categories.
- Disqualification for those with over £500 debt.
- Income/Savings to disqualify those with equity over £120,000 from joining the register.
- Five instead of four bandings to reflect changes in homeless priority.

The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager also informed the Panel that consideration was being given to changing the software provider from Civica to Locator and that this decision would require the approval of Cabinet. She referred Members to the timetable set out in the report for the adoption of a new software system.

Members referred to a number of scenarios which Hyndburn residents had faced which they felt were not fair and that these issues should be considered when reviewing the allocations policy: a disabled lady requesting a transfer to a ground floor flat not being given priority, the Income/Savings criteria impacting the elderly who want to move to rent and that £120,000 is too low, the number of empty properties in Hyndburn against the number of people currently on the social housing waiting list.

Resolved - That the report and Members' comments be noted.

58 Hyndburn Homelessness Strategy Refresh

The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager gave a presentation on the Hyndburn Homelessness Strategy Refresh. She reported on the overview of the Homelessness Strategy (2014 and 2019) and gave the priorities to prevent homelessness, reduce and tackle youth homelessness and work with the private rented sector. She provided details of how they had dealt with homelessness over the past five years and introduced and outlined the proposed new strategy. The new strategy will include new provisions including Homelessness legislation and a joint approach to preventing homelessness. She referred to a stakeholder consultation and the challenges an improved strategy will have to deal with in the coming years.

Members asked and commented on the following:

- If the true number of rough sleepers was known and if empty properties could be put to use to reduce homelessness.
- Concern about the number of young people sleeping on the streets.
- It was suggested that Government money should be used to increase Maundy Relief's involvement with homelessness and make a business case for partnership work with the Council, Onward Homes and Maundy Relief.

- It was also suggested that the Council purchased a property to house the homeless.
- Other concerns related to organisations doubling up on the work of each other and potentially wasting funding received and that there should be a more co-ordinated approach.

The Housing Strategy and Policy Manager reported that Accrington now had approximately 12 rough sleepers, an increase on last year but pointed out that private landlords could be reluctant to take homeless people. She reported that the Council did a lot of work with Calico Housing Association but all approaches would be considered. In respect of young people she reported that there were different routes that could be used to rehouse a young homeless person but that the needs of the person were paramount in deciding how to approach each case. She gave details of the time scale for implementing a new strategy.

Resolved - **That the report and Members' comments be noted.**

59 Environmental Protection

The Head of Regeneration and Housing informed the Panel of the new style of report, circulated to Members, that would be submitted to future meetings with a focus on performance.

The Environmental Standards Manager referred to the Council's strategy of taking enforcement action against blighted sites and unacceptable habitats. He explained how the Council could take action and the length of time this could take. He reported that there had been an increasing number of complaints about sites and that the Council did try to get quick resolutions where possible. He indicated that attempts were made to engage with those at fault and although this usually worked, and where it did not, the legal route was used but this could be a lengthy process.

Members requested further information on actions taken by the Council on a number of blighted sites including:

- The Calder, Blackburn Road
- Hargreaves Warehouse, Church
- Tyres on the pavement opposite the Hargreaves Warehouse site
- Fly tipping in the town centre
- 10 Wilfrid Street, Woodnook – no roof on the building
- 4 Tenison Avenue (front and rear gardens)
- Shop on Lord Street.
- Oswaldtwistle Paladium

The Environmental Standards Manager reported that sites were secured but sometimes the Council did not have the powers to take action and that they had to make referrals to other public bodies such as Lancashire County Council. He indicated that he would note and inspect the sites mentioned above.

The Environmental Standards Manager reported on the removal of category 1 hazards for residential dwellings and informed the meeting that the performance indicators recorded data which allowed sites to be monitored and which would provide statistical data such as the time taken to clear cases. He indicated that future reports would include targets.

Agreed - **That the report be noted.**

60 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

61 The Time and Date of Future Meetings:

The next meeting of the Regeneration and Housing Panel was due to take place on 14th October 2019.

Signed:.....

Date:

Chair of the meeting
At which the minutes were confirmed

This page is intentionally left blank