

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17th October 2013, 2013

PRESENT – Councillor Long (in the Chair); Councillors Baldwin, Carson, Cossins, Grundy, Harman, L. Hughes, Lawton, Lewis, E.A. Richmond and Wright. (11)

APOLOGIES – (0)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – (0)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – John Anderson, Assistant Director Policy and Regeneration, Steve Petch, Head of Strategy and Commissioning, Bryan Huntley, Planning Officer, Mike Crawshaw, Head of Leisure and Culture, and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

P16. MINUTES – Submitted - The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 5 September, 2013.

A Member queried the accuracy of the wording of Paragraph 10 of Minute 10/Sep/13 and following discussion it was -

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

P17. SCRUTINY – WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13 – The Director of Resources submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the current Municipal Year.

The submitted report outlined those areas where this Scrutiny Committee had previously identified it would like to focus its work over the next Municipal Year namely, Civil Parking Strategy, Town Centre Regeneration, Local Development Framework, Carbon Management and Economic Strategy.

It was also emphasised that the work programme was a rolling programme and any Member of this Scrutiny could request an item to be included provided that a Quad of Aims had been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee prior to ensure that it contributed to the strategic aims of the Council.

The submitted report outlined the original Work Programme and requested Members to reconsider the Work Programme to accommodate further issues that need to be included.

Members were advised on the need to defer the Special Meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 31st October 2013, to allow Officers time to complete the analysis of the Local Plan consultation responses.

Discussion ensued on forthcoming meeting of Cultural Review Group and Scrutiny's involvement in the Medium Term Financial Plan

RESOLVED – (a) That the current status of the Work Programme be noted.

(b) That the Work Programme be updated to reflect the decisions of this Scrutiny Committee.

P18. HOUSING STRATEGY ANNUAL MONITORING – The Director of Place submitted a report (previously circulated) stating that the Housing Strategy 2012-17, approved in July 2012, contained a commitment to annually monitor and review progress against milestones and targets.

It was stated that progress overall had been good with 51 per cent of milestones achieved in the first year of a two year programme. A further 34 per cent of milestones were on schedule and the Council was on course to meet its six objectives.

As part of the monitoring exercise 14 milestones (8 per cent) had been deleted as they were no longer appropriate and two new priority actions relating to older persons' accommodation and the introduction of Universal Credit had been added to the refreshed Action Plan.

Discussion ensued on the amount of accredited landlords Darlington had, concerns over tenants who engaged in anti-social behaviour, the increasing work of the Empty Homes Officer, the timetable for Red Hall improvement works, the legislation surrounding empty homes and the amount of people who had moved house due to the 'bedroom tax'.

Particular reference was made to developers arguing that affordable housing was not always achievable, the effect of change of use applications, rights of an ex-Council tenant who purchased their property, the amount of landlords who only owned one rental property and the incentives of being part of the Accredited Landlord scheme.

It was also stated that Councillors should be more pro-active and report unfit housing to the Private Sector Housing Manager and when considering new planning applications, sustainable drainage should be taken into account to alleviate the problems associated with surface water flooding.

RESOLVED – (a) That the report be noted.

(b) That it be noted that Place Scrutiny Committee have concerns regarding the condition of the rental stock.

(c) That the Empty Homes Policy be endorsed.

(d) That the expansion of the Accredited Landlord Scheme be welcomed.

(e) That the Private Sector Housing Manager be invited to the next meeting of this Scrutiny Committee to advise Members on the private housing stock and private housing landlords.

P19. SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGY – The Director of Place submitted a report (previously circulated) seeking Members views on the Draft Sports and Physical Activity Strategy..

It was stated that the Strategy was supported by an Action Plan which identified twelve Priority Actions to be implemented over the next two years. The overall aim of the Strategy was to enable more Darlington residents to be more active, more often and delivery of the objectives would require contributions from a range of agencies and organisation across all sectors.

The Draft Strategy had been prepared by a multi-disciplinary Project Team comprising Council Officers and representatives from external agencies such as Sport England and Tees Valley Sport. It is also intended to consult with schools, colleges, sports clubs and community organisations.

Discussion ensued on the varying and widespread activities available to residents of the Borough either at the Dolphin Centre or through organised groups and clubs and the grant received from Sport England – Community Sport Activation Fund, in the sum of £147k to assist sport and physical activity groups and clubs in the community. Members were keen to embrace all aspects of physical activity including cycling, walking and dance although it was acknowledged that some areas would be considered through the Open Space Strategy and Local Motion initiatives.

Members were advised that an application had been made to the CCG to extend the programme for stroke victims as over 2000 people per year could benefit.

Committee were keen to see the return of Darlington Football Club to the town and were advised that various options were currently being explored to facilitate a move.

Members stated that in times of austerity people had less money and there was a need to target people who could not afford to go to the Dolphin Centre, it was also noted that there was a cost for children to attend clubs.

It was stated that when compiling the strategy Officers had tried to capture partnership working to address the barriers of poorest health is poorest people and had tried to 'twin' deprived Wards with less deprived Wards so that volunteers and resources could be shared.

RESOLVED – (a) That Place Scrutiny Committee endorse the document.

(b) That the recommendations contained within the document be endorsed.

(c) That the co-location initiative be endorsed.

(d) That walking and cycling be encompassed in other Council Strategies.
