



REPORT OF: The Regeneration and Technical Overview and Scrutiny Committee

REPORT TO: Policy and Review Committee

ON: 28th April 2010

TITLE: Recommendations and Draft Annual Report of the Regeneration and Technical Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Purpose of the Report

This report presents to the Committee the work of the Regeneration and Technical Overview and Scrutiny Committee and recommendations on the topics in its work programme

2. Introduction

The Regeneration and Technical Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed its work programme at the first meeting of the year following the outlining of the key issues facing the portfolio it covers by the Executive Member and Officers. The Committees proposed work programme was submitted to the Policy and Review Committee who agreed to the topics and asked that they be scoped and focused. This was completed and submitted to the August meeting of that Committee. This report sets out how the Committee have achieved the scope and focus and the results of their scrutiny.

3. Markets.

The Committee agreed in June that as part of their work programme for the year they would look at the proposals for the redevelopment and relocation of the Market in Blackburn and also look at the development of Darwen Market. The Committee agreed that the review would-

- review the changes to the provision of a market in Blackburn
- examine the detailed negotiations that are ongoing
- Ensure that the market that is delivered meets the needs of traders and customers.
- Look at the provision of the market in Darwen and how this meets the needs of customers and traders and ways of taking this forward for the future.

As part of the review the Committee would look to receive assurances from both traders, customers and the Council that their views have been listened to, taken on board wherever possible and answered where not and that the market meets the needs when it opens in Blackburn and into the future. A similar outcome demonstration the long term viability of plans for Darwen market and future developments would indicate the success of the scrutiny committees work.

The Committee agreed to look at the original vision for the markets, progress to date and the next steps. The Committee also agreed to talk to traders, visit the markets and sit in on meetings with traders where appropriate to gauge opinion. The information gained will be used to challenge the Executive Member where appropriate

The Committee agreed that as part of the work they would like to talk to the following people to to gain evidence and information-

The Executive Member

Talk to service users

Talk to market traders

Talk to Darwen Neighbourhood board

Talk to customers of the market.

All members of the council

Visit to Darwen Market 30th November 2009.

On Monday 30th November representatives of the Regeneration and Technical OSC met with traders at Darwen Market. The Committee toured all parts of the market and talked to stall holders selling a variety of products. The Committee members found-

- Traders were contented with the running of the market
- Happy with the promotions that were run to generate a higher profile for the market
- Happy with the markets buildings
- Happy with the proposals for the proposed opening up of the front of the market.
- Happy that trade was steady.
- Traders were unhappy with the Pennine Lancashire food festival organisation which had omitted the market despite contributing.
- Feel that the promotion budget could be better used to promote the market.

Visit to Blackburn Market 25th September 2009.

Members visited the market in preparation for the Committee meeting on 12th October and the meeting of the Executive Board on 15th October where the progress on the redevelopment of the market was to be discussed. Members

of the Committee first met with the Management of the market to discuss the issues facing them and traders in the delivery of the market and how they managed the market and traders. Members were informed of the information vacuum that existed at present and the problems that this caused when dealing with traders who were looking to them for information on their future and the future of the market. Members were informed of the issues in relation to concessions and the 3 different elements of this. These concessions incorporated concessions on the stall rental, business rates and service charge. The concessions were for those who already had a stall and wished to use adjacent vacant stalls for their benefits and this in turn gave the appearance of a full market and therefore encouraged people to come on the market. Members discussed the special events markets that had taken place during the year including the arts market and the bazaar that had taken place at the end of Eid.

Members were then given the opportunity to meet with traders and discuss their issues with them. Members used the information they gained from the visit to ask questions of the executive member at the meeting and gain a greater understanding of the issues facing traders on the market. At the meeting the Committee were updated on the current situation with the market and the executive Member answered member's questions regarding the issues raised by traders and Officers. The current situation relating to concessions was outlined together with the methods and levels of communication with traders

Visit to Blackburn Market 4th December 2009, 11th December 2009.

Members of the committee visited Blackburn Market for the second time on Friday 4th December. The Committee had taken a stall for the afternoon to seek the views of traders and shoppers on the market and the future. Prior to the Committee had issued an invitation to meet all traders on the market asking them to meet with members submit their comments in writing. Members also gave traders the opportunity; if this was difficult then they would visit traders on their stalls. The traders were informed of the importance of their views on issues facing traders, customers and anyone who used the market to enable the Committee to ask the right questions of those shaping the future of the markets and taking important decisions.

The Committee Members asked traders what questions they would wish them to ask the Executive Member for response. At the meeting on 7th December 2009 the Committee passed these questions to the Executive Member for consideration and response. There were 17 questions to which the Executive Member provided a response. Members of the Scrutiny Committee revisited the market to provide feed back to those who had submitted the questions.

The following related to a number of areas of concern with traders. This included-

- The inclusion of shopmobility within the new market will bring in shoppers, etc in to the market.

What the council do for traders who currently trade on the 3 day market and on those days that the market is not open either carried out other parts of their business (ie Measured up for goods to be installed at the persons home etc) and could not move to 6 day trading?

Could traders consider moving to Darwen Market?

Could the Executive Member ensure that improvements are made to ensure that communication is improved between the management and the traders?

Could any business support be put in place to help traders during this difficult economic period?

Traders would prefer to see stalls full rather than empty regardless of the issues of competition etc as this added to the vitality of the market and made it more attractive to shoppers. Could the executive Member consider letting stalls currently empty at reduced rates on daily basis to attract more traders in to the market?

Could traders have information on footfall at the market and projections for the future market as this would assist in business planning and assessments necessary for the traders to consider alongside the issues of rent etc for the possible relocation to the new market.

Could traders have information setting out comparative rents with the new market and other markets in the northwest to assist in planning for the future?

Has the viability of closing half the market and putting the three and six day markets been considered?

Could a mezzanine floor be incorporated into the six day market and the two markets be put together in the same building and the remainder of the market site sold off?

What are the up to date timescales for completion of the market rebuild and relocation of traders?

Could we create a virtual model of the new development to show to traders who may wish to relocate to enable a more realistic view to be gained on what the new market will look like?

Can we reconsider the proposals for an outdoor market as this will not fit well with the redevelopment of the town centre and cause problems of litter etc and make the town feel tatty?

Could we ensure that the rents at the new market are realistic and affordable?

If we are trying to promote Christmas markets why do we not have Christmas music playing? (or any music)

Themed Markets and Promotional activities do have a positive impact on footfall and trade at the market can we continue and enhance such events with market traders co-operation?

The Committee received a full response to the questions was also forwarded to all members of the Committee for information.

Did we do what we said we would do?

Talk to the Executive Member



Talk to service users



Talk to market traders



Talk to Darwen Neighbourhood board



Talk to customers of the market.



All members of the Council



The work of the Committee was however unavoidable curtailed by the call in of the markets issue on two occasions during the year. This has meant that the Committee were unable to fully complete their work programme to their satisfaction. Due to the corporate nature of the issue the call-in were heard by the Policy and Review Committee. These call in meetings have prevented the Committee from looking at the issues at vital times in the development of the strategy as they have been just following the important decisions of the Executive Board.

Recommendations.

Members will recommend that the topic of the market relocation remain a key topic for scrutiny for the next year for the Committee.

4. Worklessness and Employment strategy.

As part of the Committees work programme the topic of Worklessness and employment strategy was selected. The Committee followed on from the work undertaken in the previous year and agreed that they would-

- Look at the delivery of a strategy to reduce Worklessness in the borough.
- ensure that the partners signed up to deliver the strategy are all playing their part and working in a co-ordinated and effective way

- Look at what has been achieved and delivered so far and what is still to be delivered.
- Test whether the services provided are meeting their targets and accessible to those who require them
- Ensure that information is consistent and accurate wherever it is given out.
- Examine the key milestones and how these are being met.

The review would seek to ensure that the council and its partners are delivering a strategy to deal with the issue of worklessness that meets the needs of those seeking employment and those seeking to improve employment opportunities.

- To receive an overview of the services provided.
- To review the strategy agreed by the Executive Board in July.
- To review progress against agreed key milestones by the council and partners.
- To look at inputs and outcomes
- To look at how services are delivered on the ground
- To road test the information received by service users.

The Committee commenced their work by receiving a full briefing on the issues affecting the employment strategy for the borough. The Committee were informed of the work of partners and the council to deliver a strategy

Visit to the Town Hall Reception to test Business Information. 30th November 2009

Members visited the Town Hall Reception in Darwen to test the information given out to those enquiring about assistance to small businesses. The members were given details of the Council's web site and the business centre at Shadsworth a print out and telephone numbers were given but no business advice could be given.

Visit to Blackburn Rovers Enterprise Centre. 30th November 2009


The representatives visited the Enterprise Centre at Ewood. The centre is run by Blackburn Rovers Community Trust in partnership with No Limits programme. The no limits programme is a partnership initiative involving this council, Lancashire County Council, Burnley, Hyndburn and Pendle as well as Burnley and Accrington Stanley Football Clubs.


Members were given information on how to get assistance from No Limits in setting up a business and how they could access premises such as those available at Ewood Park. The members also received information about continued assistance that was available for businesses and how this could make a difference. The Committee members were updated on the way a business could be helped by staff at the centre and how the facilities could be beneficial to the safety and development of the business. Information was


also given to members regarding the guardian project and business start up assistance.

The information gained by members of the Committee who made the visits was shared with the Committee at their next meeting and the issues that arose from were taken up by the executive member. The Committee were assured that the

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To road test the information received by service users. 

Members were aware that the employment strategy for the Council and its partners had been agreed at the end of the last municipal year. At that time and in scoping the initial work programme for the Committee members agreed that they would review the delivery of the strategy and look at the delivery from partners and the Council.

The Committee were aware that the strategy could not achieve without all partners playing their parts and the Committee were to test this delivery and look at the outcomes and achievements and where necessary seek clarification on the delivery of individual partners roles. The Committee were to look at the delivery of business information and assistance and how this had developed following the Committees blind testing. Unfortunately the Committee could not meet due to commitments of Members and this information will now be presented to the Committee early in the next municipal year. The Committee will have a further opportunity to challenge the Executive Member on the delivery of the strategy and measure the success in detail and the role of partners.

Recommendations

The Committee wish to put forward the following recommendations in respect of this topic

1. That training be given to all frontline reception staff to ensure that information given out on business assistance is to a standard expected by the Executive Member
2. that the progress on the implementation of the employment strategy by the Council and its partners be closely monitored by this Committee during the next municipal year.
3. that further mystery shopping tests be carried out to look at the service and information delivered to those making enquiries about business assistance and support.

Highways Issues.

As part of the work programme agreed by the Committee at its meeting in June 2009 the Committee wished to look at a number of issues relating to the highways in the borough.

This review would look at the work being undertaken to ensure that the highways infrastructure meets the needs of the borough and develops to meet these needs. The Committee will also look at the work to ensure that the Highways damage is managed.

The Committee were aware that there were significant developments proposed for the borough. Members wished to ensure that-

- the developments meet the needs of the residents and road users of the borough,
- that consultation is carried out in the most effective and meaningful way and
- that the developments will have a positive effect on the borough.
- The committee are also concerned that the existing infrastructure is maintained to the highest possible standards and maintenance is carried out efficiently and effectively and coordinated with the work of other utilities.
- The committee will also wish to review the work in ensuring that highways clutter is kept to a minimum given the visual impact this has to the environment of the borough.

To carry out the review the Committee agreed-

- To receive presentations setting out major schemes, consultation arrangements and implementation dates
- To ensure that the masterplan is to be achieved
- To review the overall effect of the master plan and the transport policies.
- To look at maintenance schedules and methods of replacement/ refurbishment and how and when these are carried out and how other utilities are involved.
- To examine the Councils policies and work to reduce highways clutter

Maintenance of the Highway network.

The Committee examined the proposals for the development of the Highways Asset Management Integrated Services (HAMIS) project has now been developing for the last few months as a significant change to the way in which the Borough's roads and other highways facilities are looked after. The review included Council staff in the Highways and Engineering Division of the R & E Department and Capita Symonds staff who provide technical services.

The key issues were outlined as:-

- The condition of the highways asset was in a poor state of repair and getting worse. Too much of the budget is spent on reactive maintenance, as opposed to planned works.
- There was uncertainty about the respective roles of the Council staff and that of Capita Symonds.
- Processes, procedures and IT systems were not fully co-ordinated
- there were potentially significant financial savings and efficiencies to be made.

The HAMIS review had the following features:

- A co-ordinated single programme of works.
- Enhanced neighbourhood working, with the street inspection and highways repairs team working closely together in each of the 5 neighbourhoods.
- Common IT system to control orders, workflow and schedules. This will be based on the EXOR system which is presently used only by Capita Symonds.
- Single budget management and accountability to carefully control expenditure and provide prioritised workflow.
- Single procurement of external contractors.
- Joint branding of the service as “Blackburn with Darwen Highways Service”
- Co-location of staff at Davyfield Road under a single Head of Service post. An open plan office which accommodates 30 positions was being drawn up.

The process for the system was outlined and the importance of the development of the project through joint working with Capita Symonds and that there was a mutual recognition that the highway services delivered by each required improvement, as well as integration with each other. Hence the proposed appointment processes are a combination of Council and CS posts at a senior level. The remainder of the staff structure, covering the operational, inspection and delivery teams was to be implemented during 2010.

The committee were reminded that a key objective was to reduce the budget spent on remedial works and increase the planned investment in the asset. Currently approx 80% of the highways maintenance budget was spent on reactive maintenance, the restructuring and joint planning will assist to drive the network recovery plan and reduce the proportion of budget spent on reactive maintenance. A number of efficiencies and improvements had been identified as part of the HAMIS review. These efficiencies are expected to give rise to a net saving, after the cost of change, of £2.6m over the next six years.

The Committee were informed of the ways that performance would be measured and a major benefit of the system would be an increased emphasis on management and performance and this would be monitored through a set of Key performance indicators developed specifically for this project. These indicators include:

- Monitoring the efficiency gained in productivity
- Additional work carried out from capacity created through efficiency
- Proportion of reactive to planned maintenance work undertaken
- Efficiencies and savings gained

At the last meeting of the year the Committee were to receive a report setting out progress on the development of the system.

Highways Network

The Committee were to look at the development of the strategic highways network for the borough as one of their key topics. At the beginning of the year members were invited to look at the consultation that was being undertaken on the orbital route and this was to be followed up by a full presentation on the findings and proposals for the town centre movement strategy. The decision made by the Executive however was called in and due to the decision being signed by two portfolio holders this was heard by the Policy and Review Committee. This prevented the Committee from completing this item on their work programme. The Committee were also to look at the successful outcome of the bid for funding of the Pennine Reach Scheme at the last meeting however the meeting had to be canceled. The outcome of the bid would have considerable implications for the highways network in the borough.

Recommendations

1. The Committee noted progress on the HAMIS system and requested that this be closely monitored to ensure the improved delivery of highway maintenance services as promised in the report.
2. that a full report and presentation be made to the first meeting of the new municipal year on the implications of Pennine Reach and how and when this will be implemented.

Response to Severe Adverse Weather.

Between the middle of December and the end of January the borough experienced some of the worst winter weather that has been experienced for around 30 years. To assess the Council's response to the conditions it was agreed that the committee responsible for delivery of services to the public and those dealing with maintaining the infrastructure should examine the response to the conditions and the lessons that need to be learned to ensure that we put into place any thing we can to ensure that we cope better in the future.

The Committee were given a full briefing of the issues facing the portfolio who were at the forefront of the council's response to the adverse weather. The Committee were aware of the substantial amount of work that was carried out by staff over and above the normal service needs and how this continued around the clock throughout the period.

Recommendations

Recommendations submitted to the Policy and Review Committee to consider

1. that the Executive member be requested to supply to all members of the Council a copy of the maps showing gritting routes and how these were prioritised to ensure that the traffic infrastructure needs were met this will-
 - Enable all members to respond to residents concerns and questions as they are a first point of contact.
 - Understand the issues facing service deliverers in the borough
 - Enable members to challenge and make recommendations on a local basis relating to their ward on gritting schedules.
2. That a review be undertaken of the provision of gritting bins in the borough to enable a rational approach to be taken to placing and filling of the bins
3. That consideration be given to how the Council uses the emergency plan and coordinates its efforts with emergency services in the borough to the best effect.
4. That levels of grit and salt stockpiled in the borough be increased in line with the recommendations of the Director of Regeneration and Environment.
5. That the Director of Regeneration and Environment be requested to report to the first meetings of the year of this Committee how the review of the strategic routes is progressing and that members be invited to travel along these routes to examine the significance of the routes chosen.
6. That a media campaign be undertaken to ensure that residents were prepared for the winter weather and the issues this brings with it in terms of road conditions etc.
7. That members of the council be included in the electronic weather warning system that is used to in the borough.
8. That the Committee view areas that present particular difficulties to residents in the borough during the summer months and members be given the opportunity to highlight particular cases to the Committee.
9. That the review of salt ordering patterns as put forward by the Director of Regeneration and the Environment be supported to ensure a constant and regulated supply of salt and grit.

10. That the thanks of the Committee be forwarded to those members of staff who went out of their way and above and beyond the call of duty to tackle the issues faced during the severe adverse weather.

These recommendations were submitted to the Policy and Review Committee on 10th March along with recommendation from the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees and at that meeting the recommendations were endorsed. The recommendations were then forwarded to the Executive Board for consideration and response.

Councillor Maureen McGarvey
Chair, Regeneration and Technical Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Trevor Maxfield
Vice Chair, Regeneration and Technical Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Background Documents: Agenda for meetings 2009/10, Minutes of meeting 2009/10, Reports to Policy and Review Committee 2009/10

Recommendations.

Markets

1. Members will recommend that the topic of the market relocation remain a key topic for scrutiny for the next year for the Committee.

Worklessness and employment strategy

2. That training be given to all frontline reception staff to ensure that information given out on business assistance is to a standard expected by the Executive Member
3. that the progress on the implementation of the employment strategy by the Council and its partners be closely monitored by this Committee during the next municipal year.
4. that further mystery shopping tests be carried out to look at the service and information delivered to those making enquiries about business assistance and support.

Highway management and Strategic Highway Network

5. The committee noted progress on the HAMIS system and requested that this be closely monitored to ensure the improved delivery of highway maintenance services as promised in the report.
6. That a full report and presentation be made to the first meeting of the new municipal year on the implications of Pennine Reach and how and when this will be implemented

Severe Weather

7. That the Executive Member be requested to supply to all members of the Council a copy of the maps showing gritting routes and how these were prioritised to ensure that the traffic infrastructure needs were met this will-
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8. That a review be undertaken of the provision of gritting bins in the borough to enable a rational approach to be taken to placing and filling of the bins
9. That consideration be given to how the Council uses the emergency plan and coordinates its efforts with emergency services in the borough to the best effect.

10. That levels of grit and salt stockpiled in the borough be increased in line with the recommendations of the Director of Environment.
11. That the Director of Regeneration and Environment be requested to report to the first meetings of the year of this Committee how the review of the strategic routes is progressing and that members be invited to travel along these routes to examine the significance of the routes chosen.
12. That a media campaign be undertaken to ensure that residents were prepared for the winter weather and the issues this brings with it in terms of road conditions etc.
13. That members of the Council be included in the electronic weather warning system that is used to in the borough.
14. That the Committee view areas that present particular difficulties to residents in the borough during the summer months and members be given the opportunity to highlight particular cases to the Committee.
15. That the review of salt ordering patterns as put forward by the Director of Regeneration and the Environment be supported to ensure a constant and regulated supply of salt and grit.
16. That the thanks of the Committee be forwarded to those members of staff who went out of their way and above and beyond the call of duty to tackle the issues faced during the severe adverse weather