

**REGENERATION AND NEIGHBOURHOODS
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Wednesday 29th January 2014**

PRESENT – Councillors *Surve* (Chair), *Hardman*, *Entwistle*, Nuttall, Hollings, *Khonat*, *Whalley*, *K Foster* and *Cottam*.

Also Present –

Cllr Bateson	Executive Member for Regeneration
Cllr Talbot	Executive Member for Culture, Leisure, Sport & Young People
Andrew Lightfoot	Executive Director (PLACE)
Martin Eden	Director for Culture, Leisure, Sport & Young People
Simon Butt	Associate Director, Capita Management Team
Matthew Joyce	Highways & Engineering Services Manager, Capita
Paul Lee	Officer Support
John Addison	Principal Scrutiny Officer
Sonya Palmer	Scrutiny Officer

RESOLUTIONS

17. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Councillors F. Hussain and Desai.

18. Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th November 2013

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on the 20th November 2013 be agreed as a correct record.

19. Declarations of Interest in items on this Agenda

There were no Declarations of Interest received.

20. Work of the Executive – Corporate Budget Monitoring Report 2013/2014

The Chair welcomed the Executive Member for Leisure, Culture & Young People and the Executive Member for Regeneration to the Meeting. The Executive Members provided an update to the Committee on their areas of the Corporate Budget Monitoring Report 2013/2014.

The Executive Members presented to the Committee an overview and update on items on the Corporate Budget Monitoring Report, highlighting a number of items for Members attention.

The Executive Member for Culture, Leisure, Sport & Young People reported to Members that it was predicted there would be an under spend in the overall budget for his portfolio this year.

In response to questions regarding the statistical information relating to leisure centre attendances, the Executive Member informed Members that the figures and income for quarter 2 were not accurate due to IT issues. Members were assured that the information would be published on future budget monitoring reports.

In response to further questions regarding the windows at Darwen Library, the Director for Culture Leisure, Sport & Young People informed Members that the Council was looking into the cost of the repairs. It was reported that if there was sufficient scope in the portfolio budget, he would look to cover the costs for the windows at Darwen Library to be repaired and restored.

Members raised concerns regarding the profit/loss of the new Skate Park in Darwen. The Executive Member confirmed that it had been agreed the Skate Park would be cost neutral to the Council.

The Executive Member for Culture, Leisure, Sport & Young People reported to Members that the level of support at Bangor Street Community Centre from the Council had been reduced and a development group had been set up to look at ways to generate additional income. Members were informed that the cost to run Bangor Street Community Centre was significantly higher than other Community Centres in the borough as it was a larger property. Members were also advised that once the Council had received an offer that they were happy with then they would be looking to transfer the Community Centre over to the local community.

In response to questions regarding an overspend for planning, concessionary fares and Capita Symonds, Members were informed that there had been less developments and there had also been a decrease in the number of planning applications. The Executive Members further informed Members that due to changes in Government legislation the Council have not been able to charge for certain planning applications.

The Executive Member reported that the Council had funded the cost of cameras for each Civil Enforcement Officer as a safety element due to the increase in personal attacks.

Highway Recovery Programme

As previously requested by the Committee, the Executive Member for Regeneration provided an update on the Highway Recovery Programme to Members.

Members were advised that after the meeting of the 29th January, Highway Maintenance would be transferring to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Housing and Customer Services portfolio.

The Associate Director for the Capita Management Team presented to Members progress of the Highway Recovery Programme which outlined areas within the Borough that had been resurfaced or had received micro-asphalt treatment.

Members were assured that quality control checks were in place to monitor the work carried out by the Council's contractors. Members were also advised that quality control checks had highlighted a small amount of poor quality surfacing within the Borough and as a result Capita had held £40k from the contractor's payment. The Associate Director confirmed the contractors had agreed to replace the surfacing at no extra cost.

The Committee were informed that the value of the network recovery budget for 2013/14 was £2.455m and the value of works yet to be delivered was £0.915m. Members were also informed the micro-asphalt treatment works were 100% complete and surfacing in-lay works were 68% complete. The Associate Director added pre-patching works ahead of 2014/15 surface treatments were 50% complete.

Members were also provided with a list of inlay surfacing and micro-asphalt schemes carried out to date and those due to be completed this financial year.

RESOLVED –

That the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure, Sport & Young People, the Executive Member for Regeneration and Officers be thanked.

21. Regeneration of Town Centre

The Chair asked the Executive Member for Regeneration and the Executive Director (PLACE) to update the Committee on the Regeneration of Town Centre Strategy.

Members were provided with a detailed update on each part of the 12 point plan which included:

- Empty property business rate incentive scheme
- Arte et labore: Stimulating new creative business
- Bring on Fab-Lab
- A vibrant annual town centre cultural events programme
- Kick starting the night time economy
- A zero-tolerance approach to enforcement and ASB
- Maximising our town centre assets
- Easier access and free parking

- Making it cleaner and greener
- Loving our heritage
- The BID and a new approach to governing the town centre
- Effectively marketing 'the place'

The Committee were informed that the regeneration of the town centre had been a priority for many years and there had been some major developments in both Blackburn and Darwen. The Executive Director advised Members that the final stages of the regeneration of the town centre should be achieved in the next 18 months.

RESOLVED –

That the Executive Member for Regeneration and Executive Director (PLACE) be thanked.

22. Committees work programme

The Principal Scrutiny Officer presented to Members a list of recommendations for the Empty Homes Strategy task group based on Members comments and observations.

It was agreed that at the March 2014 Committee, Members would like to receive an update on the Council's Progress on Waste Procurement.

It was further agreed that the Committee will monitor and review progress on tackling scrap metal theft in the Borough. Members were advised that a task group would be set up to meet in February 2014.

Members were reminded that a task group had been set up for 3rd February 2014 were they would receive an overview on Shisha Bars with the Borough.

RESOLVED –

That the recommendations for the Empty Homes Strategy task group be agreed;

1. That the Council's Housing department ensures it has a complete list of empty properties in the borough at all times to ensure that the Council Tax Premium can be applied properly to discourage have properties vacant.
2. That Officers examine the options available to get the most meaningful information possible from the council tax system in respect of empty domestic property reporting.

3. That the Executive Member explore the possibility of receiving a financial contribution from TVH to help fund its partnership working in relation to HCA empty homes funding.
4. That the Executive Member encourages TVH to use local tradesmen to work along side THV to carry out improvements to properties under the Empty homes project.
5. That the Executive Member should look to were possible increase the staffing level in the Empty Properties Group to ensure effective delivery of the strategy.
6. That the Committee recommend the reprioritisation of empty properties (empty just over 6 months) to identify those that can be brought back into use sooner.
7. The Committee recommend increased publicity of successes when empty properties are brought back into use to assist tackling this issue.
8. The Environment portfolio design clear standards and criteria for when enforced sales; compulsory purchases or empty homes management orders procedures should commence.
9. That the Committee request the Executive Member consider changes to the length of time a property can be empty before landlords are charged the Premium Council Tax Rate.
10. That the Committee recommend the Council look to establish a facility whereby it is a landlords responsibility to make sure tenants have bins to enable them to recycle and any replacement bins are charged to the landlord.
11. That the Housing department work with the Council Tax Team to include leaflet / information about empty properties with next annual Council Tax bill to all residents. Also when owners register their vacant properties with Benefits & Local Taxation Team, information should be sent to them outlining the various options available, highlighting penalties to be imposed for failing to comply with the Council's requirements, concerning bringing empty properties back into use.
12. That the Environment Department continues to work closely with other departments and partner organisations to ensure sources of fly tipping in back allies and wards as witnessed by the Committee are further reduced.

Signed.....

Chair of the meeting at which the Minutes were signed

Date.....