



REPORT OF: The Scrutiny Officer

REPORT TO: Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

ON: 16th March 2016.

RE: Committee Work programme 2015-16

1. Purpose of the Report

For Members of the Regeneration and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note the final work programme report for 2015-16 and to review and agree final recommendations for the year.

2. Background

At the first meeting of the municipal year, the Executive Members for Regeneration, Environment and for Neighbourhoods, Housing & Customer Services provided the Committee with an overview of the key priorities and risks for their portfolios for the year.

A detailed list of deliberations was circulated to the Committee and using this information as a guide, the Committee identified target areas that they felt were significant and required further scrutiny.

The following headlines were agreed to be scoped for their work programme for 2015-16;

- Selective Landlord Licensing
- Partnership Working with Blackburn College
- Capital Projects
- The Growth Agenda
- Parking

3. Work programme 2015/16

The following topics have been completed throughout the course of the municipal year;

Selective Landlord Licensing

At the meeting of the 15th July 2015, the Committee received a presentation from the Director of Housing, Localities and Prevention on the department's proposals for the implementation of Selective Landlord Licensing (SLL) in wards across the Borough.

Members held a detailed review of the SLL process from consultation to implementation which included two Task Group meetings and a Site visit.

The Task Group met on the 19th August 2015 to view the Consultation for the Infirmary Ward, this meeting included a Site visit which highlighted significant areas of the departments concern to Members, and on the 9th September 2015 where a prospective Landlord Handbook and information on further licencing schemes were presented.

A briefing note on the Task Group's findings was included within the Agenda for the meeting of the 16th September 2015 for Members attention.

The Committee completed its work on Selective Landlord Licencing and agreed recommendations to be made to the Executive Member for Regeneration (Part 4 of this report).

Partnership Working with Blackburn College

Members requested that the Director of Growth & Prosperity provide the Committee with an outline of how the department works in partnership with Blackburn College and its key partners to increase the skills base, and to attract businesses to the Borough.

Members were advised that the department engaged with partners on two main levels; education and business growth and development. It was noted that the intended outcome of this partnership working was to heighten employability skills, and create employment opportunities.

The Committee noted the ongoing cross partnership work between the Regeneration department and its key partners to assist with building a dynamic, futureproof business environment that would attract professionals and graduates to remain within the Borough.

Capital Projects

At the September meeting, the Committee received a detailed outline of the Council's Capital Projects. This being the Committee's next Scrutiny topic, a Task Group was formed to explore the Projects further and included two site visits to the recently developed Cathedral Quarter.

The visits took place on the 20th October 2015 and the 18th November 2015. Viewing the town centre locations two months apart allowed Members to see how the projects were progressing in their final stages.

A detailed briefing note on the site visits was attached to the Agenda of the 2nd December 2015 meeting of the Committee for Members information.

Members agreed that whilst there were still some aspects to be completed, the Bus Station and Cathedral Quarter development would be fundamental in generating business growth and futureproofing the Borough's economy.

As the current projects were nearing completion, the Committee felt it would be beneficial to receive a presentation on the Growth Agenda which would include key future developments and priority projects for the Borough, and agreed to invite the Executive Director for Place to their January meeting to provide Members an overview of his key priorities moving forwards.

The Growth Agenda

At the meeting of the 27th January 2016, the Committee was presented with an update on the Growth and Development Programme from now until 2020.

Members heard that in achieving success in their key target areas, the department intended to create a prosperous Borough where residents were in employment, education or training, and where businesses created innovative products for international markets.

It was agreed that the Executive Director for Place be invited to the final meeting of the municipal year on the 16th March 2016 to provide Members with a more in-depth presentation on key future developments and priority projects for the Borough, focusing around the Council's growth agenda.

At this meeting, Members also received an update on the new house bonus calculation and how this impacts on the Council.

Parking

In the last municipal Year, the Committee completed an in depth review of parking provision in the Borough, with specific reference to the implementation of 'Free After Three' and Blue Badges. As part of its work programme, Members asked the Executive Member for Regeneration for an update on parking services in the Borough.

At its meeting on the 27th January 2016, the Committee was provided with an outline of the Department's current position on parking across the Borough. Detailed discussions took place around blue badges and the viability of the current 'Free After Three' scheme.

It was noted that the Executive Member for Regeneration was considering changes to the Council's parking provision as a whole and would report back potential options to Members when he was in a position to do so.

The Committee completed its review on parking services with draft recommendations forming part of the Agenda for the final meeting of the municipal year.

Risk

The Committee can demonstrate that in light of the ongoing challenges and cuts the Council faces, Members have considered and revisited the risks identified by the Executive Members at the beginning of the municipal year; to see if they remain the same, had become more or less of a concern, or in an ongoing era of austerity, new risks to portfolios had arisen during the course of the year. This has provided Members with assurance and oversight of the increasing difficulties the Council faces in continuing to deliver services.

4. Previously agreed Recommendations

Selective Landlord Licencing

- 1) That the Committee support the Executive Member in his aims to achieve effective selective landlord license schemes in the Infirmary area/Ewood ward and Darwen town centre.
- 2) That the department explore every avenue/incentive to promote long term tenancy of rented properties in the borough/licensed areas to help promote better long term community spirit.
- 3) That any incentives for landlords where appropriate is covered in the schemes admin cost to mitigate the risk to the Council.
- 4) That the Council's creation of a licensing handbook is user friendly and contains key information in an at a glance fashion, Gas safety contact details, electric etc.
- 5) That the licensing handbook contain a section about and promoting the local community, with key contacts for local groups, Councillors etc. with an explanation of each's role.
- 6) That an example(s) of model tenancy agreements be included in the licensing handbook, to ensure a consistent standard of agreement is reached to assist both landlord and tenants.
- 7) That the Committee support the Executive Member in his pursuit of a landlord kite mark.

- 8) That the Committee would like to see, in addition to the Council's database of rentable properties that the department also looks to create a database landlords.
- 9) That the Executive Member look to explore any opportunity to "invest to save" to improve the boroughs rented housing market and that these are presented to scrutiny pre decision.
- 10) That any licensing handbook be presented to the Committee/task group pre decision.
- 11) That the Committee support (in an attempt to reduce accidents in the home) the use of incentives for landlords and tenants such as free safety equipment, smoke detectors etc. and that the department look to work with key partners (NHS, Public Health, Fire Authority) to minimise/spread costs.
- 12) That further to recommendation 10, the department work with key groups/service providers that landlords would use, such as insurance companies, with the aim to acquire a discount for landlords signed up to the licensing schemes.
- 13) That an electrical certificate be mandatory for all rented housing in a designated licensing scheme and that it be highlighted in the licensing handbook that all properties should have a relevant dated electrical certificate.
- 14) That the Committee request that the Executive Member lobby the Government to make changes to legislation to incorporate a minimum length of tenancy agreement, as the Committee feel that short term tenancies are a large contributing factor to high turnover of tenants and impact on local community.

5. Conclusion

A list of recommendations will be presented at the final meeting of the Committee for Members consideration and deliberation. These recommendations will form an outline for the Annual review of Scrutiny on the 4th April 2016. Members may also wish to consider additional recommendations based on the information and evidence received at the final meeting.

Rebekah Mottershead
Scrutiny Officer