

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

held on Tuesday, 25th October, 2011 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor L Gilbert (Chairman)
Councillor G M Walton (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors G Barton, P Butterill, H Davenport, K Edwards, R Fletcher,
S Hogben and P Hoyland

Apologies

Councillors A Barratt and G Morris

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor D Bebbington

OFFICERS PRESENT

Adrian Fisher – Head of Planning and Housing
Victoria Kell – Housing Options Manager
Dawn Taylor – Cheshire Partnership Gypsy and Traveller Co-ordinator
Daniel Corden – Planning Officer
Rob Shaw – LDA Design
Elizabeth Cooper – LDA Design
James Morley – Scrutiny Officer

139 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

140 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

There were no members of the Committee present who wished to declare any interests.

141 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/ OPEN SESSION

Mr John Jones, a member of the public, was present at the meeting and addressed the Committee. Mr Jones made references to the content of an article in the Crewe Chronicle on 19 October 2011 titled "Gypsies have changed, says leader". Mr Jones went on to make his own comments related to the article.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

The Committee received a presentation on the Council's Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Study from Rob Shaw who represented LDA Design, the consultants on the study. Elizabeth Cooper of LDA Design was also present to assist Rob.

The presentation by the LDA Design representatives summarised the content of the Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Study. The study was designed to inform the development of energy efficiency and renewable energy policies with the Local Development Framework (LDF). The study assessed the feasibility of delivering various types of renewable energy and the total implementable resource, taking account of constraints within the Borough.

The presentation briefly outlined several of the renewable energy technologies that were investigated as part of the study. Maps were used to show potential sites in Cheshire East for various technologies and diagrams illustrating the potential energy yield across the entire borough of each technology were shown.

The purpose of the Study was to identify the borough's potential to inform the Council's decision making. Potential for energy production was high and exceeded the future requirements of the borough. It would be the responsibility of the Council to decide where, when and which technology would be used to fulfil the needs of the borough in the future.

Following the presentation questions were asked and several points were made including:

- There would have to be a balance between preserving the green belt land and fulfilling the boroughs energy needs in the future. There were also aesthetic considerations to take into account, particularly in relation to the installation of wind turbines and photovoltaics.
- The study could be used to inform the decisions of private organisations and community groups as well as the local authority. The potential for sustainable energy production should be considered when making planning decisions and designing new buildings and residential areas.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee note the content of the Climate Change and Renewable Energy Study as presented to the Committee.

The Planning Officer and LDA Design representatives left the meeting

HOUSING STRATEGY

The Committee received a briefing on the proposed Housing Strategy to allow it to offer comments before it was presented to the Cabinet for approval. The Head of Planning and Housing gave a presentation to the Committee to outline the

content of the Strategy document. The presentation covered the importance of housing, the key challenges and the five housing strategy priorities.

Members of the Committee asked questions and made comments about the Housing Strategy document. The points made included:

- There were a lot of aspirations in the strategy document but no mention of the resources that would be required to deliver on the priorities of the Strategy or targets for delivery that could be used to measure and scrutinise performance. The Committee accept the priorities but should be able to measure progress towards achievement of priorities as a Scrutiny Committee.
- There should have been a scheme in place to offer incentives to elderly and vulnerable people to downsize homes in order to free up larger homes for families.
- There was a lot of support for elderly and vulnerable people in social housing but there should also be support for elderly and vulnerable people in private sector housing and those who own their homes.
- It may be difficult to deliver affordable housing during the poor economic climate due to people being unable to afford deposits for houses and obtain mortgages. The Council should help residents with finances and provide resources to increase the supply of affordable housing.
- The five priorities were not weighted and were seen as equally important however the scope of some was larger than others. Limited resources meant it would be hard to deliver everything but the Council would endeavour to deliver on all of the priorities.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee endorse the adoption of a Housing Strategy.
- (b) That the Committee recommend the following amendments be made to the Housing Strategy document:
 - i. That greater recognition be given to renewable energy in the strategy document.
 - ii. That the wording of the “Meet the housing needs for a changing population” section needs to be strengthened to explain plans for downsizing older residents to smaller properties which should also include offering incentive schemes.
 - iii. That there be greater recognition of all tenures and not just social housing, especially for those just above the benefits threshold.

- iv. That the strategy document include boosting support for elderly people with empty properties who wish to sell the property or, equally, rent it out.
- v. That figures referring to the Crewe population be clarified.
- vi. That the strategy makes specific reference to and takes account of the Council's duty to support and care for 16+ care leavers, for whom the Council are Corporate parents.
- vii. That the strategy include measures and targets for progress so that performance can be measured and scrutinised.

144

GYPSY AND TRAVELLER PROVISION

The Committee received a presentation on provision for Gypsies and Travellers from the Cheshire Partnership Gypsy and Traveller Co-ordinator. The purpose of the presentation was to inform the Committee about the requirements for provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites in the borough, the issues with unauthorised encampments and developments and the measures that were being taken to improve the relationships between Gypsy & Traveller communities and the local settled communities.

Questions were asked and points were made including:

- Officers were currently working on recording officer time and finding out the costs to Cheshire East of dealing with unauthorised encampments and transit sites. Costs tended to be a lot higher for those local authorities that did not have a dedicated co-ordination officer.
- A "pitch" was considered to be the space required for one family. This was not definitive as needs varied between families however there were expectations about what it was necessary to provide space for. A target of between 27-42 additional pitches was set for Cheshire East between 2006 and 2011 which the Council has failed to reach. There is also a target for between 19 and 22 additional pitches to be made available between 2011 and 2016.
- It would have been much more effective to be proactive and in control of encampments and transit sites than to be reactive to Unauthorised sites. Accepted site provision needed to be improved and would improve control, relations between travellers and the settled community and generate income for the local authority.
- The planning process for proposed sites needed to be more transparent and communication between traveller and settled communities needed to be developed in order to improve relationships and acceptance of encampments. The Council should take the lead on educating and improving communication and understanding between both sides.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Cheshire Partnerships Gypsy and Travellers Co-ordinator be thanked for attending and the presentation be noted.

The Cheshire Partnership Gypsy and Traveller Co-ordinator left the meeting.

145 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee gave consideration to the Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the current Work Programme is agreed.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 5.10 pm

Councillor L Gilbert (Chairman)

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