

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 5 April 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Cole, Purvis, Sanderson, J A Walker and Williams.

OFFICERS: J Bennington, C Breheny, P Clark, A Crawford and S Joscelyne.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors C & J Hobson, Kerr and Khan.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

No declarations of interests were made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 8 and 15 March 2011 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK – WINTER MAINTENANCE – NATURE’S WORLD

As part of the scrutiny process and in a report of the Executive Office Manager it was reported that the Executive had considered the findings of the Board in respect of Winter Maintenance and the Environment Scrutiny Panel’s Final Report on Nature’s World.

The Executive and the Corporate Management Team had considered and supported the Service Responses.

NOTED

SOCIAL HOUSING – FINAL REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY PANEL

The Chair of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel outlined the Panel’s conclusions and recommendations following a scrutiny investigation on the topic of Social Housing.

The Board considered the following recommendations of the Panel based on the submitted evidence: -

- (i) That a more up to date service contract agreement for the homelessness service be established with Erimus and that a protocol be agreed in respect of adaptations expenditure post 2014.
- (ii) That efforts to deliver new affordable housing within the Town be continued and supported, with an increased focus on securing new affordable housing in areas of the Town where there is currently a low proportion of social housing. All mechanisms available to the Council will need to be maximised in the current economic climate including securing additional units through section 106 agreements, contributing land or assets at nil cost and investing income generated from the New Homes Bonus Scheme in the delivery of affordable homes.
- (iii) That the success of securing affordable housing through section 106 agreements be monitored and annual update provided to the Panel detailing the amount of on-site, off-site and financial contributions to affordable housing that have been secured. A 3-4 year programme also be established to bring a targeted amount of empty homes back into use across the Town.

- (iv) That a focus on increasing the number of intermediate housing market products on offer within the Town be prioritised in an effort to help more people to access the housing market and become owner occupiers.
- (v) That work is undertaken to increase people's understanding of the various intermediate housing market products on offer and to ensure that people within the Town are aware of what is currently available and what is planned for the future. A central register to which people can submit their details if they are interested in receiving information on intermediate housing products to be developed.
- (vi) That LHA claimants be advised in writing of the changes in housing benefit introduced by the Government along with a comprehensive guide on where they can access help in Middlesbrough if they concerns about being unable to meet their rent payments in the year ahead. Efforts to also be undertaken via the landlords' forum to encourage landlords to reduce their rents in line with new LHA rates.
- (vii) That the placing of young people in emergency accommodation be avoided at all costs and that efforts be made to secure additional supported accommodation and move on accommodation for vulnerable young people within the Town. The use of pre-tenancy courses is to also be promoted with social landlords in the Town to help increase the amount of move on provision.
- (viii) That an update version of the Older People's Housing Strategy (2007) be published and a progress report on the action plan contained therein be reported to the Panel on an annual basis.
- (ix) That continued efforts be made to deliver additional extracare units in the Town in order to address the current shortfall in provision. If this objective cannot be achieved in the short to medium term then the upgrading of sheltered accommodation to extracare sheltered accommodation and investment in virtual extracare must be prioritised.
- (x) That an agreement be reached with providers of social housing within the Town on how many upgraded extracare sheltered accommodation units can be provided in the next three years and how the Council can help support to deliver this objective within that period.

The Board acknowledged the concerns expressed by the Panel and sought clarification on a number of areas including the lack of a fair rent scheme which had operated several years ago with private landlords. An indication was also given of the contractual arrangements with Erimus Housing in terms of homelessness. Whilst the statutory duty to prevent and respond to homeless rested with the Council the Homelessness and Housing Advice service had been contracted out to Erimus Housing as part of the housing stock transfer in 2004.

ORDERED that the findings and recommendations of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

SCRUTINY REVIEWS - CONSIDERATION OF REQUESTS

It was confirmed that no requests for scrutiny reviews had been received from the Executive, Executive Members, Non- Executive Members and members of the public since the last meeting of the Board.

NOTED

SCRUTINY PANELS – PROGRESS REPORTS

A report of the Chair of each Scrutiny Panel was submitted which outlined progress on current activities.

ORDERED that the information provided be noted.

CALL IN REQUESTS

It was confirmed that no requests had been received to call-in a decision.