

**HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE  
1 APRIL 2014**

**Present:** Councillor Hacker (Chair);  
Councillors Ballsdon, Benson, Davies, K Edwards, Gittings, Singh,  
Terry, Whitham and Williams.

**15. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of 26 November 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**16. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES**

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

- Community Safety Partnership - 4 December 2013.

**Resolved - That the Minutes be received.**

**17. PETITION REQUESTING A COMMUNAL BIN AT AMITY STREET AND CHOLMELEY ROAD**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report informing the Committee about the receipt of a petition from some residents living in part of Amity Street and Cholmeley Road. A location plan was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and a copy of the petition was attached to the report at Appendix 2.

The petition, containing 21 signatures, read as follows:

"We are the residents living in part of Amity Street and Cholmeley Road, Reading. We wish to bring our inconvenience and hygiene concern issue to your notice. We are advised to place rubbish bags each week for collection. The rubbish bags are being laid in the footpath even in rainy time. This not only gives ugly picture to our streets, but also raises hygiene concern.

None of us want rubbish bags being laid over the footpath. Hence, we submit this petition with request for a communal bin."

The issues raised in the petition were to be fully investigated and a report would be submitted to a future meeting for consideration.

At the invitation of the Chair, lead petitioner, Mr Pattabiraman, addressed the Committee.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That the issue be investigated and a further report submitted to a future meeting;

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(3) That the lead petitioner be informed accordingly.

**18. LOVE CLEAN READING - PRESENTATION**

David Moore, Asset Manager, showed the Committee a short film on Love Clean Reading and informed the Committee that 134 streets in the Borough would be cleaned under the project and that extra resource had been brought in to complete the work. The project also covered areas of open space and areas where there were concerns about anti-social behaviour.

The streets were checked initially to identify the work that had to be carried out after which a schedule was completed. The work was being carried out by a team of six men who would cut grass, cut back vegetation and clear moss, specialists teams would then be called in for tree work and cleaning the streets. Advance warning signs were put up in the streets a week before the work was due to take place in order to inform the residents and when the work was completed residents were given a card asking for their feedback which would be used to inform future work.

The project's progress could be followed on Twitter and Facebook and weekly progress reports were produced, although they could vary due to weather conditions. To date work had been completed on 64 of the 134 streets, 52 tonnes of waste had been removed and 156 feedback cards had been received. 92% of respondents had rated the work as good and 99% supported a deep clean taking place on an annual basis. When the project was completed the feedback received would be used to inform the way forward and whether or not a permanent scheme should be introduced.

**Resolved - That the position be noted.**

**19. COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report presenting the Committee with the Reading Community Safety Partnership new three-year rolling plan that had been based on the findings of the annual strategic assessment.

The report explained that Reading's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) was required to produce a three-year rolling plan. The new plan had been based on the findings of the annual strategic assessment which had identified seven priorities for the CSP to focus on between April 2014 and 2016. The priorities were as follows:

- Burglary of a dwelling
- Shoplifting
- Violence against the person
- Domestic violence
- Situational anti-social behaviour
- Hate crime
- Substance misuse

At its meeting on 10 July 2013 the CSP had formally agreed the priorities and on 4 December 2013 the Executive Group had signed off the Community Safety Plan 2013-

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16. The Community Safety Plan set out the key successes of the partnership during the period of the last plan and in the final year of the plan this had included:

- Overall crime had fallen by 11% (1,690 fewer crimes)
- Burglary had reduced by 34% (431 fewer victims)
- Violent Crime had reduced by 16% (548 fewer victims)
- Car theft had reduced by 15% (16 fewer cars stolen)

The report explained that the Community Safety Plan would be delivered through five strategic delivery groups and would be chaired by officers from across the partnership. The five delivery groups were as follows:

- Domestic Abuse Delivery Group
- Community Based Crime Delivery Group
- Offender Management Delivery Group
- Town Centre Delivery Group
- Drug and Alcohol Delivery Group

Each of the delivery groups had produced an action plan against their priorities.

**Resolved - That the report, the Community Safety Partnership Priorities and the Strategic Delivery Groups' action plans be noted.**

**20. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2014 - 2019**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report presenting the Committee with the revised Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2019, the revised Guides to Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) and Enforced Sales of Empty Homes. The Empty Homes Strategy 2014 - 2019 was attached to the report at Appendix 1, the Guide to Compulsory Purchase Orders was attached to the report at Appendix 2 and the Guide to Enforced Sales of Empty Homes was attached to the report at Appendix 3.

The report explained that the Strategy replaced the 2008/11 Strategy, reflected the lessons that had been learned in that period and included the Government's first ever National Empty Homes Strategy.

The CPO procedure updated the 1997 version and the ESP supported the use of the Law of Property Act 1925. These powers were used as the last resort with empty home owners who remained uncooperative and non-compliant and where the Council saw no reasonable prospect of the home being brought back into use through informal measures.

The report stated that since 2008 over 75 problematic empty homes had been returned to use due to Council intervention and the benefits of the work were set out in the new Strategy. The Strategy retained existing targets and the overall approach, but included external part-funding of the empty homes role and actions arising in response to the Government's National Empty Homes Strategy. Structural achievements since the previous Strategy had included: capital funding, empty home loans, empty dwelling management orders, corporate debt recovery and technical

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reform of Council Tax. The Strategy set out the Council's forms of assistance and range of formal powers used to persuade owners to act, including updated Guides to CPO and Enforced Sales and retained the annual target of bringing 20 high priority long term empty homes back into use per annum.

The Committee discussed the report and agreed that an annual update report should be submitted to future meetings.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That progress being made to implement the Empty Homes Strategy be endorsed;**
- (2) That the Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2019 be approved;**
- (3) That an annual update report be submitted to future meetings.**

**21. TWO WENSLEY ROAD REMODELLING AND REFURBISHMENT**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out the proposal to remodel and refurbish the property at 2 Wensley Road and bring it back into use for homeless households.

The report stated that the numbers of homeless acceptances as at January 2014 stood at 160 and continued to rise. There were currently 57 units of accommodation for use as temporary accommodation with another 15 due to come on-line in the new financial year. Homeless households had to remain in temporary accommodation until such time as they could be re-housed through the Housing Register into permanent accommodation. There were currently 52 households in Bed and Breakfast and a current pressure of £224,000 on the current year's Bed and Breakfast budget. Additional budget provision had been made in the 2014/15 budget to meet a projected pressure of £249,000.

The report explained that it was proposed that the property at two Wensley Road should now be brought back into use to provide much needed temporary accommodation. The property was currently undergoing a feasibility study for refurbishment and the creation of one and two bedroom self-contained units. This would also explore fully whether it was possible to provide any limited parking facilities. Work would also be carried out to ensure that services were in place to minimise as much as possible any problems for local residents that might be created by a minority of tenants and a number of services would be put in place.

It was anticipated that the feasibility study would be completed by the end of the current financial year and a specification would be drawn up by May 2014. The project would be tendered to one subcontractor in order to get the best value for money and an early completion date. The start of work on site was likely to commence in August 2014 with a 12 to 16 week programme of work.

**Resolved - That the property at 2 Wensley Road be brought back into use as temporary accommodation to house statutorily homeless households.**

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**22. SOCIAL HOUSING SUPPLY AND LOCAL AUTHORITY NEW BUILD FEASIBILITY STUDY**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report asking the Committee to endorse the planned review of the Housing Revenue Account, the proposed work to develop a Housing Asset Management Strategy and investment plan and an Option Appraisal for a local authority new build housing programme.

The report stated that in line with good practice set out in the Chartered Institute for Housing (CIH) and Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountancy (CIPFA) 'Voluntary Code for a Self-Financed Housing Revenue Account' it had been proposed to engage external consultants to independently review the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Council's Housing asset management plans. The code was intended to help provide transparency to tenants, members and other stakeholders on how the HRA housing service was being managed to allow housing authorities to assess where they might need further support and assistance and to ensure that the HRA was managed efficiently and effectively to maximise delivery of the Council's current priorities in relation to council housing. This was key in ensuring that the Council's housing stock was maintained over the longer term and met future housing needs.

In order to maximise the supply of affordable housing into the future, it was intended to carry out a feasibility study and full appraisal of the options available to the authority to bring forward a programme of new build homes.

The Committee discussed the report and it was suggested that a report be submitted to a future meeting detailing how money the Council had received under the Right to Buy scheme had been used.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the planned external review of the Housing Revenue Account be endorsed;**
- (2) That the work proposed to develop a Housing Asset Management Strategy and investment plan be endorsed;**
- (3) That an Option Appraisal for Local Authority new build housing programme be endorsed and an update report submitted to a future meeting.**

**23. CORPORATE PLAN 2014-2017: PRIORITIES AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report highlighting the issues, priorities and associated activities in the Corporate Plan for which the Committee had responsibility.

The report explained that the Corporate Plan 2014-17 had been approved by Council on 25 February 2014 (Minute 57 refers). The Plan had highlighted the key issues and challenges the Council wanted to address over the next three years and set out what the Council would do in the form of a prioritised action plan.

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The report detailed the following issues and challenges for the Borough that were of particular relevance to the work of the Committee:

- Housing
- Neighbourhoods and Environment
- Safety
- Sport, Leisure and Culture

The report explained that the Corporate Plan listed four priority areas for the Council over the next three years and that priority three and four were the most relevant to the Committee: an attractive and safe town and good quality public services. The report set out the detailed objectives for the priorities and the associated action plans. The report also set out the delivery approach that would be taken to deliver the priorities.

**Resolved - That the priorities and associated activities set out in the Corporate Plan as they related to the responsibilities of the Committee be noted and endorsed.**

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 7.55 pm).