

CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL – 20TH JULY 2009

Agenda Item 8(i)

CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Lady Patricia Newton
CABINET PORTFOLIO: Housing & Well-Being

Portfolio covers:-

- Housing and Homelessness Strategy
- Health and Well-Being
- Leisure
- Affordable Housing
- Older People

REPORT COVERS ACTIVITY DURING PERIOD COMMENCING 22ND JUNE 2009 AND ENDING 20TH JULY 2009
Housing Strategy

Four workshops to discuss some key housing issues were proposed as part of the research and consultation process for the forthcoming Housing Strategy.

At the time of writing (Tuesday 7th July) the current status of these workshops is as follows:

Workshop	Status
Rural Housing	Completed
The Physical and Social Environment	Completed
Empty Homes	<i>Cancelled – no alternative date yet in place</i>
Older Persons	Arranged for Friday 17 th July 2009

Rural Housing Workshop

 (Friday 27th June 2009)

Representation included the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE), Greenfields Community Housing, Mid Essex PCT, Braintree Association of Local Councils (Chair), Flagship Housing, Icen and Colne Housing Association, BDC, Local Strategic Partnership and a member of the public.

Summary of discussions:

- Former policy allowed for people to be “placed” in villages they didn’t necessarily want to be thus not promoting a community feel to the area. The new choice based lettings system should change this as applicants have greater choice over where they live.
- How shared ownership homes in rural areas and for sale should be marketed and communicated to the local people.
- How local businesses can be maintained in rural areas – a different approach to the provision of rural services could be explored for example merging services where possible.
- Village Agents and Support Services - concerns were expressed that the provision of support services could encourage under-occupancy.
- Identifying housing need – a suggestion for RSL’s to revisit and refresh the housing needs of an area they are developing in nearer to when the scheme is due to be started.

Physical and Social Environment Workshop

(Monday 29th June 2009)

Representation included Councillor John Baugh, Mid Essex PCT, Home Group (New Development and Housing Management), Greenfields (New Development and Antisocial Behaviour (ASB)), BDC (Community Development and Planning Policy).

Summary of discussions:

- Tenant involvement with new development – the nature of the Bailey Bridge Road scheme allowed for extensive resident involvement the needs of the existing residents could be tailored for.
Greenfields have set up service user groups to ensure their new developments are meeting the required needs.
- Accessibility and adaptability – how can we ensure new units are completed to the correct set?
- Neighbourhoods – historic design of housing blocks typically promotes ASB. Ensure Community Development teams are involved in the development process of new housing schemes.
- Service charges – a suggestion for planning guidance to include a note stating management agent's fees must be affordable as they can be particularly high.
Explore through the Braintree Housing Partnership how RSL's can easily identify correct responsibility for areas.
- Key neighbourhood contacts – help the public identify the most suitable contact for their neighbourhood concerns more easily.
The BDC Community Development team circulated a calendar throughout BDC detailing all their activities with the public – this could be something we may consider.

The Draft Housing Strategy has now been presented to the three Local Committees for comment.

Three Dragons Viability Study

Three Dragons is a consultancy that has developed a spreadsheet based model with the capacity to calculate whether the proposed affordable housing provision on a new development scheme is viable. Their model has been accepted by virtually all mainstream developers and has been used across London and the South East and is known as the Three Dragons Viability Toolkit.

The model requires raw data specific to the Braintree housing market in order to work, for example:

- Build costs
- Land values
- Property prices

The workshop to gather this raw data was held on Wednesday June 24th with representatives from the following groups attending:

- Developers
- Planning consultants
- LA Planning (BDC and other LA's)
- LA Housing
- Registered Social Landlords

Health & Wellbeing

Health Profiles

The latest Health Profile for Braintree has recently been published and has been circulated to all Members.

Key issues to note are:

- Health of people in Braintree generally better than the England average
- No locality falls into most deprived but some health inequalities e.g. Men in most affluent area live 5 yrs longer than in deprived areas
- Rising obesity in adults and children
- Rising number of adults who are physically inactive.
- Need to reduce smoking and increase healthy eating

Village Agents Conference

The VA Conference held on 17/6 was well attended and gave comprehensive details of this Local Strategic Partnership Pilot Project. Led by the RCCE the Village Agents Manager has now been appointed and will start in August. More details to follow in due course.

Health Presentation at Witham Local Committee

Unfortunately this had to be cancelled at short notice (due to sickness) and arrangements are being made to have a special meeting to hear this presentation from the NHS on the Care Review for Witham sometime late July or early Aug.

Leisure

Witham Replacement Pool

Following consideration by the Witham Local Committee of a number of options for the replacement of swimming facilities in Witham, Cabinet has requested a further report and full costings before reaching a final decision.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING:

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