

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

4 APRIL 2016 - 2:30PM



PRESENT: Councillor Yeulett (Chairman), Councillor Mrs Hay (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Mrs Bucknor, Buckton, Mrs Davis, Mrs Laws, Mason, Mrs Mayor

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Murphy, Oliver, Sutton and Tanfield.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Garratt

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Jane Bailey (Member Services and Governance), John Carey (Press Officer), Richard Cassidy (Corporate Director), Anna Goodall (Head of Governance and Legal Services), Sarah Gove (Housing and Communities Manager), Steve Hammond (Private Sector Housing Officer), Dan Horn (Head of Housing and Community Support), Phil Hughes (Head of Leisure Services)

OSC35/15 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 15 February 2016 were agreed and signed.

Matters Arising

Councillor Yeulett made reference to the fact that Roddons were yet to come back to the panel with answers to some questions put to them at the Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting which took place on 15 February 2016. He informed the panel that a letter had been sent to follow up the questions.

*** FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL ***

OSC36/15 FENLAND TOURISM BOARD UPDATE

Members considered the Fenland Tourism Board Update presented by Councillor Tanfield.

Members asked questions made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Councillor Yeulett stated that it would have been helpful to have had sight of the presentation and information prior to the meeting and asked how long it had been ready. Councillor Tanfield explained that the details had just been agreed by the Tourism Partnership, she added that the panel can now overview the plan and have some input into that moving forward;
2. Councillor Yeulett asked if the plans for the Tourism Partnership are deliverable within the current budget. Councillor Tanfield stated that we have 2 years to create the revenue stream to be self-sufficient. We have a great team working on changing and developing the new website. It is about getting things on the site that people want to see at the right times and the partnership are feeding into this, so far it is going well and we hope it continues to;

3. Councillor Mason suggested that Town and Parish Councils have some representation on the Tourism Partnership as there is lots going on that the Partnership are unaware of. Councillor Tanfield stated that the Tourism Board previously worked in that way, it was changed as it was agreed that they needed to look at it from more of a commercial point of view. She added that they are keen to retain the communications with Town and Parish Councils but do not want the partnership to be too Council orientated;
4. Councillor Mrs Mayor stated that unless there is a link with the Town and Parish Councils how will you know what is going on, we do not expect to be part of the partnership but there should be a link. Councillor Tanfield stated that we are looking at having local links with people that are interested in the area, we want to have those links in place, but we will not be able to publicise every local event;
5. Councillor Mrs Davis suggested that the contact details should be circulated to Town and Parish Councils so that they can pass on information about events in their area. Councillor Tanfield confirmed that these details have already been circulated but agreed to re-circulate them. She added that the partnership have tried to make contact personally too by attending Town Council meetings so that when the emails arrived they would have some understanding behind them;
6. Councillor Sutton stated that each Town and Parish should nominate one person and let the partnership know who the contact is for clarity;
7. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that no Town or Parish Council would be offended if every event was not publicised on the Fenland Website as they will have their own methods of advertising local events, she added that she would be happy to include a link to the Tourism Partnership website on their Town Council website;
8. Councillor Mrs Hay asked when the selling of advertising space on the site and booking links would be live and is the partnership approaching companies with regards to advertising opportunities. Councillor Tanfield confirmed that the partnership has been approached already but wanted to ensure that they have a strategy in place before embarking on any advertising agreements. The partnership have also agreed that advertising is related to tourism in some way. She added that the bookings aspect of the site would be operational in around a year's time as we want to ensure that the website is going in the right direction before we go out and speak to businesses about the availability of the booking facility;
9. Councillor Yeulett stated that we are approaching peak season and asked what have the partnership done to prepare for this. Councillor Tanfield stated that at the moment social media is getting people interested in events coming up, upcoming events will start to be a focus on the website for people planning trips to the area. She added that the partnership have tried advertising on social media and have found out what works best for them, mistakes will be made during these early stages but lessons will be learnt to improve things moving forward;
10. Councillor Yeulett asked if there are any indications on take-up following advertising. Councillor Tanfield stated that there are programmes that can measure this but they cost a lot of money, we have been contacting businesses to ask how it is going for them and have looked at the areas that our visitors travel from to focus advertising in particular areas;
11. Councillor Mrs Davis asked what has been put in place to advertise the Tour of Cambridge event that is coming up. Councillor Tanfield stated that planning has gone into publicising this event on the website, cyclists on the home page and lots of focus on the event as it approaches. She added that they have met with representatives from the Tour of Cambridge to discuss what other events can take place whilst roads are closed in towns and villages to facilitate the event;
12. Councillor Yeulett stated that the strategy shows 3 clear aims, he asked how these aims are going to be demonstrated. Councillor Tanfield stated that because the partnership are so website orientated we will have an indication of hits on the website, and how long they stay on the site;

13. Councillor Yeulett asked how we will know how many new visitors the website generates. Councillor Tanfield stated that computer programmes to work that detail out are expensive but when the booking facility is available we will be able to capture much more information. Ideas have been put forward to generate interest on the website like photographic competitions, where visitors submit photos following a visit to the area;
14. Councillor Buckton stated that the aims of the partnership do not promise to increase the numbers of visitors into Fenland but to promote the area, and we have said that we will do what we can to measure that. He added that for the Tourism Partnership this is a summer of evolution, developing the partnership to its full potential with local businesses, this is a new approach in its very early stages;
15. Councillor Mrs Davis asked how many are involved in the Partnership. Councillor Tanfield stated that there is small working group and partners that we talk to who when we are looking at ideas and feedback. It is about making sure that we have the right information available on the website at the right times for anyone that might be interested in it;
16. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked how the partnership will be able to measure their success. Councillor Tanfield stated that in October we have a meeting planned with partners to discuss what we have got right and wrong so far and will use that as our first measure of success. We will be running 2 more of these events to get partners together and we will make sure we are listening and reacting to comments and input from the partners at those events;
17. Councillor Mrs Davis stated that unless you can show the website is working you will not get any interest from people wanting to advertise, so that will be a good measure of its success;
18. Councillor Tanfield stated that we cannot make people want to be involved in tourism in the area but we want to make it easy for anyone that is interested;
19. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for clarification of the budget. Councillor Tanfield stated that finances are being drawn up and we are looking at costing's at the moment. She agreed to feedback to the panel at a later date with regards to the financial details;
20. Councillor Yeulett thanked Councillor Tanfield for attending today and answering the questions put forward by the panel, he added that the website is looking much better and he is looking forward to seeing the partnership's progress moving forward.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the Cambridgeshire Fens Tourism Partnership Update and made the following recommendations:

- Town and Parish Councils to nominate a link person to the Tourism Partnership;
- A peak season review to be carried out to look at an approach to measure the outcomes;
- Financial forecast to come back to the panel when it has been finalised.

(Councillor Buckton expressed a non-pecuniary interest in this item by virtue of the fact that he is a member of the Tourism Partnership Team he would not be participating in this item; however he agreed to answer questions if necessary.)

OSC37/15 SELECTIVE LICENSING SCHEME FOR WISBECH

Councillor Sutton presented the Selective Licensing Scheme for Wisbech Report to the panel. He thanked the panel for bringing this forward as an 'overview' matter stating that the consultation is about half way through and that comments from the meeting today will be included in the consultation document.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Richard Cassidy asked members if the consultation has gone out to the right people and is 10 weeks long enough;

2. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that we have a lot of absentee landlords and asked how they will be reached. Richard Cassidy agreed that will always be an issue, but we are leaving the information with tenants in the properties and with letting agents;
3. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that there are many examples of this in the area that she lives in and asked if she could have some additional copies of the leaflets in other languages for tenants to pass on to landlords where possible. Dan Horn agreed;
4. Councillor Yeulett asked if there is a landlord's forum, and what is the general feeling from landlords so far. Richard Cassidy confirmed we have been working with the National Landlords Association to run an event in Fenland for Landlords. The initial response is that most do not think that Selective Licensing is a good idea, many people are not professional landlords, have the additional property to let as an investment and do not realise their responsibilities;
5. Councillor Yeulett asked what the incentives are for landlords, what difference this will make for them. Richard Cassidy stated that if you have a market town where properties are improved and people feel safer and happier about the area that they live in, that is good for your business. If people feel it is a better area they will be happy to live there and may even pay a little more rent;
6. Councillor Sutton stated that most landlords feel that the Selective Licensing Scheme is a good idea, but are unhappy that they have to pay for it;
7. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she supports the Selective Licensing Scheme and feels that it will enhance many properties, she added that her only concern is that good landlords could be penalised. Richard Cassidy stated that it is unlikely that a landlord would describe themselves as bad. The key idea behind the scheme is to improve private rented housing standards in the area for all, which should result in Landlords getting better tenants, but to get to that point it is felt that the scheme will only be successful if all landlords are brought into the project;
8. Councillor Mrs Mayor stated that the theory is that this scheme will bring the bad landlords up to the standards of the good landlords. Richard Cassidy stated that this is why it is important to get everyone involved in the scheme;
9. Councillor Mrs Davis stated that the payment is just a few pounds a week. Richard Cassidy stated that officers are looking to see if there might be a the opportunity to offer early bird discounts as an incentive to landlords;
10. Councillor Buckton stated that this scheme will identify the good landlords, bad landlords are not a member of the National Landlord Association and so maybe discounts can be offered to these members. Richard Cassidy stated officers are looking at tweaking the charges so that discounts can be offered. However the National Landlord Association do not look at property standards, members simply pay to become a member;
11. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if there is a Wisbech Landlords Association. Dan Horn confirmed that there is an Eastern Landlords Association;
12. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked how many were in attendance at the event for Landlords which took place at the Boathouse. Richard Cassidy confirmed that there were approximately 30 in attendance;
13. Richard Cassidy asked members if they felt that an early registration discount should be applied and if there should be two fees in place, one for HMO's and another for privately rented accommodation. He stated that perhaps the HMO registration should cost more as it would cost more to inspect those properties. He added that another question is that the scheme is running for 5 years, but what happens if you join in year 3, and what if it is a new home;
14. Councillor Yeulett asked who is responsible for the Council Tax in these properties. Richard Cassidy stated that the tenant is liable for Council Tax if it is a family let or the landlord if it is a HMO;
15. Councillor Mrs Hay stated that it would be unfair to a new landlord joining part way into the scheme to have to pay the full amount, she suggested that there be a fee for the initial inspection and then a sliding scale partial fee depending when you join;

16. Councillor Mrs Laws asked what the plans are with regards to policing of the scheme after the setup is complete. Richard Cassidy stated that we already have inspectors on our staff and would need to recruit some additional qualified inspectors moving forward;
17. Councillor Mason asked for clarification that Housing Associations are not subject to these inspections. Richard Cassidy confirmed that they follow a different regime and we are meeting with Roddons to go through some current issues. He added that if you are in a Housing Association property you will know who your landlord is and know your rights and it is issues around a perceived slow response to dealing with problems tenants raise that seems to be causing concern;
18. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if Officers have visited other Councils and discussed the issues that they have encountered. Richard Cassidy stated that officers have been in close liaison with Officers at Peterborough and have recently met officers from Doncaster, these meetings have been very helpful;
19. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that she has heard that the questionnaire sent out has been criticised and asked how this was produced. Richard Cassidy stated that officers worked closely with officers at Peterborough and had based our questions on a survey that they had successfully used;
20. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if we will need to have a separate team to deal with this. Richard Cassidy stated that we will not require a separate team, we already have a lot of experience within the team, but would need additional inspectors to survey the properties;
21. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if the team will be based in Wisbech or at Fenland Hall. Richard Cassidy stated that these details have not been finalised but they will spend most of their day in Wisbech;
22. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that it would be a good idea for members to have a single point of contact. Richard Cassidy agreed that is a good idea. He said that an email address is also being launched for members to make contact with Circle Roddons to deal with problems members may become aware of in connection with social housing provision;
23. Councillor Mrs Davis stated that the enforcement of this scheme has to be good or it will fall apart, she asked for clarification that the fee included the cost of enforcement. Richard Cassidy stated that we cannot charge for enforcement of non-licensed landlords within the scheme however there are elements of enforcement that can be charged for;
24. Councillor Mrs Hay asked for clarification with regards to the Computer software that will be used. Richard Cassidy stated that we have a general database and will work with the suppliers to set up the system to meet our needs;
25. Councillor Mrs Hay asked if this cost will be built into the fees. Richard Cassidy stated that there are elements in the fees for the administrative setup;
26. Councillor Yeulett stated that it is important that we make the emphasis on prevention and get the message to the landlords that this will benefit them and the area. Richard Cassidy agreed stating that it has close links with Wisbech 2020;
27. Councillor Yeulett asked how the success of this scheme will be measured in 5 years' time. Richard Cassidy stated that we would have identified private sector rented property that we did not know about previously, the condition and safety of properties would have improved and that anyone that is registered as part of this scheme that we did not know about previously, properties that have improved and that we have driven out rouge landlords. We would also hope to have an effect on overall deprivation in the area, but these are very long term changes;
28. Richard Cassidy asked if 10 weeks was long enough for the consultation, and if the right people have been asked to complete it. Members agreed that 10 weeks was long enough;
29. Councillor Mrs Hay stated that some landlords will do the minimum work to bring their property up to meet the standards, she asked if any thoughts had been given to a grading system. Richard Cassidy stated we cannot ask that they do any more than to meet the minimum standard, although we could consider some form of voluntary grading scheme in the future;
30. Councillor Buckton stated that he felt there was no merit to having a score as part of this scheme;

31. Councillor Buckton stated that the use of language in the information leaflet was not clear, he added that it refers to 'HMOs' but does not say what this means. There is also reference to 'fit and proper' and asked for clarification about this. Richard Cassidy agreed to feedback to officers with regards to the language used. The term 'fit and proper' is a statutory term, the guidance and legislation explains it in greater detail but we will make reasonable decisions and look at each case on its merits. He agreed that some of the conditions have a slight 'wooliness' and we would look at this as part of the consultation work although having some leeway in the standards allows for some officer discretion;
32. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked what happens when a landlord registers, will they receive a registration or licence number? If so tenants should have access to that number so that they can report any queries. Richard Cassidy stated that currently the system works on addresses, but agreed to discuss further the idea of a licence number;
33. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that if it is a brand new property it would seem unfair that the landlord would need to pay the same fee. Richard Cassidy stated that we are looking at a pro-rata fee on the basis that the landlord has certificates for the new building however inspections would still need to take place;
34. Richard Cassidy stated that with regards to the fees there will need to be further discussions to finalise these moving forward;
35. Councillor Buckton stated that rather than a discount for a good landlord, maybe a partial refund if all the criteria are met within a reasonable timeframe. Richard Cassidy stated that this has been considered as those landlords will cost the scheme less overall;
36. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked when the scheme will be going live. Richard Cassidy stated that there is no fixed timeframe at the moment but we would hope to have the scheme in place for 2017;
37. Councillor Sutton thanked the members for their input today and the work on Operation Pheasant that has fed into this proposed scheme;
38. Richard Cassidy stated that he is keen to keep the dialog going and asked members to let him know if they have any other ideas, feedback or comments that they think would be useful;
39. Councillor Yeulett thanked officers and members for their comments and questions today.

OSC38/15 ITEMS OF TOPICAL INTEREST

Members discussed Items of Topical Interest as follows:

1. Councillor Yeulett stated that Councillor Mrs Hay, Councillor Mrs Davis, Geoff Kent and Anna Goodall had attended a Joint Scrutiny Training session.
 - Councillor Mrs Hay stated that they had picked up a book at the training and agreed to circulate on online link for this book to all overview and Scrutiny Panel members;
 - Councillor Mrs Hay stated that she had found the event very useful explaining that she had thought about where this panel might make use of Joint Scrutiny. She suggested Roddons and ARP as there would possibly be the same scrutiny meetings taking place in various authorities and they could come together and scrutinise jointly;
 - Anna Goodall reminded members that previous joint scrutiny arrangements which we have been involved in, for example, Domestic Violence and Education Attainment have worked well. She stated that the arrangements would have to be slightly different now as the County Council have a Committee system but suggested that it is something that this panel might want to look at in the future;
2. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she has been concerned about some articles that have been published in the newspaper about Roddons. She added that she cannot understand why the Roddons officers that attended the previous Overview and Scrutiny Meeting had still not responded to questions from the panel that day. Councillor Yeulett agreed and

stated that a letter has now been sent asking that those questions are answered. Richard Cassidy stated that he has a meeting arranged with the Regional Manager and agreed to follow up too. He added that a member hotline would be launching in the next few weeks to enable members to report any concerns or issues;

3. Councillor Yeulett stated that he is concerned that officers are pushing back items on the work programme and asked that they follow the programme;
4. Councillor Mrs Bucknor reminded officers that members need to have sight of the reports and presentations prior to the meeting, as it is difficult for the panel to scrutinise effectively on the day;
5. Councillor Yeulett asked for an update with regards to the Cabinet Appraisals. Anna Goodall confirmed that she is looking at other authorities to see how they do this, she agreed to feedback to Councillor Yeulett;
6. Councillor Buckton stated that the Leader had agreed in principal but was concerned with regards to some legal issues surrounding the meetings. Anna Goodall agreed to investigate further. Councillor Yeulett asked if a meeting could be arranged with himself, Councillor Mrs Hay and Councillor Buckton to move forward with this. Anna Goodall agreed to circulate some dates;
7. Councillor Yeulett stated that in the Cabinet Meeting which took place a vulnerable people Overview and Scrutiny Report from Peterborough was referred to, he asked if officers could locate this report. Councillor Sutton confirmed that this was as part of their selective licensing meeting. Anna Goodall agreed to investigate.

OSC39/15 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Future Work Programme 2015/16 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Members agreed the Future Work Programme 2015/16 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

5.20pm

Chairman