

# **POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**Date:** 14 March 2011

**Venue:** East Northamptonshire House, Cedar Drive, Thrapston

**Time:** 7.30 pm

**Present:** Councillors:-

**Richard Lewis (Chairman)**  
**Glennil Greenwood-Smith (Vice-Chairman)**  
**Steven North (Leader of the Council)**  
**Philip Hardcastle (Deputy Leader of the Council)**

**Wendy Brackenbury**  
**Glenn Harwood MBE**  
**Sylvia Hughes**

**Sean Lever**  
**Andy Mercer**  
**John Richardson MBE**

## **431. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2011 were approved and signed by the chairman.

## **432. APOLOGIES**

Councillors David Brackenbury, Pauline Bradberry, Lisa Costello, Roger Glithero and Peter MacGovern sent their apologies.

## **433. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Andy Mercer declared a personal interest in item 7, Homelessness Grant 2010/11 – Requests for Funding, as he had recommended grants to East Northamptonshire Community Services from another body in the last year. Councillor Richard Lewis also declared a personal interest in item 7 as he knew Rev Mark Lees of East Northants Community Services. They both remained in the room and took part in the discussion and voting on this item.

## **434. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.3**

There were no questions.

#### **435. NENE VALLEY NEWS**

Further to minute 14 (13 September 2010), the committee considered the potential impact of the revised Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, and the restriction on the publication of free council newspapers to no more than four times a year, on its decision to continue with a fortnightly publication of the Nene Valley News (NVN). During discussion members commented that

- The code of practice was a recommendation not a legal requirement;
- A precedent of fortnightly publication of NVN had already been set;
- NVN adhered to the seven principles set out in the code and its content was strictly monitored;
- the committee had put forward detailed reasons for continuation of a fortnightly publication at its meeting on 13 September
- the contract would include an escape clause to allow the council to terminate the contract if a successful challenge was made.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the continuation of a fortnightly Nene Valley News for the next two years be approved.
- (2) That the completion of the procurement process be approved, subject to the inclusion of an escape clause to allow the council to terminate the contract if a successful challenge is made or the law is changed.

*(Reason – to ensure timely and effective communication with residents in East Northamptonshire.)*

#### **436. AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

The committee discussed and evaluated possible future policy options in relation to affordable housing. The options debated were:

1. Seek to take forward local lettings policies for all new affordable housing developments in villages, and for certain affordable housing developments in towns.
2. Seek to take forward/adopt targets of up to 40% for the north of the district (Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan area) and 30% for the south of the district (proposed Four Towns Plan area) through the Housing Strategy, on a site-by-site basis, and in any forthcoming development plan documents.
3. Seek to deliver a broader range of affordable tenures on sites; to include the delivery of affordable rent.
4. Deliver an element of low cost market housing on sites where appropriate.
5. Deliver some affordable units off-site, subject to alternative sites being available, and further legal advice.

During discussion the following points were made:

- The importance of distinguishing between social and intermediate housing and developing separate targets for each in future plans/policies.
- Whether to set minimum as well as maximum limits on targets – It was noted that minimum targets had been rejected by the inspector on the Rural North, Oundle

and Thrapston Plan, but that members would always have the option to refuse a planning application if they did not think enough affordable housing was being proposed.

- Concern about the strength of a lack of enough affordable housing as a reason for refusal of a planning application.
- Concern that housing need and settlement need were open to interpretation and could be contradictory – it was felt that a better way of defining what the council wants and what evidence should be used to support it was needed. Officers commented that the judgement was based on the information available and that only very small villages had settlement figures.
- The importance of ensuring there was the right mix of housing in the right place and the ratio of need to delivery was in line with neighbouring areas.
- The need to prevent people being priced out of local villages.
- The affordability gap between wages and house prices had widened in rural areas.
- Although property prices had decreased in the private sector, difficulty in getting finance had driven up demand in the private rental market. Proposed changes to the benefits system would also make the private rental market harder to access.
- Whether local lettings policies should be developed for urban areas not just smaller settlements.
- How to achieve a more proportionate spread of affordable housing across the district within the current site-led process.
- By the end of 2011, new legislation would introduce a duty on the council to develop a tenancy strategy and the concept of flexible (i.e. shorter than life-time), means-tested tenancies.
- Option 4 did not fall into the definition of affordable housing and might be difficult to implement in practice as it would not be easy to design who would benefit from access to such a scheme.
- All options could be taken forward without the need to be written into development plans at this stage, albeit they would be taken forward formally as part of future plans and strategies.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That members be minded to take forward options 1, 2, 3 and 5.
- (2) That the need to develop separate targets for the two different types of affordable housing be noted.
- (3) That local lettings policies be strongly favoured.
- (4) That members' views be put forward as part of the review of the Core Spatial Strategy, Housing Strategy and Tenure Strategy.

*(Reason – to enable officers to take forward policies and targets in relation to affordable housing.)*

#### **437. HOMELESSNESS GRANT 2010/11 REQUESTS FOR FUNDING**

The committee considered two requests for funding from the Homelessness Grant 2010/11.

Bromford Carinthia Housing Association had requested £3,900 to provide a drop-in service for people living in the district who require housing related support. Members noted that

Bromford operated a support service delivering free support to people at home but wished to extend its service to provide a twice weekly drop-in facility in Rushden, which would enable households on its long waiting list or those just looking for some short term advice to access a service. The service would directly prevent homelessness by helping people to maintain their tenancies and mortgages. Members commented that they would like to see the outcomes of such projects when funded by the Homelessness Grant in the future.

East Northants Community Services (ENCS), formerly known as the Rushden Night Shelter, had submitted an application for £2,334.88 for a number of initiatives, including employer contribution towards NVQ/apprenticeship in 'Information Advice and Guidance', its food parcel collection scheme, an organisation uniform and enhanced security alarms. For the last three years (including this year), the council had provided grant funding towards ENCS's night shelter service of approximately £5,000 per year. Members commented that they sought to allocate funding from the Homelessness Grant to fund initiatives that would directly prevent or reduce homelessness and that the funding requested would go towards the general running of ENCS rather than specific homelessness prevention projects.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That Bromford Carinthia Housing Association's request for funding from the Homelessness Grant 2010/11 be granted.
- (2) That East Northants Community Services' request for funding from the Homelessness Grant 2010/11 be refused.

*(Reason – to prevent or reduce homelessness.)*

**438. FUNDING FOR THE HIGHAM FERRERS MASTERPLAN**

The committee considered a report seeking the release of a maximum of £50,000 to enable consultants to be commissioned to undertake a masterplanning exercise for Higham Ferrers, which would explore community priorities for the future improvement and development of the town. Masterplanning exercises had been carried out in Rushden and Raunds. These have led to clear identification of community priorities for improvement and development, including an action plan for delivery. Public consultation on a Master Plan for Irthlingborough was due to start mid-March. Members noted that the resulting town master plan would play an increasingly important role in the following activities:

- helping the town council focus its resources or activities
- providing evidence for the preparation of funding bids
- informing the allocation of any monies devolved to the town council from the New Homes Bonus
- identifying any local infrastructure requirements for the Local Infrastructure Plan or which may be suitable for inclusion in the Community Infrastructure Levy process.

Members were concerned about the degree of weight masterplans could have as material planning considerations but noted that they were not specifically Development Control documents.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the request from Higham Ferrers Council for funding for consultants to prepare a master plan for the town be noted.

- (2) That officers be authorised to seek external funding for the master plan.
- (3) That if attempts to secure such funding prove unsuccessful by the end of June 2011 or require an element of match funding, up to £50,000 be released from the revenue reserve for regeneration to enable the work to take place in 2011/12.

*(Reason – Use of consultants to develop the plan will provide timely information to inform the review of the local planning framework.)*

#### **439. RUSHDEN HIGH STREET IMPROVEMENTS**

Further to the committee's decision on 11 October 2010 to allocate up to £785,000 to Rushden High Street improvements to enable design work to be carried out on phases 1, 2 and 3 and phases 1 and 2 to be implemented (minute 209 refers), members were asked to allocate part of the capital budget to enable the link between phases 1 and 2 to be completed at the same time. It was hoped that the full amount would not be needed. Officers confirmed that they and the project team had been liaising closely with local traders on the project and members were reassured that this request constituted a change in phasing rather than a change to the overall design or plan.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the allocation of up to £250,000 from the capital budget for town centre regeneration for 2011/12 for linking phases 1 and 2 of the improvements to Rushden High Street be approved.

*(Reason - To enable work on the link between phases 1 and 2 of the Rushden High Street improvements project to proceed.)*

#### **440. CHANGES TO PART 5.7 OF THE CONSTITUTION (CODE OF PRACTICE – LICENSING PROCEDURES)**

Members considered a report recommending amendments to part 5.7 of the constitution to allow ward members serving on the Licensing Committee to sit on a panel determining a liquor, public entertainment or gambling licence for premises affecting their ward or which will have a significant impact on that ward. The changes would entitle Licensing Committee ward members to sit on a panel unless they chose not to serve and to represent the views of their constituents instead. This would be consistent with the situation which applies to Development Control Committee ward members.

#### **R.15 RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND:**

That the changes to part 5.7 of the constitution, as set out at page 745 be approved.

*(Reason – to introduce the opportunity for ward members serving on the Licensing Committee to be involved in decision making on applications affecting their ward)*

**Chairman**