

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 27 September 2017 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor J. Reid
(Chairman, in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Armstrong, E.
Beynon, J.
Cartie, E.
Dunbar, C

Dunn, E
Gallacher, B.
Gibson, R.
Swithenbank, I.C.F.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Riddle, J. Planning, Housing and Resilience

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

P. Hedley
M. McCarty
P. Jones

S. Nicholson

Chief Fire Officer
Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Director of Local Services and Housing
Delivery
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor W. Pattison.

15. MINUTES

Councillor Gallacher referred to item 11.3 Interim Planning Policy Position Statement and reported that his comment stating that “due to the removal of the NCC Core Strategy by this Administration, I cannot support any bridging document that will make the County vulnerable to developers” should have been included in the minutes.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Communities and Place OSC, held on 26 July 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record, subject to the above amendment, and signed by the Chairman.

16. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the latest Forward Plan of key decisions (October 2017 - January 2018). (Forward Plan enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

17. CABINET REPORTS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised members of Cabinet decisions regarding issues previously commented on and been subject of report by this Committee. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

18. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

The Committee were advised that the following reports would be considered by the Cabinet on 10 October 2017. The Committee were asked to comment on the proposals contained in the reports.

(1) Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Fire and Rescue Plan (Integrated Risk Management Plan) 2017-2021

Paul Hedley, assisted by Mark McCarty, presented the outcomes of the *Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Fire and Rescue Plan (Integrated Risk Management Plan) 2017-2021* consultation. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

The Committee welcomed the report and noted that it would be subject to annual review to ensure that any emerging risks would be identified and incorporated in the Plan.

With regard to the proposal to implement a charging scheme for persistent Fire Alarm (Apparatus) callouts, members were assured that consultations would continue with businesses and advice given where appropriate, prior to any charges being made.

Members were advised that changes to the Council's Leadership since the election in May had not affected the core risks in the Plan, although Councillor Riddle

reported that he had influenced the framing of the questions in the consultation document.

RESOLVED that the Chairman advise Cabinet that the Committee supports the recommendations contained in the report.

(2) Community Housing Fund

Paul Jones presented this report which provided members with the details of the Community Housing Fund allocation that had been received by the Council to support the delivery of Community Led Housing and would seek approval of the Community Housing Fund Policy which set out how the fund may be utilised and applications for funding would be considered. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

The Committee welcomed the £1.34m to support the delivery of Community Led Housing. However, there was some concern regarding the viability of affordable housing schemes where income from rents were insufficient to meet long-term maintenance and refurbishment costs, particularly if no further allocations were available from the Community Housing Fund. Members were advised that applications for support from the Fund had to be able to demonstrate their long-term financial sustainability as part of the assessment process, and that this usually involved the organisation having other sources of income, for example from the development/sale or rental of other property assets on a commercial basis.

Members were also advised that there was the potential to attract further funding from Government to support Community Led Housing in the future and it was therefore important to demonstrate that the Council could deliver successful schemes to improve the prospect of receiving additional monies.

Whilst they understood that there was a particular need to focus on providing housing schemes in rural areas, they noted that funding would also be available for initiatives in towns. Members felt that ARCH could have a role in acquiring less expensive urban housing, which could be refurbished and made available to communities.

With regard to the Monitoring and Clawback provision in the Policy:

“The Council reserves the right to seek repayment of any grant awarded, should any homes provided through this programme be taken out of community ownership within 15 years of the completion of the scheme.”

the Committee suggested that 15 years was too short a period and sought clarification on whether that timescale could be significantly extended.

RESOLVED that, subject to the comments as set out above, the Chairman advise Cabinet that the Committee supports the recommendations contained in the report.

(3) Management of Unauthorised Encampments

Paul Jones presented this report which provided members with the details of the powers available to the Council to manage unauthorised encampments and set out proposals for the development of temporary stopping places in Northumberland for Gypsies and Travellers, to reduce the community impact arising from some unauthorised encampments. The report also sought to approve the Protocol for Managing Unauthorised Encampments in Northumberland. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix E).

The Committee welcomed the report and discussed the impact that unauthorised sites had on local communities, both in terms of being a nuisance to local people and the demands on Council services. Members agreed that provision should be made for Gypsies and Travellers to stop in areas where they would cause minimal community impact.

There was some discussion regarding the use of the word “toleration” as one member felt the word was too discriminatory towards travellers. However, members were advised that this was a recognised term to describe a situation of controlled nuisance, as the Council would want to retain the right to seek legal remedies to remove travellers if necessary, and to dilute the language used in the policy may weaken any prospective case in the courts.

With regard to the protocol regarding encampments on local authority land, reference was made in the document that: *“unauthorised encampments will be visited by the GRTLO as soon as practicable (normally within 24 hours Monday to Friday) - the Committee felt that consideration be given to amending this to seven days a week. Members were advised that consideration would be given to this, but that there were cost implications of amending the response time to include weekends, and that seasonality was also an issue given the majority of encampments occurred in the summer months.*

RESOLVED that, subject to the comments as set out above, the Chairman advise Cabinet that the Committee supports the recommendations contained in the report.

19. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the Committee’s Work Programme. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix F).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

20. INFORMATION REPORT - POLICY DIGEST

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised the Committee that the Policy Digest gave details of the latest policy briefings, government announcements and ministerial speeches which may be of interest to members. The report could be accessed

through the service finder element of County Council's web site at www.northumberland.gov.uk.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Chairman _____

Date _____