

Communities and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2009

Present:

Councillor Flanagan - In the Chair
Councillors Barnes, Bracegirdle, Chohan, Evans (Items 1-10), Helsby, Isherwood, Loughman, O'Connor (Items 1-10), Rahman, and Royle

Also Present:

Councillor Andrews, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Cowell, Executive Member for the Environment
Councillor Curley, Executive Member of Adult Social Care
Mr Ron Goulden, Manchester Environment Group of the Blind and Partially Sighted
Jane Chadfield, Friends of Rochdale Canal
Les Chadfield, Friends of Rochdale Canal
Derek Purnell, Vice Chair, Friends of Rochdale Canal
Kevin Healey, Friends of Rochdale Canal
Jamie Goddard, Friends of Rochdale Canal

Apologies:

Councillors Ankers, Karney, Lewis, McCulley and Ryan

CN/09/11 Councillor Bill Risby

The Committee stood in silence for one minute in recognition of the memory of Councillor Bill Risby. Councillor Risby was a former member of the Committee and had given many years of service to the Council.

CN/09/12 Urgent Business

Items 6 - 'Local Development Framework – Core Strategy' and 8 'Mortgage Rescue Support Services' were submitted as urgent business.

CN/09/13 Minutes

Decision

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2009 as a correct record.

CN/09/14 Information and Overview Report

A report of the City Solicitor was submitted providing information about relevant issues affecting the Committee's remit.

A suggestion for an item for the work programme was received from a member of the Committee. The request was to consider the development of e-marketing campaigns to promote services and events by Manchester Libraries and Information Service. In

particular, the report should focus on how e-marketing campaigns were used to attract young people to make use of the library service.

The Chair of the Committee requested that an item be added to the work programmed to consider the demand for City centre motorcycle parking bays now that the outcome of the TIF bid was known. The Committee last considered the provision of motorcycle parking bays in September 2008. It was noted at this time that motorcycle parking bays were being filled beyond their capacity and that the Northern Quarter in particular lacked adequate facilities.

Decision:

1. To agree the work programme of the Committee.
2. To add an item to the work programme to review the use of e-marketing campaign to promote services and events by Manchester Libraries and Information Service.
3. To add an item to the work programme to consider the demand for city centre motorcycle parking bays following the outcome of the TIF bid.

CN/09/15 Local Development Framework – Core Strategy

The Head of Planning presented a report detailing the refining options consultation of the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy would form the key document within the new Local Development Framework.

It was reported that the consultation on 'Refining Options for the Core Strategy' was planned for six weeks from 6 April 2009 to 18 May 2009. This consultation developed proposed policies for each of the two options within the Core Strategy. Members of the Committee were invited to attend a Members drop in session on 19 March 2009 to discuss the consultation with officers and view all the documents.

Decision

1. To note the contents of the report.
2. To support the recommendation contained within the report.

CN/09/16 Oral Report on United Utilities

The Chair advised that this item had arisen from two incidents raised by individual Councillors at a previous meeting. The first incident was the connection of electricity to a school extension in Blackley. Residents in the surrounding area were given twenty-four hours notice of disconnection while these remedial works were carried out. Members felt that this was not adequate notice for residents especially in cases where vulnerable people would be affected.

The second incident was the blackout in Manchester City Centre on 13 January 2009. It was noted that the power cut caused serious problems affecting the transport networks and many homes across the City. The Committee sought a response from

United Utilities on how this happened and what emergency planning procedures were in place to remedy potential power cuts in the future.

It was agreed that the Chair of the Committee would write to United Utilities to invite them to respond to these questions at a future meeting.

Decision:

To agree that the Chair of the Committee write to United Utilities to invite them to a future meeting of the Committee.

CN/09/17 Mortgage Rescue Support Services

The Director of Housing presented a report outlining the Government mortgage rescue scheme. This was aimed at supporting 6,000 vulnerable residents to remain in their home.

It was reported that mortgage rescue enquiries from within Manchester were currently being referred from various sources including Homeless Families, Mortgage Lenders or the Courts, Citizens Advice Bureau, Law Centres, On Call, partner Registered Social Landlords, Shelter or Plumlife. In the first instance these were referred to Manchester Advice for initial assessment and support.

To date, 22 enquiries about mortgage rescue had been received and of those;

- All had received debt advice and support.
- 1 had been offered access to the scheme but turned it down preferring to move from their home into the private sector.
- 6 more were currently going through the extensive checks required and were likely to be considered eligible.
- 10 have not qualified on the basis that property exceeded the currently permissible value of £125, 000.
- 3 were considered non-priority cases under the current rules.
- Manchester Advice provided 2 with alternative support.

A member of the Committee sought clarification on whether the £125, 000 ceiling value of properties would be increased to allow a higher proportion of applicants to be eligible for the scheme. Officers responded that this was a national scheme with the criteria set by Government although this was constantly under review.

There was some discussion around the staffing levels at Manchester Advice. It was noted that the economic downturn had resulted in increased demand for advice services. Members were concerned whether there were enough staff at Manchester Advice to cope with the additional demand for services. The Executive Member for Adult Services reported that a bid for additional resources had successfully been made to the Big Lottery and that external advice services were now being reviewed. It was noted that the Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee had looked in detail at advice services offered by the Council.

Decision:

To note the report.

CN/09/18 Manchester Canals

The Head of Street Management presented a report outlining the progress made in improving the visual appearance of the city's canals, and to identify priorities for future improvements. Officers had invited representatives from British Waterways to attend the May meeting of the Committee.

It was reported that joint action between the Council, CityCo, British Waterways and Castlefield Estates to improve the visual appearance of the canal was undertaken in 2005. Feedback from members via the Neighbourhood Funding Strategy showed that we needed to concentrate future improvements on the section of the Rochdale Canal in the Newton Heath area.

It was noted that there was a willingness from all partners and local communities to improve this section of the canal. Officers were due to meet with British Waterways representatives in April to identify a project co-ordinator to put together an environmental maintenance programme Newton Heath section of the Rochdale Canal.

A member of the Committee highlighted that the canal attracted anti social behaviour and sought clarification on what measures could be taken to address this issue. Officers responded that any action taken would need to include partners such as Greater Manchester Police to reassure local communities that canals were safe and pleasant areas for local recreation. Improved surveillance would also help to protect the improvements that were starting to be made.

A member of the Committee referred to a previous meeting between local residents and British Waterways to address the issues in the Newton Heath area. It was noted that British Waterways had stated their intention to provide increased surveillance and maintenance of towpaths. The Committee would consider this with British Waterways in May 2009.

The Chair invited Friends of Rochdale Canal to address the Committee with their concerns about the Canal. A number of issues were raised including:

- Disabled access on towpaths and some bridges was restricted.
- The condition of the canal water was poor with overgrown weeds and debris.
- That the towpaths were in a state of disrepair and subject to constant flooding.
- Litter in the canal and on the towpaths.
- The general deterioration as the canal goes from Manchester to Oldham.
- Responsibility for the maintenance of the towpaths.

The Chair thanked Friends of Rochdale Canal for attending the meeting and invited them to the next meeting in May. It was acknowledged that some good work had already taken place to improve the visual appearance of the canals but there was still much that needed to be done. A number of issues were highlighted for British Waterways to respond to at the meeting in May. Members requested that the next meeting should be preceded by a fact finding site visit to the Newton Heath area of the

canal to allow members of the Committee to see for themselves where the issues of concern were.

Decision:

1. To thank Friends of Rochdale Canal for their comments.
2. To request that British Waterways attend the Committee meeting in May to respond to the concerns raised about the Newton Heath section of Rochdale Canal.
3. To request officers arrange a site visit covering the Newton Heath and Oldham sides of the Rochdale Canal to take place immediately prior to the May meeting of the Committee.

[Councillor Damien O'Connor declared a personal interest in this item as a member of the Friends of Rochdale Canal Group]

CN/09/19 Supporting People Business Plan

The Assistant Director of Adult Social Care and the Accountable Officer for Supporting People presented a brief outline of the Supporting People Business Plan.

Decision:

To note the Supporting People Business Plan and to thank the Officers for attending the meeting.

CN/09/20 Manchester Streetscape Manual

The Head of Highway Services presented a detailed report outlining the new Manchester Streetscape Manual. The Manual informed the design and management of new lightly trafficked residential streets.

Members were informed that the Manual reflected the structure and content of the national Manual for Streets (2007) published by the Department for Transport, however it was more detailed where specific local policies applied. For instance the Manual was proposed the City Council has a specific approach to, and endorsed the concept of, Pedestrian Priority Streets, parking and the use of materials.

The Chair invited members of the public to address the Committee on the Streetscape Manual. Mr. Goulden, a representative of the Manchester Environment Group for the Blind and Partially Sighted addressed the Committee. Attention was drawn to page 20 of the Streetscape Manual where shared surface streets were not to be accepted on new residential streets following research done by various access groups and consultants. The research found that shared surface streets tended to discriminate against some disabled people and pedestrians. Members of the Committee were asked to endorse this recommendation and also develop a principal to extend this to all new and existing streets.

The Head of Highway Services reported that this Manual was confined to residential streets and that it would be very difficult to introduce this policy in existing streets without a full scale redesign. The Executive Member for the Environment added that the Council was currently undertaking a piece of work to look at the streetscape of existing streets. It was noted that the no shared surfaces principal could be taken into account during redevelopment of existing sites.

Members of the Committee noted the concerns raised by Mr. Goulden and requested that a further report be brought to the Committee to review the progress of the work to review the streetscape of existing streets.

Decision:

1. To support the recommendations contained within the report.
2. To thank Mr Goulden for his comments on the Streetscap Manual.
3. To request that Officers provide a further report to review the progress of the work undertaken to look at existing streets to a meeting of the Committee in Summer 2009.

CN/09/21 Housing Sub Group Terms of Reference

Members considered the revised terms of reference and work programme for the Housing Sub group. It was agreed to arrange the fist meeting for April 2009.

Decision:

1. To agree the terms of reference and work programme for the Housing Sub Group.
2. To add Councillor Helsby as a member of the Housing Sub Group.