

**GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 19 JULY 2018**

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## **GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 19 JULY 2018**

#### **Present:**

Councillor J Windle ..... (Chair)  
Councillor C Smith .....(Vice-Chair)  
Councillor S Boyle Councillor A Powell  
“ S Cornwell “ B Rice

#### **Also Present**

Niall Clarke – Director of Property & Development – Rykneld Homes Ltd (Min No 132)  
Dan Swaine – Chief Executive (Min No 135)  
Jane Weston – Employment and Skills Officer (Min No 136)  
Karl Apps – Housing Strategy and Growth Manager (Min No 137)  
Sue Veerman – Overview and Scrutiny Officer  
Alan Maher – Governance Officer

#### **129 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Cupit, K Tait and C Tite.

#### **130 Declarations of Interest**

Members were requested to declare the existence and nature of any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or other interests, not already on their register of interests, in any item on the agenda and withdraw from the meeting at the appropriate time.

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### **131 Minutes of Last Meeting**

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee held on 14 June 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **132 Garages**

Members were reminded that Rykneld Homes manages the Council’s stock of domestic garages. The Committee received an update from the Director of Property and Development at Rykneld Homes, about the state of the stock and about some possible changes that might occur in the future.

He began by reporting to the Committee that many of the Council's garages are in a poor state of repair. The rents that users pay for them are low and it would not be cost effective to upgrade them – for example, by replacing the asbestos roofs that some have. Moreover, they are often used, for storage rather than for parking cars, as they are too small for most modern vehicles.

Members asked for further information about the cost of renting garages, both to Council tenants and to others. The Officer agreed to provide this information to the Overview and Scrutiny Manager.

The Committee was informed that there was a capital programme to pay for rationalising and demolishing garages. A small number of garages had already been demolished. The land where these garages stood had continued to be used for parking. However, as more garages were likely to be cleared in the future, there would be a range of possible options for how this land could then be used.

In this context, Members heard that a utility company had expressed an interest in purchasing some of the Council's garage sites. The utility company had provided a list of those sites that they may wish to purchase. The Director of Property and Development at Rykneld Homes agreed to forward this to the Overview and Scrutiny Manager.

The Committee discussed the possible sale of the sites, the reasons why the utility company may wish to purchase them and the potential benefits to the Council and the community – especially if the sale generates significant income and frees up land so that new affordable housing can then be built.

The Committee emphasised that local Members and communities should be consulted before any action to dispose of the specific sites is taken.

**RESOLVED –**

- (1) That the Committee thanked the Director of Property and Development at Rykneld Homes, for his update and contribution to the discussion.
- (2) That the Committee continues to monitor further development on the future of the Council's domestic garage sites.

(Overview and Scrutiny Manager)

**133 Change of Order of the Agenda**

With the agreement of the Chair, Members then considered the List of Key Decisions.

**134 List of Key Decisions – Issue No 75**

The Committee considered Issue No 75 of the List of Key Decisions which set out the major decisions being taken over the next few months.

The Committee confirmed that there were no key decisions that it wished to look at, at this time.

**135 Devolution/LEPS**

The Committee was reminded that Members had identified the future of devolution and local economic partnerships as a potential issue for a Scrutiny review.

In order to assist the Committee in assessing the issue, the Joint Chief Executive gave a presentation explaining the background and recent developments. The Chief Executive began by stating that the Council – along with some other of the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire District local authorities – had been a member of the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority (SCRCA) since it was formed in April 2014. He explained that the Council and the other Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Authorities were classed as ‘non-constituents’ members of the combined authority. This means that they can vote on most of the matters at SCRCA meetings.

The Chief Executive went on to explain the attempts which had been made to establish a combined authority for the North Midlands. In particular, he informed Members that so called ‘Economic Prosperity Committees’ had been established for both Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire in 2013. Based on these committees, proposals for initially two, and then subsequently a single combined authority, covering the whole of the North Midlands, had been developed.

The Chief Executive explained that for a variety of reasons the proposals for a North Midlands Combined Authority did not progress. Alternative proposals had begun to emerge for an East Midlands wide authority, made of upper tier (County and Unitary) local authorities, although it was stressed that these proposals were still at an early stage and had yet to be finalised.

He also advised the Committee that a mayor for the Sheffield City Region had now been elected by voters in South Yorkshire. However, because of well publicised disagreements between the four South Yorkshire local authorities about whether to proceed with this devolution deal, the powers of the new mayor have not been set and no additional funding has been devolved to the city region by Government.

The Chief Executive went on to inform Members that the Council is part of two local economic partnerships – Sheffield City Region and the D2N2 Economic Area. This is because North East Derbyshire, along with its neighbouring Derbyshire local authorities form part of the economic areas for both partnerships. He stated a review of the LEPS was expected to be announced by ministers shortly, and that this review could result in changes to the network of LEPS.

The Committee discussed the devolution update with the Chief Executive and in particular, the possible change to the LEP arrangements. At the conclusion of this discussion, Members thanked him for his contribution. They asked that the Committee continued to be apprised of any future developments especially on the future of the LEPs. The Committee discussed whether devolution should be

considered as part of a Scrutiny review. Members felt that there was still a great deal of uncertainty in this area and insufficient progress had been made for the Committee to add value at this stage. The Committee agreed that it would not carry out a review on the topic at this time but would continue to monitor what progress is made.

**RESOLVED –**

- (1) That the Committee notes the latest developments on Devolution and Local Economic Partnerships.
- (2) That the Committee receives further updates on devolution and local economic partnerships, as appropriate.

(Chief Executive/Overview and Scrutiny Manager)

**136 Employment and Skills**

Members were reminded that the Council's Housing and Economic Development Strategy had set 'maximising employment, skills and training opportunities as an objective. The report to Committee gave an update on what progress had been made towards achieving this objective.

The Committee was assisted by the Employment and Skills Officer. The Officer began by explaining that there had been a range of specific initiatives to improve employment skills and training opportunities for local people. In particular, she pointed out that a higher and degree level apprenticeship 'Marketplace' had recently been held at the Council's offices. This event had been well received by employers and those seeking apprenticeships. The Council had also helped to promote the higher level qualifications offered by local education institutions, including Chesterfield College.

The Committee welcomed these initiatives and the other work that had taken place to improve skills and training opportunities in the District.

The report made it clear that further progress was required in order to achieve the key performance indicator of increasing NVQ Level 4 qualifications to the same or above the percentage figure for Derbyshire. The proportion of people with NVQ level 4 qualifications, it was stated, had fallen across Derbyshire since 2014. The reduction had been greater in the District than for the County as a whole.

The District's Economically Active Unemployment Rate had come down at a much faster rate than the reduction for the UK. However, those who had been unemployed for a long period of time in the District now make up a larger proportion of the total than in the past. The report indicated that those receiving Employment Support Allowance (ESA) in the District, which is paid to people with disabilities or suffering from ill health, had increased. Those receiving ESA as a percentage of the working age population had risen from 6.1% in November 2013 to 6.7% in 2017.

The Committee thanked the Employment and Skills Officer for her contribution and discussed with her the information she had provided. At the conclusion of the discussion, they asked to receive further updates on employment and skills as appropriate.

**RESOLVED –**

- (1) That the Committee notes the report.
- (2) That the Committee receives further updates on the progress against the Housing and Economic Development Strategy targets to maximise employment, skills and training opportunities.

(Employment and Skills Officer/Overview and Scrutiny Manager)

**137 Empty Properties**

Members considered a second potential review topic on the action taken to maximise available accommodation in the District, by reducing the number of 'empty properties'. They were assisted in this by the Council's Housing Strategy and Growth Manager. The Officer began by pointing out that a highly successful landlord event, attended by over 60 landlords and 20 organisations, including letting agents, had been held recently. As a result of the event, one empty property owner had signed up for the Council's bond scheme, which meant that they were now able to take a tenant for this property. Members welcomed this.

The Committee also learned that the Enforced Sales Procedure had now been agreed by Cabinet. Work was underway on how to take this forward. One empty property, had been identified and housing and environmental officers were working together in order to take action on it. If successful, this action would help to deter other owners from leaving their properties empty.

Moving forward, a Purchase and Repair Scheme had been developed with the aim of purchasing nine empty properties, so that they could be transformed into social housing – either with a registered provider or Rykneld Homes. He explained that the Cabinet was due to take a decision on whether or not to press ahead with the scheme in due course.

Finally, The Officer informed the Committee that the Council had been working with an energy provider on a scheme to help these empty properties back into use. If the decision was taken to approve the scheme, then up to 120 properties could be brought back into use. The Committee welcomed the progress that had been made on this scheme and in particular the contribution that it could make to meeting the need for housing in the District and social or affordable housing. Members asked to be kept informed about future progress on this.

The Committee thanked the Housing and Growth Manager for his contribution and discussed the information which he had provided. Members welcomed the action which had been taken to tackle the problem of empty properties but recognised that a lot more work still needed to be done. Consequently the Committee felt that it would not be an appropriate time to carry out a review into this topic at this time to allow some of the initiatives to produce outcomes that could be measured.

The Committee discussed a range of other possible topics that might be suitable to a review. A consensus emerged from this discussion that it would be helpful if Scrutiny carried out a review into the provision of business and industrial units in the District.

Members recognised that any review would have to be scoped, but felt that it should focus on whether the District has the right mix of units, whether these units were in the right locations to meet current needs and whether they were likely to meet the needs of the District's changing and growing economy.

**RESOLVED –**

- (1) That the Housing Strategy and Growth Manager be thanked for updating the Committee on the progress made to reduce empty properties in the District.
- (2) That the Committee does not carry out a review on the issue of empty properties at this time.
- (3) That the Committee agrees that a review into the provision of business and industrial units to promote economic growth and development in the District be undertaken.
- (4) That the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Manager and relevant service officers should now scope out the Terms of Reference, objectives and timetable for this review for the Committee to consider at their next meeting.

(Overview and Scrutiny Manager)

**138 Work Programme**

The Committee considered and endorsed its Work Programme for 2018-19.

**139 Additional Urgent Items**

There were no additional urgent items for the Committee to consider.

**140 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee is as scheduled on Thursday 27 September 2018 at 1.00 pm.

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