

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Ian Maher	Cabinet Member – Regeneration	July-August 2011

1. Housing Market Renewal - CPO

Compulsory Purchase Orders issued for Bedford/Queens Phase 3 and Klondyke Phase 1B have now been confirmed by the Secretary of State.

Confirmation notices have been issued to all those with a registered interest in the area, and public notices have been posted in the two areas.

A 6 week 'Challenge Period' allows appeals to this decision to be lodged with the Planning Inspectorate. The 'Challenge Period' finished on the 25th August. Following the 'Challenge Period' the vesting process will begin and discussions with residents about rehousing can commence.

2. Housing Market Renewal Transition Fund

A bid for £3.457m has been submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) for the Transition Fund.

This £30m pot was offered to five of the former pathfinder areas in order to purchase the interests of residents still remaining in HMR Intervention Areas.

As expected the fund is oversubscribed, by approximately 50%, and the HCA has now asked for further information not requested in the original bid. The deadlines set for the submission of this information is mid September, and therefore we do not expect to hear about our allocation until after this time.

3. Housing Options service

The Council has received a Homeless Prevention grant of £88,000, for both 2011-12 and '12-13. This is higher than previous years. A decision was made by the Member Overseeing Group, VCF sector, 22nd November 2010, that funding for Light for Life should be prioritised and continue. The only source of funding available for this is the Homeless Prevention grant. Light for Life, through their provision of the Southport Housing Centre, assist the Council in performing our statutory duty to ensure that there is provision of housing advice available within the borough. Their core services are to provide housing advice and homeless prevention to residents of Southport and Formby, operate a Bond scheme and access to a Floating Support service, and to facilitate the Private Landlords forum.

The existing SLA expired in March 2011, but was extended for 6 months so a new SLA could be developed, and the revised SLA will soon be agreed.

However, Light for Life have also lost funding they previously received from other sources. In light of this, Light for Life has had to implement a reorganisation to reduce their costs more in line with the resources that are now available.

The balance of the Homeless Prevention grant resource will be used to fund other related housing service options, such as; the Repossession Prevention fund, Bond Scheme, Hardship fund for homeless applicants, and Underoccupation project with OVH.

The Government has provided the City region with funding to tackle Rough Sleepers, of £120,000 under the auspices of “no second night out”. The 6 LA’s (Sefton, Liverpool, Knowsley, Wirral, Halton and St. Helens) have agreed in principle how to use this funding between now and March 2013 when the project ends. Liverpool City Council are the Accountable Body, holding the funds for this project and as such there is no financial implication for Sefton. The Proposal is based on 1.4 staff: 1 (Full time) outreach worker & a 0.4 manager. Outreach worker will respond to the reports of rough sleeping across each authority, undertake assessments of need, work with existing providers, and find solutions to bring indoors and prevent no second night out. Manager will co-ordinate provision across authorities, facilitate the tracking meetings / single point of contact and provide additional outreach provision. It is possible that we could uncover some unmet needs in Sefton and we should be mindful that when the initiative has finished there could be additional service needs to be met.

The Council is committed to entering into a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings scheme. The scheme will be operated on our behalf by OVH, similar to that currently provided as the 'Homesearch' service. We are about to enter into contract with the other LA Partners and the IT System supplier Abritas. It is hoped the new system, and approved CBL Policy, will come into effect circa March 2012.

4. Private Sector Housing Standards service

The size of the team was reduced as part of the Transformation and budget exercise. It also currently has reduced capacity due to one member of staff being long term ill, and another on maternity leave. The team continue to deal with a high level of service requests from vulnerable private tenants and home owners, living in poor conditions. As the Council are no longer able to provide grant/loan funds to vulnerable home owners, there maybe a need for greater enforcement activities. A report on the implications of this will be brought to Cabinet Member Regeneration in the coming months.

There is a growing number of service requests to deal with empty homes - especially via ward Councillors and MPs. This is also a significant issue being raised through the Planning Core Strategy Process. We have 1 dedicated member of staff to deal with a small number of problematic properties. We do not have the capacity to deal with or take enforcement actions on large volumes of empty properties.

We are trying to work with partners to see if we can increase 'capacity' and take a more pro-active approach with empty property owners. Officers are discussing whether we could implement a pilot project proposal for the Southport area - an area with a very high level of vacancies, and greatest shortage of (affordable) homes.

The team also oversee the management of the Council's Gypsy & Traveller site in Formby, and deal with unauthorised encampments that occur in the borough. There have been 3 incidences to deal with over the last 3 months.

5. Home Improvements Team and DFGs

The Council have approved a capital budget of circa £2.5m for 11-12, which is less than the circa £3m spent in recent years, to meet demand.

Part of the service is provided via an Agency agreement with Mears Ltd [who took over Anchor Trust last year]. We are working toward a reprocurement of these services, and looking at options for how this procurement exercise might be structured; as it is currently combined with Supporting People services, and Older People services.

6. Kew Housing Development Site

The Council are working with David Wilson Homes to bring forward a scheme of 650 new homes on the site at Kew Southport. At present negotiations are ongoing regarding the proportion of Social Rented Housing to be built as part of the scheme. A detailed report to Cabinet will be presented in due course which will also identify this together with any potential Capital Receipt to the Council. An Extra Care Housing Scheme is now also looking as though it will be developed as part of the scheme. A combined Planning Application for the new Housing, the Extra Care Unit and an extension of the Business Park is expected to be submitted in early October.

7. Regional Growth Fund Round 2

LCR Local Enterprise Partnership endorsed 27 applications for RGF before the bidding deadline of 1st July.

Sefton MBC was lead applicant for one bid: Port of Liverpool Post-Panamax Container Terminal (£35m). It was a joint applicant with Bellway for Hawthorne Rd Enterprise Corridor (£1.57m), and with Liverpool CC and Keepmoat for Housing & Employment (Anfield & Queens Bedford).

Nationally, 492 bids were received with a combined total value of £3.3 bn. Decisions will be announced towards end-September.

8. Bootle Town Centre & Office Quarter

In line with the Strategic Regeneration Framework for South Sefton & North Liverpool, a stakeholder event on the future of Bootle Town Centre and Office Quarter was held on 6th July, courtesy of Bruntwood which offered the top floor of St Hughs House as a venue. Some 25 people attended for presentations and discussion groups. It was agreed to bring forward four pieces of research:

- A profile of the local workforce to understand trends in employment, population and dependency on public sector jobs; and an inventory of office floorspace and vacancy rates.
- A parking review
- A perception study of how workers and residents perceive the value and importance of the town centre.
- A retail strategy review which will include a Town Centre Retail Health Check (already in hand and due for completion in November 2011).

This research will feed through into the next stage of identifying the "Bootle product", brand definition, promoting the area as an investment destination, along with plans for adapting the town centre and office quarter to new requirements.

9. Work Programme & Families with Complex Needs

A provisional start date of 22nd August has been given for commencement of the Work Programme in Sefton. This is the new entry-to-employment programme for 6 month-plus unemployed jobseekers. Sefton@work is sub-contracted to A4E to deliver a mandatory programme for individuals referred from Jobcentre Plus. The first few weeks will be exceptionally busy as clients are forwarded who have been held back following the closure of New Deal earlier in the year.

The DWP is tendering for WP prime contractors to deliver a Families with Complex

Needs contract. 7 providers have contacted Sefton, and because of the Council's excellent track record in work-focussed whole family support, a current total of 4 contractors have offered to sub-contract their delivery in Sefton to Sefton@work and its partners.

Officers are now investigating whether to participate in the first phase roll-out of Community Budgeting, which takes this approach a stage further and generates savings from transforming and integrating family services hitherto independent of each other.

10. REECH

The first Supplier Event was held on 2nd August for contractors selected through the Fusion 21 framework to deliver the retrofit of insulation into the older housing stock under the REECH programme. This is the first of several such events to maximise the local benefits of the £18m programme to the city region. All companies who meet the criteria will be allocated an appointment for the Meet the Buyer event at Aintree Racecourse on 31 August.

Each of the nine participating RSLs has also agreed to prepare an Employment Plan detailing how they will open up employment, training and skills opportunities to the local community.

11. Employment Development

The redevelopment of the available land at Southport Business Park and on the Senate Business Park, both sites which are owned by the Council, have been severely hampered by the recession which impacted significantly on the ability of developers to borrow the necessary bank finance. Indications are now such that developers are now showing some interest in initiating speculative development which may show some promise for these sites. Elsewhere there is interest being shown by developers in bringing forward new business premises on the Former switch Car Site, the Peerless Refinery site and Atlantic Park. Officers will continue to promote and support proposals for these sites as they to come forward.

12. StepClever Property Project

The StepClever Property Project is now in its final year and there is a push to ensure that the remaining approved projects do progress to financial completion. Whilst there have been only two projects in the Sefton area there are a number that are very close to the Sefton boundary that will provide employment opportunities to Sefton Residents. These include the Liverpool Film Academy and the St Mary's Walton project both very close to Derby Ward boundaries and the Rotunda Project which is a short distance from both the Linacre and Derby Ward boundaries.

13. Southport Market Refurbishment

The project has been delayed as the initial contractor, ROK Ltd, was unfortunately placed in administration. The works have however now recommenced with a new contractor Lockwoods Construction (Liverpool) Ltd.

Works are now proceeding well and is currently due to complete in accordance with the revised contract completion date of 8th May 2012. Discussions are however underway with the contractor aimed at improving upon the existing completion date in order that the Market can play a full role within the Southport Food Festival, which is scheduled for June 2012.

The development of proposals for gateway features and infrastructure works, which will provide facilities for occasional outdoor markets, is underway.

The Lettings consultant Quaterbridge Ltd, report that take up of stall leases for the new facility is proceeding well.

All funding for the project has been secured and the projected final outturn cost is within the total amount of funding available.

14. Southport Cultural Center

Works on site are well underway, the appointed contractor being Bovis Lend Lease Ltd, now re-branded as simply Lend Lease Ltd.

External funding for the project, provided by the NWDA and Sea Change Grant has been reduced, as a result of Central Government funding reductions, to £7,908,000. This means the total funding availability is revised to £15,608,000.

The expenditure necessary to meet the external funder draw down requirements to the end of the 2010/2011 financial year was achieved. The funders have now been provided with the information necessary to allow receipt of the grant funding in full.

A process of Value engineering has been carried out, and is ongoing, to address funding shortfalls and to ensure that the best possible value is achieved from the available funding provision.

The progress on the project has been delayed to some extent, due to a number of factors, including the uncovering of faults or matters of particular conservation interests, which are always likely in buildings of this nature. The contractor and design team are currently however holding 6 weekly workshops aiming to mitigate the impact of any delays and ensure that that existing completion date is achieved.

A detail report on progress, including an update on the projects financial position, will be provided to Cabinet in the near future.