

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT		
Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Ian Maher	Cabinet Member Regeneration & Tourism	February 2013

1. Housing Market Renewal – General

Klondyke

Construction of new homes on the Phase 1 site has commenced. This involves 86 new housing units, 17 of which will be for affordable rent.

Over the last 3 months, 3 households have been rehoused, and there are currently only 5 occupied properties in Phases 2 & 3. There is ongoing liaison to try to encourage these residents to move temporarily, however, most have indicated that they are not interested in doing so, and most want to wait for a new-build home on the Phase 1 site.

CCTV has been installed on the estate, and is able to be accessed by both the Police and Sefton Security.

Bellway is currently preparing a new layout proposal for Phases 2 and 3 with a view to seeking Planning Consent, in the coming months.

A judicial review on the need for an environmental impact assessment on the demolition of the Springwell Chapel has been heard in the High Court for the 27th November following action taken by Save Britain's Heritage. We still await the outcome verdict.

Bedford/Queens

Construction of the Phase 2 site continues. The use of Regional Growth Funding to fund the development of Bedford Queens Phase 3, St Winefrides and the refurbishment of the Kings Centre has been approved by BIS, and we are about to enter into a tri-partite agreement with Keepmoat and Liverpool CC [as Accountable Body] to allow a scheme to begin in the coming months.

2. Housing Market Renewal Transition Fund

Following a High Court hearing on the 18th September, Save Britain's Heritage won the right to a judicial review hearing into the allocation of Transition Funding. The Judicial Review was due to be heard in January 2013. However, the Secretary of State has conceded that the funding decision was unlawful, and a settlement will be made out of court. This should NOT lead to any action to try to reclaim the Transition Grant.

However, we have recently learnt that the case has been relisted for the High Court in May. We are seeking clarification as to why this is necessary.

3. Housing Options Service

The Local Authority partners will be conducting a Review of the common Property Pool Plus Allocations Policy over the coming months, in light of early operational experience. Revisions of policy will be reported to Members of each LA for approval in due course.

We have appointed Chartered Institute of Housing Consultancy to undertake the task of Reviewing our Homeless Services and production of a new Homeless Strategy. The Homelessness Act (2002) requires every Council to review and produce a new Homeless Strategy every 5 years. Consultations with partner agencies, has begun.

Members have agreed to the Lease disposal of Windsor House, Southport, former Homeless hostel, to Forum HA, who will utilise the building to provide low level supported accommodation for young single people.

The number of residents approaching us, especially single people, has increased over the last year or so, and there is little likelihood of this increase slowing over the coming months and years. This increase in homelessness has been mirrored across the other Merseyside LA's who are also reporting an increase or at least no further reductions in presentations.

We have also seen a year-on-year increase in the number of people Rough Sleeping in the Borough despite the introduction of the No Second Night Out project. However, numbers are relatively small, increasing from 4 cases in 2010, to 7 in 2012.

There has been recent attention given to the Council's service provision for Rough Sleepers, on the back of a national campaign. Members were provided with a briefing note about Sefton Council's service position.

The Council receives a Homeless prevention grant as part of it's annual funding settlement (circa £88,000). Over the past 2 years, and longer, we have used the vast majority of this money to fund Light for Life (L4L) to provide the Southport Housing Advice Centre service. The Council has entered into a contract with Light for Life for these services, which is due to end at the 31st of March. Officers will seek approval to extend this for a further 12 months, but beyond this, the service will be the subject of the Council wide Voluntary/Community/Faith sector review.

Between April and October 2012, L4L dealt with 1,108 customers seeking housing assistance, many of whom would be seeking help to find accommodation. Some cases will be households who are statutorily homeless, and L4L will offer a triage service, but may have to refer them to the Council's Housing Options team. But in the vast majority of cases, L4L have service interventions to prevent or alleviate the homeless issue, helping to fulfil the Council's duties.

4 Private Sector Housing Standards Service

The Housing Standards Team have both an enforcement and advisory role dealing with Private Sector Landlords, tenants and owner occupiers. The Council has a legal duty to take action where a Category 1 Hazard (most serious hazard) exists. The Housing Standards Team has removed Category 1 hazards from over 200 homes over the past 2 years, using various actions. The vast majority of those are privately rented premises.

There has been a significant increase in the demand for the service of the team. The last financial year saw an increase in demand on the previous year of 42%, and this year we are on target to receive a similar or even increasing level of service requests. This increase in demand has surpassed the national increase in demand which was reported by the charity Shelter in Oct 2012, at an increase of 30% last year

The (2009) Private Sector Housing Strategy includes an objective to set up a (voluntary) Landlord Accreditation scheme in Sefton. On 31st October, Cabinet approved 'one-off' funding, to help establish a scheme and operate it, for a 12 month period. Approval was given to appoint Wirral Council to do this for us. A project plan has been agreed and we hope a scheme will be agreed and set up over the next 3 months. However, due to their own budget cuts, the Wirral officers involved have been issued with 'at risk' letters, which casts a doubt on their ability to assist us beyond April.

There is continued focus on dealing with empty homes, with staff taking enforcement actions on long term empty homes. There has been recent, fairly positive, press coverage on empty homes activities by the Council

Plus-Dane submitted a successful funding bid to the HCA's Empty Homes Initiative, which include delivering empty properties on the basis of delivering both purchase and repair units, and leasing units mainly in the Southport Area. Plus-Dane have developed a Leasing scheme. Those owners interested in leasing are being contacted, and negotiations between the HA and a small number of owners have commenced. Cosmopolitan HA have withdrawn from this scheme.

Riverside Housing have received funding under another empty homes initiative; 'Clusters of Empty Homes'. They will be seeking to purchase, repair and then sell 18 properties under their Own-Place scheme in the Knowsley Rd & Peel Rd area of Bootle.

A further round of £300m Government funding for empty homes was announced in December. Housing associations and community groups will be able to bid for funding. The closing date is 25th March. So far, only Plus-Dane HA have indicated that they wish to submit a bid for properties in Sefton.

5. Home Improvements Team and DFGs

The council have approved a capital budget of circa £2.5m for 2012-13. In addition the Govt recently announced an additional sum of £377,000 for DFGs this year.

Part of the service is provided via an agency agreement with Mears Ltd (who took over Anchor Trust in 2010). Due to the costs involved the Council has agreed that it would be more cost effective to bring the services in-house. Notice has been served on Mears and work is progressing to bring the service in-house before the end of this financial year. The Councils Minor Adaptations service will also be managed within this service area.

6. Housing Strategy

A new Tenancy Strategy has been approved by Cabinet on the 13th of December.

David Adamson consultants have been appointed to undertake a borough wide Private sector housing stock condition survey. This will involve the survey of circa 1200 randomly selected properties across the borough. The work has been procured jointly with Wirral council, to generate some efficiencies for both Authorities. Letters will begin to be sent to selected householders later in February.

Officers are beginning to review the Council's Empty Homes Strategy, with a view to bringing forward a revised strategy by the end of the year.

The Council has been successful in it's application for circa £300,000 of funding from the HCA, to improve the Council's Gypsy & Traveller site at Formby. Work will involve upgrading the utility blocks [for bathing and laundry] and hopefully the addition of 4 family pitches within the site, to meet growing demand.

7. StepClever Property Project

Works to the Anfield BusinessCentre within the Liverpool part of the StepClever area is now virtually complete. Final payments to the contractor should be made in March. Final claim expected after April 2013.

One final project utilising other funds from the Stepclever Property Programme is currently being revised for consideration by the Legacy Funding Steering Group. This project is expected to commence on site by May/June 2013.

8. Kew Housing Site Southport

David Wilson Homes are now completing technical surcharging tests on the site in advance of commencing the remediation of the site from September/October 2013. Legal matters including transfer and other agreements will be concluded simultaneously

9. Southport Cultural Centre

The majority portion of the building was handed to the Council on 3rd January 2012 and library and other fit out works are now progressing in these areas.

The procurement of some fit out works has been concluded and orders have been placed, other procurement is ongoing.

The main contract works are due to be completed in February 2013 but the date for final completion of the fit out works is still to be confirmed.

It is currently proposed that the Ground Floor and Library areas will be opened to the public at the end of March 2013 with the remaining areas becoming available in May 2013. All efforts are being made to achieve these timescales.

Every effort is also being made to keep costs to a minimum but there are additional costs which will be reported to Members in the near future.

10. Southport Market

The Capital works for the building were completed in July and the Market has been operating successfully since.

The project is currently within the 'defects liability period' and any matters arising will be dealt with prior to the 12 month anniversary of the project completion. The most significant outstanding issue relates to the ventilation and potential over heating in the food stall areas: Capita Symonds are currently implementing a strategy designed to alleviate this issue.

The Final Account is close to being agreed and final payments will be made in May subject to satisfactory completion of outstanding defects.

The important role that the gateway signs, and other directional signage, play in highlighting the presence of the Market is recognised but unfortunately the installation of these signs has been delayed.

The initial discussions necessary to identify a suitably prominent location, while being mindful of the sensitive location, have now been concluded but the presence of services in the footpaths in the proposed locations has further delayed the installation. A revision has however now been agreed and works to carry out installation have now been instructed.