

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Adoption of Estates

Wednesday, 6 February 2013

Present: Councillor Matthew Crow (Chair) and Jean Cronshaw, Julia Berry, Steve Holgate, June Molyneaux, Dave Rogerson and Kim Snape

Also in attendance

Officers: Jamie Carson (Director of People and Places) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

13.TG.11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from County Council Mike Devaney.

13.TG.12 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Adoption of Estates meeting held on 22 January 2013 be confirmed as a correct record for signing by the Chair.

13.TG.13 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

No declarations of any interests were received.

13.TG.14 PRACTICAL WORKSHOP

The Group participated in an interactive workshop that looked at pulling together a set of recommendations that fully reflected their findings and were aimed at improving processes surrounding the adoption process.

The following recommendations were amended:

Communication

Recommendation:

That arrangements be put in place to seek regular dialogue with individual developers to identify new sites coming on to stream.

Recommendation:

The development of a map based system on the Council's website to show information about the status of the roads in the borough for use by the community.

Process

Recommendation:

That the Executive Cabinet asks Lancashire County Council to consider building on existing work with local planning authorities to

put in place arrangements to ensure the consideration of road adoption issues commences at the planning application stage of the planning process, including:

- **Designing developments to provide separate access routes for residential and construction traffic**
- **A phasing implementation of larger development**
- **Laying out and constructing roads to adoptable standards**

Information

Recommendation:

That the Executive Cabinet be requested to commission a study of the existing adoptions 'caseload' in the Borough, to provide a full picture of all completed and partially completed agreements, including Section 38's and Section 106's.

The following additional recommendations were **AGREED**:

Communication

Recommendation:

That a list of Frequently Asked Questions FAQ's be published on the Councils website.

Reason:

To provide information for residents to help them to understand the processes relating to the adoption of estates that will enable them to be more informed.

Process

Recommendation:

That a review be undertaken on a risk based approach for the adoption of open spaces.

Reason:

Developers commented that the transfer of open space to a management company instead of the local authority was mainly down to cost implications. If the costs were lower developers may transfer this land to the Council more readily. There was a view that often after around ten years the land was often in a neglected state and it was at this stage that the ownership for its maintenance was overtaken by the Council. Members felt that there was the potential to obtain the land sooner to avoid this from happening and asked for alternatives from the present policy to be explored, particularly on smaller developments in the Borough.

Recommendation:

That Lancashire County Council consider their approach to the pre-application processes to include the introduction of associated fees.

Reason:

This would not only generate additional income but would help to develop a change of culture whereby officers would become more focused on the effective provision of information.

Chorley Council officers had explained that they did a lot of work around pre-application and had implemented a scheme of fees and charges associated with this process. These fees had meant that the service had become more focused and encouraged officers to work in a more business-like fashion to ensure that deadlines were adhered to and ensured smoother delivery. The pre-application process enables officers to sort out a lot of issues that are associated with a development prior to an actual application for development being submitted and established and maintained good working relationships with the developers.

It was the Council's understanding that Lancashire County Council did not offer such a service and if they did, it was work that was undertaken but yet not charged for. Indeed, a lot of the work that Chorley officers needed to do, was obtained via the County but we did not incur a charge for these requests. Members felt that if County were to take the approach that Chorley had undertaken and introduced a scale of fees and charges for this work, they would not only generate additional income but would be much more focused on the provision of timely information.

Recommendation:

To consider the introduction of Development or Site Exit meetings to specifically deal with adoption of sewers, roads and green spaces and to include compliance with conditions.

The Lex site on Pilling Lane has been identified by officers as an ideal site to trial the success and value of such meetings.

Reason:

This will allow any future website to be updated, enabling search information to be accurate and reduce back office questions about the compliance of developments with conditions. It would also contribute to an end to end delivery of development and certainty for all involved in the development process including existing and new residents and developers.

Recommendation:

That Lancashire County Council explores the introduction of a grading system of inspection with associated relevant fees.

Reason:

This would help with the waiting times for inspection for both the developer and the highways authority and in turn speed up the process of adoption for residents.

Recommendation:

That the Executive Cabinet support Lancashire County Council to develop a small team of site based staff that would help to support the process of adoption across the County.

Reason:

County officers had identified a need for a team of this calibre that would be able to react more readily to the site inspection processes. It was also envisaged that this would help to standardise the process and build up the experience of highways officers on this type of work. The Group supported this idea and felt that the proposed change to current working arrangements at County, that were conveyed to them through the review would go a long way in helping to improve the adoption process for local residents.

Partnership Working

Recommendation:

That Chorley Council and Lancashire County Council work together on issues surrounding adoption by sharing intelligence about developments across the Borough.

Reason:

Both authorities have information on the status of existing developments that can be shared to develop a more complete picture of the present situation of the adoptions across the Borough. The group felt that better partnership working arrangements needed to be implemented across the two authorities to progress/improve policies and procedures on the process of adoption.

Recommendation:

That Chorley Council develop a co-ordinator role from within the Planning Services team to provide an enhanced level of co-ordination for the whole process of adoption to be linked into the Neighbourhood Area meetings and that the Executive Cabinet ask Lancashire County Council to consider doing the same.

Reason:

The highways design was key to the development and subsequent adoption of the site and Chorley officers reported that they consistently had to press County officers in order to progress. A number of recent staffing changes at County had also meant a lack of continuity in the process and officer from both authorities felt that there were merits for a co-ordinated approach to provide an enhance level of co-ordination to the adoption process and to oversee the recommendations of this Task Group. This work could also be linked into the Neighbourhood Working agenda and status updates could be reported to the eight Neighbourhood Area Meetings of the Council.

Recommendation:

That all developers be encouraged to nominate a dedicated officer that would work proactively with officers of both borough and county councils on adoption processes and be asked to consider reviewing their complaints procedures to improve relations with residents on their developments.

Reason:

One of the main issues identified by residents was the inconsistencies surrounding information issued on the status of the adoption by individual developers, particularly on the same site. Although there was admittance by developers that staffing changes contributed to this, there was also an acceptance that a more co-ordinated approach needed to be taken going forwards and there was a willingness to work with the Council to improve the customer experience.

Information:

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Recommendation:

That Lancashire County Council be asked to consider developing a more proactive reporting process for communicating issues and frustrations of residents to the relevant portfolio holder.

Reason:

Members of the Group had concerns about how complaints were being communicated to the relevant portfolio holder on the Executive Cabinet for Lancashire County Council. From the discussions that took place throughout the review there did not appear to be an adequate reporting structure in place and Members queried how improvements could be addressed if the Cabinet were unaware of the problem.

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13.TG.15 NEXT STAGES

The Chair explained that the draft Final Report would be sent out to all the consultee's to enable them to comment on the Group's recommendations..

It was also intended to invite the Executive Member for LDF and planning to comment on the proposals before the Group finalised the Final Report ready for its submission to the Executive Cabinet.

The next meeting of the Group is 19 March 2013.

Chair