

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes

Thursday, 31 October 2013 at 18:30

Attendees:

Mrs Mary Coleman (Member), Mr Bert Collins (Member), Mrs Sue Hacon (Member), Mr Ronald Hanton (Member), Mr Jim Shrimplin (Member), Mr Barry Stone (Chairman), Mr Michael Castle (Member), Mr Charles Marsden (Member), Mrs Kerry Robinson-Payne (Member), Mr Jamie Smith (Member), Mrs Barbara Wright (Member)

Apologies for Absence:

Mrs Marlene Fairhead (Member)

Absent:

Ms Marie Field (Member)

Also in attendance at the above meeting were:

Councillor Sutton attended as a substitute for Councillor Fairhead.

Councillor Wainwright attended as an observer, Councillor Jeal attended for item 8, Councillor Peck attended for item 4, Councillor Linden attended for item 4 and Councillor Plant attended for item 8

Jane Ratcliffe (Chief Executive Officer), Jane Beck (Director of Customer Services), Robert Read (Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods), Robin Hodds (Cabinet Secretary), Tracey Slater (Strategic Housing and Housing Options), Trevor Chaplin (Housing Services Group Manager) and Karline Smith (Senior Member Services Officer).

David Marsh and Ken Sims (Greater Yarmouth Tourist Authority) - attended for item 8

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2013 were confirmed subject to the following amendments:-

A member asked for clarification on which officer was responsible for the PIPs licence. The Chief Executive Officer confirmed she was the officer dealing with the licence prior to the Director of Customer Services taking responsibility in January 2013.

The Director of Customer Services explained the difference in that GYBC pursued sundry debt through the use of bailiffs and confirmed that bailiffs had not been used in this case.

The Chief Executive Officer confirmed that she made the decision to continue discussions with GYTA as she felt this was the best way to get the money back.

A Member asked the Chief Executive Officer if she felt that the close relationship between GYTA and GYBC influence the way the debt issue was handled. The Chief Executive Officer agreed that this was probably the case.

2 Efficiency Support Grant Project Plan

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

3 Role of Ward Councillors

The Cabinet Secretary reported that a meeting had been held on 10 October 2013 to look at the Members Handbook and the Members Compact.

The Working Group made changes to the Hand Book and these would be presented to the next Scrutiny Committee along with the Compact and the Members Job Description.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal update be noted.

4 Boarded up Derelict Houses

The Committee considered the Strategic Housing and Housing Options Manager's report on boarded up Derelict Houses. The Strategic Housing and Housing Options Manager reported that Great Yarmouth does not have a large number of Boarded up houses in the Borough. The report only details empty homes but commercial properties could be looked at.

A Member stated that there were two properties on Nelson Road Central for two years.

A Member asked what the funding streams were for Empty Homes and it was reported that this years allocation had been spent and the had allocated the Old Toilets on Hall Quay.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

5 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2013-14

It was agreed that the following items would be considered at the next meeting:-

- *Efficiency Support Grant
- *Role of Ward Councillors
- *Budget Monitoring
- *Review of Key Performance Indicators
- *Report on St Georges Chapel and Pavillion

6 Vauxhall Bridge

The Cabinet Secretary reminded Members that at the last meeting they had asked about the representation of Norfolk County Councillors on the Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust and it was reported that there were non on this. Members had also asked about the decision to appoint the contractor and the Cabinet Secretary read out the minutes from Full Council on 27 September 2013 which stated that Full Council had endorsed the appointment of the contractor.

A Member stated that he felt access should be from the quay along the bridge and that this should be included in the bid for funding.

RESOLVED:

That the position be noted.

7 Salisbury Road Call-In

The Chairman reported that he had exercised his right as the Chairman to call in this item for the following reasons:-

No feasibility study had been carried out as to whether this was a cost effective way to develop the land. Had the option of a leasehold rather than a gift of the freehold been investigated and if so what was the outcome of that investigation and could the Council benefit from future income if they kept the freehold and had the possibility of the NIF building the development and then selling the houses to a Housing Association been investigated.

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods informed the Committee that for a number of years the Council had been looking for a solution on how to use the site. Cabinet had given the officers a steer that they wanted to use the site for affordable housing. No formal feasibility study had been carried out but as internal meetings were held with officers. This is a difficult site to develop as it is narrow and needs a lot of infrastructure to develop it. The Council looked at the site to see if they could develop this themselves and it was felt at the time it was not one for the Council to develop themselves and that the best way was to see if any housing associations wanted to develop it. Three housing associations showed an interest initially but after further investigations only one was left and Saffron Housing stated that they would carry out a feasibility study if they were not in open competition. They then came back to the Council and stated that if the land was gifted to them they would consider developing the site. It was felt that it was the best option for the Council to go out to housing associations as at no cost to the Council they get affordable housing for some of their housing list.

A Member asked if the housing would be for sale or to rent and it was confirmed that these would be to rent. The Chairman stated that originally the emergency services had turned down a development on this land as they could not access it and asked what had changed. The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods stated that by working with Planning, Property and the Highways Department they had come up with a proposal to deal with the access. The Chairman asked if the Council had gone to the private market to see if they would develop the site and it was reported that they had not gone to the private development market as Cabinet had indicated that they wanted affordable housing.

A Member stated that a number of years ago the Council had looked at the site and agreed to sell the site to local residents for off road parking. The Chairman stated that the local residents were not interested in buying the land.

A Member stated that this issue had been discussed for a number of years and they had looked at various issues. This was an attractive scheme where Saffron Housing would carry out all the work and people on the Council's housing list would get a property. The Council would also receive £50,000 in new homes bonus and gain in less maintenance and clearance of the site, creating a better environment and reducing the council housing list.

The Chairman stated that he raised the issue as he wanted to ensure that this was a good deal for the Council and did it get a good return for the Council, were they getting value for money for land they owned and if all financial implications had been investigated then he was happy.

A Member stated that this raised some interesting questions on the road to the decision being made and that he felt that further information should have been presented to Cabinet for consideration.

The Chairman stated that a developer would have had the site 10 years ago to build on peoples bungalows but there were access issues and asked why the Council didn't approach private developers.

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods stated that the steer was to look at affordable housing and private developers would probably only give one or two affordable housing units.

Councillor Wainwright stated that the DCLG and the Minister were encouraging Councils to give land for development and that there were 600 people in Great Yarmouth affected by the bedroom tax.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the information provided and that no further action to be taken on this matter.

8 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12(A) of the said Act.

9 PIPs

The Cabinet Secretary reported that he had received Legal Advice from NPLaw on the public interest factors that would encourage the disclosure of information and it was then agreed to take this item as a confidential item excluding the public.

The Director of Customer Services explained that the Street Licence was never relinquished and the confidential minutes provided by the GYTA relate to this.

David Marsh reported that the licence was issued to GYTA in June 2010. Advertising for the 2010/11 season had already been undertaken by the previous operator and therefore an agreement was entered into by GYTA with Sutton Media to provide the service. Payments were not received for the 2010/11 season from the operator leading to discussions around County Court Action and the relinquishing of the licence. David Marsh explained that to relinquish the licence in February 2011 would have left GYTA with the costs associated with the 2010/11 year. Ken Sims stated that throughout this time Sutton Media had been taking income and benefiting. In 2015 the licence is due for renewal.

A Member asked to clarify if the licence had been given up would the liabilities have transferred at that point with the licence being passed to the second highest bidder. David Marsh clarified that at that point £24,000 of liabilities would have remained with GYTA.

A Member asked if Sutton Media owed any money to Great Yarmouth Borough Council and it was stated that yes they did.

A Member asked if the PIP's could be seized and David Marsh stated that there would be a point when this could happen and that they had considered originally to seize and store the PIP's but did not want this to affect the current advertisers.

The Director of Customer Services stated that Sutton Media owes £3,750 of a total of £5,750 as they had paid £2,000 this year. However, the £5,750 represents the year 2009/10 and needs further clarification.

A Member asked the Chairman if the Chief Executive Officer had made him aware of her decision not to take action against GYTA and he stated that she had not at the time but he had been made aware afterwards.

The Cabinet Secretary informed the Committee that if they wished to scrutinise the decision that the Chairman had made then the Vice-Chair would have to take the Chair.

The Member stated that they would ask their question to the Chief Executive Officer and she stated that she continued to maintain her decision was made by her judgement and not by the influence of the Tourist Authority.

A Member stated that the Council has a good working relationship with the Tourist Authority and David Marsh added that the Council does not fund the Tourist Authority.

A Member stated that all decisions should be properly recorded as the Chairman's decision was not acted on and there was no paperwork to explain the reasons why.

The Chairman pointed out that it was the Tourist Authority's decision and not Great Yarmouth Borough Council's decision not to act on it.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and no further action be taken.

The meeting ended at: 20:00