

**Policy and Service  
Review Scrutiny  
Committee**



Date	Thursday 03 September 2009
Venue	Town Hall, Lytham St Annes
Committee members	Karen Buckley (Chairman) John Prestwich (Vice-Chairman) Elizabeth Oades; Patricia Fieldhouse; Tony Ford; Elaine Silverwood; Christine Akeroyd; Thomas Threlfall
Other Councillors	Cheryl Little, Sue Fazackerley
Officers	Clare Platt, David Gillett, Alan Royston, John Cottam, Darren Bell, Anne Heslop, Allan Williams, Annie Womack
Others	Members of the public

Public Platform

There were members of the public present, and the Chairman asked if anyone would like to speak on any topic on the agenda.

A member of the public wished to speak on the item on the agenda "Sand Dunes Management Action Plan". He told the committee about his misgivings about the current Action Plan, and in particular that this report did not contain all of the points which had been contained in the original 2005 report. He felt that there had not been sufficient consultation and asked the committee to defer making a recommendation on the topic this evening.

1. Declarations of interest

Members were reminded that any personal/prejudicial interests should be declared as required by the Council's Code of Conduct adopted in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000.

There were no declarations.

2. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Policy and Service Review Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 6 August 2009 as a correct record for signature by the chairman.

### 3. Substitute members

Cllr Christine Akeroyd acted as substitute for Cllr Elizabeth Clarkson.

### 4. Draft Private Sector Housing Policy

This report was presented by Mr John Cottam, Principal EHO (Housing), and was subsequent to a previous report on the same topic which had been presented to this committee in April 2009.

Since then, the draft had been out for consultation, and Mr Cottam advised the committee that this was the final draft, based on that consultation.

The consultation had elicited only two responses, which was disappointing, and overall had resulted in only minor changes to the original draft.

Mr Cottam spoke to the committee about the increase in the external funding to £579k for 2009-10. However he asked them to be mindful that potentially, for economic reasons, this would not be a long-term increase and that cuts were anticipated for future years.

Members asked Mr Cottam about the extent of the consultation and he confirmed that this had been facilitated through the website and the LSP housing theme group. In his report, Mr Cottam had made mention of the need to improve over 1000 private sector homes in order to meet the decent homes target, and in response to a question he confirmed that the figure had been set by government.

Queries were also made about how the annual average income was arrived at, and whether means testing was applied. In response to a specific question about residents in mobile homes, Mr Cottam advised that to benefit, such residents must live on a licensed residential park, and have lived there for a minimum of 3 years, and would be means tested.

After a full debate the committee RESOLVED:

To recommend approval and adoption of the final draft Private Sector Housing Policy.

### 5. Capital Programme – Replacement of Cremators and installation of Mercury Abatement Equipment

This report was presented to the committee by Clare Platt, Director of Community Services, supported by Allan Williams the council's procurement officer, and Alan Royston the council's cemetery and crematorium manager.

Ms Platt explained to the committee that the cremation equipment does not comply with DEFRA's air quality emission requirements, and is also approaching the end of its serviceable life. There are other refurbishment needs which it would seem sensible to tackle at the same time, to reduce the loss of income through closure of the cremators and chapel whilst these works are carried out.

She explained about the burden-sharing scheme, which meant that costs are shared between those fitting the equipment, and those who do not – a levy from those who don't fit the abatement equipment to be paid into a scheme which will be passed on to those who do fit it.

Members were told of the project underpinning the procurement process, which had resulted in a consortium approach with the specific intention to reduce costs for the participating local authorities.

Mr Williams advised members of the detail of the procurement process and assured them that a value for money solution had been found through this tender process, securing a recognised leading industry supplier, Facultatieve Technologies, at the best price.

Ms Platt told the committee that it was envisaged that works would be carried out during summer 2010. This would require a cremator shutdown of 4 – 6 weeks whilst new ones were installed. The abatement equipment could be fitted over the ensuing 8 weeks with no need for shutdown.

It was anticipated that refurbishment work to the crematorium and chapel could be carried out whilst the cremators were not operational. The cost of this work was not included in the £797k set aside for the cremators and abatement equipment, but it was estimated that £17k would remain after the major installations, and members were asked to consider recommending that any balance be used towards the cost of refurbishment.

Mr Royston gave the committee full details relating to the proposed maintenance contract. He gave his opinion that this represented good value for money and advised members that if the contract option was not taken up, then any breakdowns or essential repairs would not be given priority by the repairing company.

Ms Platt went on to outline the financing options and the revenue budget implications.

Members queried the credits that would be received and whether they would be offset against losses sustained during the closure of the cremators. It was explained that an additional offset would be obtained during Carleton's closedown in 2012, where Fylde would take most of that business.

They also asked about the lifespan of the new cremators; whether there would be an increase in fees; how long the works would take and whether there would be penalties for failure to meet deadlines for the supplier.

Concerns were expressed that DEFRA might make further demands in terms of reducing emissions once the equipment had been installed, but Mr Royston explained that the abatement equipment selected would remove all heavy metals. The issue had nevertheless been raised with DEFRA who confirmed that there were no such plans.

Members agreed that this was an excellent report and they thanked all concerned in the project. They also agreed that refurbishment of the chapel and crematorium was an essential addition to the main installation work.

After a full debate the committee RESOLVED to recommend to Cabinet

- 1 the appointment of Facultatieve Technologies to supply and install two new cremators and abatement equipment at Lytham Park Crematorium at a tender figure of £686,250
- 2 a capital budget of £780k is approved and allocated for the replacement of the cremators and abatement equipment

3 any balance remaining after the replacement of the cremators and installation of the abatement equipment, up to the amount identified in the capital programme, is used for the refurbishment of the crematoria whilst it is not operating. As the refurbishment work will have to be carried out during the closure of the facility and delay in getting member approval could prolong the closure, it is also recommended that Cabinet approve the delegation of the level of budget to be spent on refurbishment to the Portfolio Holders for Social Wellbeing and Finance & Resources. Full details to be provided in a further report to Portfolio holders in order to comply with financial regulations.

4 an unfunded budget increase to revenue budget estimates of £70k in 10/11, £81k in 11/12, £79k in 12/13 and £78k per annum thereafter to finance the capital scheme as set out in recommendations 2 and 3 above.

5 Facultative Technologies to be engaged to undertake a 7 year maintenance agreement. This increased maintenance cost to be financed from an increase in cremation fees from April 2010.

## 6. Homelessness Prevention Access Plan

The purpose of this report was to advise members of additional resources made available by the Government to deal with an expected increase in repossessions and the provision of additional debt advice. It sets out the resources currently available and an action plan for approval.

Mr Gillett, Housing Manager, advised the committee that in recent months a number of new initiatives had been announced by the Government to tackle debt related issues arising from the current and anticipated difficulties in the housing market, with the aim of the prevention of homelessness.

He told members that money had been made available to support the development of actions to tackle the threat of repossessions across all tenures, distributed on a sub regional basis and that Blackpool, Fylde, Wyre and Lancaster have been awarded £30,000 to split across the region. An action plan was provided for members.

The Government has also made additional funding available to local authorities by uplifting their existing homelessness grant payments. Fylde Borough Council has received a one off additional grant of £28,500 during the 2009/10 financial year.

It was proposed that a homelessness intervention policy and budget was developed to include these new funding initiatives and incorporating the existing Invest to Save policy which has been piloted successfully.

Mr Gillett highlighted some aspects of the action plan. He also made reference to the success of the Housing Advice Service, and to homelessness presentations which had numbered 126 in 2008/09. He told members about the measures which had been undertaken to ensure that appropriate advice and assistance was offered to residents.

However, there were still gaps in existing provision, principally that there are not enough specialist debt workers to deal with the demand in the Borough. He anticipated that funding could be used to support increasing debt advice available through the Citizen's

Advice Bureau. It could also pay for appropriate publicity to advertise this provision.

Mr Gillett told members that, further to the current Homelessness Strategy, Fylde BC was successful in gaining an extra £10,000 per year in Homelessness Grant paid by Communities and Local Government (CLG). An Invest to Save policy was developed in 2008 and the additional CLG monies had been used to deliver the policy and provide a fund which helps people to remain in their home or find alternative accommodation.

The fund had been successful in the prevention of homelessness and achieved savings in the homelessness budget through a reduction in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

Taking into account both existing resources and the new resources available through the CLG initiatives it was proposed to consolidate this funding and create a specific Intervention fund within the homelessness budget. This consolidated fund will pull together all the current resources to provide a number of different tools to prevent homelessness caused by debt and or repossession in the private rented and owner occupier sectors.

Government evidence suggests that the real impact of the recession will only hit in 18 months time. CLG has provided funding as a one off, and it is recommended that any unspent monies in 2009/10 to be carried forward to 2010/11. Mr Gillett also advised that further consideration would need to be given as part of the budget setting process for 2010/11 as to whether additional resources from the Council can be provided at that time to meet these anticipated needs.

Members asked for some extra information, including clarification about plans for using the funds and whether there was capacity to meet extra demand generated by publicity.

After a debate, the committee RESOLVED:

- 1 To recommend a funded budget increase of £36,000 for 2009/10 to create an intervention budget within the existing homelessness budget
- 2 To commend the success of the Invest to Save pilot scheme and recommend approval for its continuation
- 3 To recommend adoption of the Homelessness Prevention Action Plan as detailed at Appendix 3.
- 4 If there are surplus funds at the end of this year, to recommend that they are carried forward to be used the following year, this recommendation to be in principle, subject to budget pressures.

## 7. Sand Dunes Management Action Plan

This report was introduced by Mr Darren Bell, Parks Manager, and related to the proposed future management and maintenance of the coast and dune system from Starr Gate to Lytham. He explained that the aim was to create a well managed and marketed coastline with duneland that is clean, safe, environmentally sustainable, educational, biologically competent and hosts a variety of community involvement.

Mr Bell told the committee that The Lytham St. Anne's Dunes Management Plan had been adopted in 2005 and had been a high level strategy document. However, the Dunes Management Action Plan which was presented for consideration this evening had been prepared to manage delivery of the environmental aspects of the original Management Plan. Other facets of the 2005 Management Plan were being taken forward by other departments and agencies, and were not the subject of discussion in his report.

The Action Plan had been developed through consultation processes with professional bodies such as Natural England, other partner organisations and interested parties. It will be reviewed annually, and was designed to deliver specific outputs.

Members clarified with Mr Bell that it would be useful to obtain wider consultation, and confirmed that such a delay would not interfere with the work of the Dunes Officer.

It was proposed that the Action Plan be deferred to allow further clarification and consultation, and after the debate the committee RESOLVED:

To request that Mr Bell defers the Action Plan for further consultation and clarification, and that the matter should be brought back to committee in December 2009 for further consideration.