

## Community Focus Scrutiny Committee



Date	Thursday, 14 October 2010
Venue	Town Hall, St Annes
Committee members	Councillor Keith Hyde (Chairman) Councillor Roger Small (Vice-Chairman)  Councillors Christine Akeroyd, Frank Andrews, Maxine Chew, Elizabeth Clarkson, Barbara Douglas, Kathleen Harper, Howard Henshaw, Linda Nulty, Janine Owen, Dawn Prestwich, Paul Rigby
Other Representatives	Dr Frank Atherton (Director of Public Health)
Officers	Clare Platt, Tracy Scholes, Paul Walker, Stephen Ball, John Cottam, David Gillett, Marie McRoberts, Lyndsey Lacey, Darius Ward

### 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. No members declared any interests.

### 2. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Community Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 29 September 2010 as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

### 3. Substitute members

The following substitutions were reported under Council procedure rule 22.3:

Councillor Frank Andrews for Councillor John Singleton

Councillor Howard Henshaw for Councillor Ken Hopwood

### 4. Performance Exception Report

Further to the request of the committee at its last meeting, Marie McRoberts (Assistant Director: Revenues and Benefits and the Manager of the Blackpool

and Fylde Revenues and Benefits Shared Service) presented an updated report on matters associated with NI181 (time taken to process benefits new claims and change events) - an area identified as under performing.

Mrs McRoberts provided an overview of the issues associated with the System Replacement project which placed various challenges on resources not present in a normal year. She explained that this had inevitable impacts on processing times particularly over recent months leading up to 'go live' in October and for some time after. She added that it could take a considerable time to recover to former performance levels. Members were advised that the target is currently set for processing new claims/change events is 15 days but was running at 22.59 days.

Members were further advised that in addition to the normal workloads, every member of staff required training and that this training was not effective unless the staff were also given some practice time on the new system. In addition, staff time was also required to undertake data cleansing and reconciliation work before and after each data cut. This was a huge task requiring considerable resource to complete within the project timetable.

Mrs McRoberts explained that the situation was further exacerbated as a result of the recession in that workloads had increased by a considerable amount. New claims alone had increased by 18.9% compared to Feb 2008. She added that this is one of the highest increases in the North West.

A chart depicting the average time taken to process new claims/ average time to process change in circumstances prior to when Pericles was implemented in January 2006 to before and after the Shared Services commenced in October 2008 was circulated at the meeting. Also circulated were details of other local authorities ranking comparisons based on the number of households and caseloads including the % increase in claims from Feb 2008 and % of claims to household numbers.

Councillor Roger Small asked if the 15 day target set for processing new/change event claims was realistic. Mrs McRoberts stated that this was dependent on the circumstances of change and the number of caseloads but confirmed that the team was confident that they could regain performance. She added that Fylde's caseload had increased by 18.9% since 2008.

Councillor Linda Nulty expressed concerned about the vulnerable and elderly clients. Mrs McRoberts explained that arrangements were in place to make emergency payments. In anticipation of such circumstances, the team were already working 5 weeks ahead to 14 November. In addition, an extensive consultation exercise had been undertaken with landlords, DWP and other agencies to ensure that key messages were understood. The team were dealing with claims on a case by case basis and would ensure that no individual would suffer during this period.

Councillor Howard Henshaw asked about the increase in new claims. Mrs McRoberts made reference to the current economic climate. She stated that the volume of new claims had impacted on the new system but in anticipation

of the likely problems, CAPITA had provided consultants to help out in the early days. In addition, the Council had acquired (through the funding arrangements) extra floor walkers from Preston and Bolton to provide additional support for the staff concerned. She added that by the year end, it was hoped that the system would be back on track.

Councillor Janine Owen asked about the team's working arrangements and whether there was integrated working on claims or whether they were undertaken on an area by area basis. Mrs McRoberts confirmed that the team worked on an integrated system.

Councillor Paul Rigby asked about Fylde's ranking in the processing of claims. Mrs McRoberts addressed this matter.

Following detailed consideration of this matter it was RESOLVED:

1. To note the report and request that an updated report be presented at a future meeting of the committee when the year end figures are known.
2. To circulate at the earliest opportunity a briefing note on Welfare Reforms to all members of the Committee.

(The Chairman indicated that he was satisfied that the matter was not controversial and dealt with the matter by a show of hands rather than by taking a recorded vote on it)

#### 5. Health Issues in the Community

Dr Frank Atherton (Director of Public Health) attended the meeting to give a presentation to members on health issues in the community.

In brief, the presentation provided a summary of the health status of the population of North West area together with some recent trends in health indicators. It also included an overview of the following areas:

- The NHS White Paper
- Implications of Public health
- Reorganisation of the NHS

By way of introduction, Dr Atherton made reference to the Annual Report on the Health of the Local Population and in particular, the health status of the people in Fylde. He stated that in general, the health status of the people in Fylde was getting better. Life expectancy in men and women had made small but steady improvement. In addition, diseases, cardiovascular detection and mortality rates had improved. He added that a key role of the NHS and Local Authority was to address the broader determinants of health and achieve a healthier population.

Dr Atherton stated that within the North West, lifestyle issues were still a problem and that these generally related to alcohol consumption, smoking and diet/exercise/ obesity in the young and adult population. In terms of the Fylde

area, three distinct areas were rated worse than the national average and these related to:

- Accidents/ road traffic accidents
- Smoking
- Breast feeding initiation.

In terms of Health Services, Dr Atherton confirmed that the area was well serviced by primary and secondary care. There was recognition of the high quality of general practitioners and investments made in areas like Lytham Primary Care Centre. The secondary provision in the area was good. He added that the issue of finance was challenging but that the national trend was to provide more services in the community rather than hospitals and that this would be subject to ongoing consultation.

Dr Atherton briefed members on the NHS White Paper: Liberating the NHS and the likely impact on patient care together with details of various associated NHS consultation documents and joint initiatives proposed to be undertaken in Lancashire.

Members asked various questions relating to some of the trends highlighted in the report and thanked Dr Atherton for his helpful and well constructed report.

The Committee RESOLVED to note the report and thank Dr Atherton for his attendance at the meeting.

(The Chairman indicated that he was satisfied that the matter was not controversial and dealt with the matter by a show of hands rather than by taking a recorded vote on it)

## 6. Empty Property Position Statement

In accordance with the action contained in the recently agreed Fylde Housing Action Plan which related to the bringing of empty dwellings in the private sector back in to use, David Gillett (Housing Manager) and John Cottam (Principal Environmental Health Officer) provided members of the committee with an up to date position statement on the number of empty (residential) properties in the Fylde area.

Mr Gillett provided members with the background to the report. In doing so, he stated that the report raised a number of issues that required consideration by members and suggested actions that could be taken to deal with the issues.

In brief, the report provided details of the number of empty properties/ long term empty properties in the area, the rationale behind empty/'blight' properties, details of housing needs and projected growth in households, together with details of current activities and priorities for the housing team. In addition, it outlined proposals to undertake a review of the housing structure which among other things would seek to address the development of an empty homes strategy. It also made reference to some notable successes of

returning to use empty properties and its work with partners and peer group authorities.

Mr Cottam indicated that the objectives for action in relation to empty properties in Fylde are (a) to increase the use of the existing housing stock to provide additional affordable housing for rent and purchase and (b) to remove 'blight' properties.

Various actions were required to achieve these objectives and these were set out in the report. It was reiterated to members that all of the actions would require time and resources and that there was only a limited amount of work that could be done within existing resources.

Mr Cottam further stated that the Department for Communities and Local Government had begun work on developing options and advice for local authorities, property owners and others to bring more empty properties back into use. It is expected that information would become available on this work by the end of December 2010.

Member raised a number of matters at the meeting relating to funding costs/opportunities to bring empty properties back in to use, statutory intervention, blight properties and commuted sum opportunities.

Following detailed consideration it was RESOLVED to request that a report be presented to a future meeting of the committee upon consideration of guidance to Local authorities due to be issued by Government in December 2010.

(The Chairman indicated that he was satisfied that the matter was not controversial and dealt with the matter by a show of hands rather than by taking a recorded vote on it)

## 7. Shoreline Management Plan Adoption

In accordance with the instructions of Cabinet at its meeting on 15 September, Paul Walker (Director of Strategic Development) and Stephen Ball (Chief Engineer) presented details of a recent review of the Shoreline Management Plan covering the Fylde coast.

Mr Walker explained that Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) are part of the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management planning framework. He added that the SMP sets the long term policy for the management of the coast and is taken forward through shoreline strategies and schemes.

The report detailed the area covered by the review and the associated funding and consultation arrangements that had taken place together with the implications for Fylde. In addition, it highlighted the four possible policy options for coastline management and the time epochs stipulated by the guidance.

A copy of the relevant parts of the consultation report was circulated with the agenda.

Councillor Howard Henshaw asked about the bidding arrangements for coastal work against other local authorities. Mr Ball made reference to three schemes along the coast which had been incorporated in a combined bid with neighbouring authorities and included a scheme at Fairhaven. He added that this provided the opportunity for local authorities to bid more competitively.

Councillors Kathleen Harper and Janine Owen asked about the managed realignment proposed at Freckleton and the effect on the coastal walkways. In response, Mr Ball stated that the managed realignment between Freckleton Marsh and Naze Point was proposed for the long term time period, for the next 50-100 years. He added that these proposals are general policies, and the detail of the new route of the coastal path had not been established at this stage. It was suggested that it would most likely be considered and follow the line of the proposed set back defences, comprising earth banks.

Councillor Roger Small enquired as to whether the on going coastal works at Blackpool had any detrimental impact on the borough area. Mr Ball confirmed that there was no evidence of this.

Following consideration of this matter it was RESOLVED to endorse the decision of Cabinet to adopt the policies set out in the North West England and North Wales Shoreline Management Plan for the Fylde coastline.

(The Chairman indicated that he was satisfied that the matter was not controversial and dealt with the matter by a show of hands rather than by taking a recorded vote on it)

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