

Community Engagement

Briefing note to Budget and Performance Panel meeting 21 February 2012

This Briefing note provides additional information to members regarding the actions identified in the most recent round of Performance Review Team meetings.

Action: To arrange for an updated condition survey of Williamson Park.

During the recent severe weather damage occurred to a number of buildings in Williamson Park – the Butterfly House, shop and the Ashton Memorial. This damage gave concern that there might be other problems associated with the fabric of these buildings. The last condition survey was carried out in 2008 and a reserve budget was established to carry out any necessary repairs. Before carrying out repairs to recent damage it is considered prudent to arrange for an up to date condition survey in order to take a comprehensive approach to any repairs that may be required. The buildings have been made safe.

Action: To review the proposals for the repair of the Ashton Memorial steps

During the summer of 2011 the steps to the front (fountain side) of the Ashton Memorial began to sag and move out of alignment. On public safety grounds the steps were closed off and a firm of structural engineers was commissioned to examine the structure. They found the steps were laid upon an intricate arrangement of steel and wooden beams and that the area underneath the steps is in effect a large void. The beams had sagged causing the steps to move.

The advice of the Council's Conservation Officer was taken to put together a design solution and tenders were sought from three specialist heritage restoration companies. Two tenders were returned. Analysis of those tenders suggested that each tenderer had approached the reconstruction in a different way making it difficult to compare like with like and thus the risks associated with carrying out this extremely complex major work had been approached differently. It was felt that there was a risk to the Council going forward with either tender on that basis and so it has been agreed to retender the work on a different basis. The steps have been sealed off and the impact of the sealing off will be mitigated until construction work can begin later in the year following a retendering exercise.

Action: Investigate installation of biomass boiler in Williamson Park

Biomass boilers offer an environmentally sound, heating solution. Burning biomass, such as wood pellets or logs, emits the same amount of carbon dioxide as is absorbed while the plants were growing. Therefore, biomass is classed as carbon-neutral/renewable energy.

In the Williamson Park Asset replacement register it has been highlighted that the main boilers will be replaced in 2015/16 assuming that there are no major problems between now and then. Investigations into the feasibility of a biomass boiler at Williamson's Park are at the preliminary stage.

However, these investigations are suggesting that Lancaster City Council may be able to receive payments for the heat produced from a biomass wood boiler through the government's Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) which opened for applications on 28th November 2011.

The RHI provides a continuous income stream for twenty years to any organisation that installs an eligible renewable heating system, ensuring that renewable heat is commercially attractive when compared to fossil fuel alternatives.

Action: Salt Ayre Sports Centre - Investigate cost of replacement floodlighting with energy efficiency bulbs.

To date there has been £27,500 capital investment into the centre which has resulted in projected savings up to £240,000 by 2013. Using 2008 as a benchmark year, the SASC has shown a reduction of its electricity bill of 41.7% which has been estimated equating to a £92,131 saving on the associated costs.

SASC has two external areas which currently use floodlights; the Astro turf pitch, and the Athletics arena. A proposal has therefore been made to investigate the cost of replacement floodlighting with energy efficient bulbs.

The lights currently used for both the Astro turf and Running Track areas are of an outdated design which does not concentrate the light on the sports surface. The proposed replacement lights produce a more targeted beam therefore producing more useful light.

The proposal would comprise the replacement of the existing 32 lights with 20 new lights at the Astro turf pitch and the replacement of 32 existing lights with 32 new lights at the running track.

This investigation is still at an early stage and will be reported back to members when complete.

Brief - PRT Q3 2011/2012 Housing - Council Housing (Tenancy) Re-letting

Council housing monitor the average time taken to relet properties as one of their key performance indicators. The average time taken to relet local authority housing is the time in calendar days from the day after tenancy is terminated up to and date when the new tenancy agreement starts. Over the last year there has been deterioration in performance in this area. The average relet time at the end of Q3 was 49.89 days against a target of 38 days.

The major contributor to this deterioration on performance on the overall time taken to relet properties has been a significant increase the time taken to undertake repairs to empty properties by RMS.

2010/2011	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Average time taken to complete void repair works	26.04	22.08	21.33	21.82

2011/2012	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Average time taken to complete void repair works	33.06	33.83	32.70	

If RMS's performance had been maintained at the levels achieved in 2010/2011 there would be no significant concerns. The repairs and maintenance service of the council is in the process of being reviewed and restructured. To improve the performance in relation to the repairs to empty council housing properties the function is being moved from the responsive repairs team to the planned maintenance team and this should lead to significant performance improvements. This restructuring has still to be completed. Following the transfer from Council Housing to Environmental Services and a subsequent review of RMS, it was always anticipated that it would take a period of time to get the right structure in place and for improvements to be made. Officers are still confident that we can deliver an excellent repairs and maintenance service and have taken immediate steps to address the void repair issues with an action plan already in place.

In addition a review has been undertaken of the whole of the reletting process which identified other areas that were affecting performance, and these have been built into the action plan:

- Low number of pre-void inspection being undertaken
- Ensuring that adequate resources are available and targeted to reduce the time taken to undertake void work
- Properties not being effectively highlighted as being available for early viewing
- Installation of new kitchens having an effect on a number of voids
- Maintenance of common areas to flats affecting prospective tenants opinions on the desirability of property

Chris Hanna
Principal Housing Manager
10 February 2012

PRT Report – Property Services

The following table relates to the items that are contained within Leader's Corporate PRT report

Key PRT Actions Agreed	Comments on progress	Additional comments
Complete the review of St Leonards House	Review to be completed as soon as possible and the rent owing by health occupiers to be identified	The building is in very poor condition with 11.37% of the building unlettable & of the remainder only 29.4% is currently occupied. Part was occupied by the NHS foundation Trust who left owing £32k in rent. Maintenance costs are significant. An asset management report is being prepared to allow the council to determine what the future of the building should be. Lack of resource within the service is delaying the report.
Advise on the outcome of the expressions of interest for the sale of land at Middleton	Official closing date was 6.1.12 although other expressions of interest are still coming in. Meeting with planning w/c 6.2.12 to discuss further	Cabinet indicated that the council should seek expressions of interest for the disposal of part of the former Shell/ICI site at Middleton. Four expressions have been received and the details are being analysed and further information requested where necessary.
Advise on the outcome of the Lancaster TH boiler tender Process	All tenders are in. Came in at £100,000 above budget. Meeting with Finance 3.2.12 to discuss extra finance or reducing tender	This scheme will provide a new boiler including the associated building works, thermal radiator valves, ventilation works, & building energy management system. The Head of Finance has indicated that finance is available for the scheme to proceed. It is expected that the boiler will be installed at the end of the heating season.
Identify costs of adapting P&D machines to accept card payments	Chamber of Commerce to be advised on the cost of adapting P&D machines to accept card payments. Also a review of change in size of coinage and card security will be carried out	As part of the consultation prior to cabinet considering the parking fees & charges report, the Chamber asked for information on adapting pay & display machines to take card payments. This information will be sent to them when available. It is likely that there will be a significant cost in adapting the machines. The Royal mint is to issue new coins in the near future which will be a slightly different size to existing coins. As a result the P&D machines are being adapted to receive the new coins.

REGENERATION AND POLICY SERVICE

PRT 3 Actions Councillor Hanson.

Morecambe Area Action Plan: The Area Action Plan has reached the stage of exhibiting the clear visions the community has for the central area. It has got there after extensive rounds of consultation. The next stage is to prepare draft proposals and consult with the community again, and the commercial sector to see if the parties who have engaged with the council so far consider the proposals commercially realistic.

The Deputy Chief Executive wishes to raise with Cabinet the option of taking an alternative approach. This might involve using the vision which has emerged through the Area Action Plan to date and attempting to secure a development partner through the County Councils selected development partner list. If such a partner felt the vision could be turned into viable schemes the DCE thinks there is a possibility that they could be persuaded to submit planning applications straight away giving the same strong basis for site acquisition through CPO if required. Alternatively a development partner at this stage might be able to assist the City Council in drafting detailed site allocations for the Area Action Plans.

There is a risk with considering this approach in that progress on the next stage of the Area Action Plan could be delayed, alternatively the sourcing of an enthusiastic development partner could advance matters at a greater pace. All risks need to be considered. The deputy Chief executive has undertaken to prepare a report to Cabinet to enable them to consider the options.

Business Improvement District Morecambe: Consideration of removing the £40K allocated for development of the project was based on the understanding that little progress was being made on developing the Morecambe BID. Since then the Lancaster and District Chamber have confirmed in writing their support for a Morecambe BID and a willingness to share their experiences in the preparation of the Lancaster BID. The Morecambe Chamber have taken steps to constitute a group to work on BID preparation. It would appear therefore that progress is being made and that the removal of the funding would be very unpopular.

Housing Regeneration Chatsworth Gardens : Officers in the Regeneration and Policy service have prepared a report to consider options for preparing a viable scheme to regenerate the properties on the Chatsworth Gardens Housing Exemplar site. It considers options and costs but does not identify funding to implement the scheme. The Deputy Chief Executive after attending a recent LGA conference which introduced a new model for affordable homes has asked for consideration to be given to a new option which might include acquisition of all the properties in the scheme and total demolition to provide a site capable of delivering this new form of housing model. Evaluation of this, and the request to include a much wider range of

Housing Regeneration initiatives in the report will create a delay in that particular item coming to Cabinet.

Regional Growth Fund : Although a new round of funding has been identified the criteria has not changed. It is largely targeted to private sector schemes where a developer is in place and has approval to proceed. There are no projects immediately available to secure this funding in Lancaster District at this time.

Planning Applications: Recent steps to bolster capacity through temporary posts have been hindered by inability to recruit a major applications Officer and a temporary contractor having given notice. A solution to the Major Applications Officer post has been found and the vacant contract post is being advertised. Steps are also being considered to redeploy another member of staff to act as service Complaints Officer to remove the burden from the Assistant Head (Development Management) and enable him to concentrate on his primary operational role. This should also enable the Service Head to reduce the amount of hands on support he is having to give to Development Management activities.

Andrew Dobson
Head of Regeneration and Policy