

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL
ECONOMY AND ENTERPRISE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of the **Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in **Committee Room 2 - County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 27 February 2012 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor J Moran (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors B Arthur, J Cordon, B Graham, J Hunter, P Jopling, C Potts, P Stradling, M Wilkes, M Williams and A Willis

Co-opted Members:

Mr T Batson, Mr A Kitching and Mr JB Walker

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Naylor, J Armstrong, A Barker, C Carr and J Rowlandson and Mrs O Brown, Mr A J Cooke, Mrs A Harrison and Mr T Thompson

Also Present:

Councillors B Bainbridge, D Boyes, C Magee, A Shield, R Todd, J Turnbull and C Walker and Superintendent P Beddow, Ms E Roebuck and Mr M Iveson

A1 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no Declarations of Interest.

A2 Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties, if any

There were no Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

A3 "Bringing Empty Homes Back Into Use":

The Chair asked the Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Stephen Gwilym to introduce the topic of Empty Homes. The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer thanked the Chair and reminded Members that Empty Homes was a topic agreed within the Work Programme for the Committee and that Members had requested an update on the topic further to the regular quarterly performance reports and a refresh of the Work Programme.

The Committee noted that the issue was cross-cutting, including the Altogether Wealthier and Altogether Safer priority themes of the Council Plan and accordingly, Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who had carried out a review that looked at issues such as Envirocrime, Anti-social Behaviour and Empty Homes had been invited to attend the Committee.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer introduced the Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager, Kath Heathcote who was in attendance to give Members a presentation updating the Councillors on "Bringing Empty Homes Back Into Use" (for copy, see file of minutes).

The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager thanked Members for the opportunity to address the Committee and began by referring to the slide that set out the national statistics, noting that there were 740,000 empty homes as at February 2012, of which 300,000 are "long term" empties, giving a vacancy rate of approximately 3.3%. Members learned that an academic opinion was that a vacancy rate of 2.5% was the "indicator of a flourishing housing market". It was noted that the number of empty homes had not fluctuated much over the last 10 years, between 700,000 and 800,000 in that period, with the annual amount of homes becoming vacant being around 300,000, with a comparable number coming back into use. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager added that the 10 year period that had not fluctuated wildly encompassed periods where many Local Authorities had put a lot of resources into tackling empty homes and periods where little funding was used in this way. Accordingly, the main factors shaping the number of empty homes were economical and financial, though it was noted that this did not mean that Local Authorities could not help to bring empty homes back into use.

The Committee were shown the statistics for the North East region in comparison to the other 8 "regions" of the country noting that London did not share the "peaks and troughs" that the other areas of the country experienced, a steady rise from 2005 to 2008 then a fall from 2008 through to 2010. Members noted that this was connected to the housing market conditions at the time, with a house building boom in the period 2004 to 2008 and the global downturn and recession 2008 to 2010. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager referred Members to the statistics for the North East and pointed out that contrary to the popular myth that our region was one of the worst for empty properties, the statistics showed that the North East was the third best performing area and that the figures for Durham showed similar trends to those nationally and regionally with the current figure of 9750 empty homes for Durham being approximately that of the 2004 figure of 9,592. Members were asked to be aware that differing figures noting the number of empty homes are often quoted, and that this was because that the housing market was incredibly fluid and changeable with any statistic being a snapshot in time and that the data source used, the Council Tax Register, was not completely accurate as regards the number of empty homes as some properties may be sold, however the Council has not been informed. Members also learned that some statistics would include social housing and private rented accommodation, whilst some statistics would only include one or the other. The Committee also heard that in some figures, properties earmarked for demolition were included, and in some cases new build properties yet to be marketed were also included. Members were advised to ask whenever they were given figures whether they were the raw Council Tax data or had been adjusted in some way as previously noted.

The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager explained that the picture across the County was varied with some areas having larger numbers of empty homes, some having less, the average vacancy rate being 4.3% and the peaks being around 10% in the main mining communities. Councillors were advised that whilst the rate was above the national average, it was in line with the current economic climate within the County and that by targeting those areas with the higher figure of 10%, mostly former coalfield areas, it should be possible to reduce the average figures.

The Committee were made aware that there were several myths as regards the issue of empty properties including, as previously mentioned, that all empty properties are problematic, indeed for a housing market to be able to operate it was explained that there was a need to have a proportion of empty homes. It was added that the problem of empty homes has not worsened, there was no “north / south divide” and whilst there was an excellent team in place at the Council there were limits as to what any Local Authority could do to resolve all empty homes issues. Examples given to Members were some properties that were subject to probate, some properties that were marketed at an unrealistic price and so on. Members were informed that the simplistic view of the number of homeless families / in housing need being equal to that of the number of empty homes as presented in a recent television programme was not correct and that whilst it was right to highlight the issue of empty homes as a valuable commodity not being utilised, it was perhaps naive to say that empty homes was a universal solution to the problems of homelessness.

The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager added that the Council’s Homelessness and Housing Allocations Policies were “family friendly” and wherever possible there was always an attempt to support families by housing people in areas where they would be able to access their families and support networks. However, it was noted that if Members were to look at the issue of empty homes, then it would be sensible to look at the homelessness and associated appropriate housing policies. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager explained that in London, there was an offer of any property to those presenting as homeless and if they refuse a property then the Council’s obligation would be discharged. Members were reminded that the higher figures for empty homes were mostly in the former coalfield areas and that there were many excellent properties within these areas that could be utilised if policy was to encourage this.

Councillors noted that the advantages of targeting those areas with the highest percentage of empty homes were that in moving from the County average of 4.3% to the national average of 3.3%, around 2,500 properties would be brought back into use, helping to meet housing demand. It was explained that other advantages would be the prevention of neighbourhood blight, the creation of sustainable neighbourhoods in tandem with other regeneration projects, and would be potentially more cost effective than building new homes and using up valuable land resource. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager added that in the county the highest proportion of properties are terraced, with the lowest being detached dwellings. It was noted that in order to attract business and economic success it would perhaps be a better strategy to build a greater number of new executive homes rather than high proportions of “affordable homes”, and to bring empty properties back into use as affordable housing. Members noted that choices of housing type would have impact for generations and it was important to make the right choices for the future as sustainable development was a Council strategic priority.

Also, Councillors were informed that bringing an empty home back into use achieving a saving in terms of energy and carbon footprint in comparison to new build.

The Committee were reminded of the Council’s current approach, with the Private Sector Housing Strategy (PSHS) being in place in support of the Housing Strategy, the Regeneration and Economic Development (RED) Regeneration Statement priorities, the Council Plan and the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS).

The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that the PSHS committed the Council to provide support to ensure a thriving private housing sector including: improving the energy efficiency levels of existing housing; providing grants and loans to enable vulnerable owner/occupiers to adapt their homes; providing loans to enable vulnerable owner/occupiers to repair their homes; tackling issues of poor management and poor housing conditions in the private rented sector; delivering area-based holistic housing regeneration initiatives; delivering new housing; and bringing empty homes back into use.

Members noted that some of these were requirements and the Council had to provide certain types of support, however, in an ever increasingly tight staffing and budget envelope there was a need to have a targeted rather than a blanket approach in order to realistically deliver results for vulnerable neighbourhoods, vulnerable people and to provide a “safety net” for anyone across the County. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager explained that there were 3 full-time equivalent Officers dealing with empty homes for all of County Durham, operating across 8 priority areas that had been identified for the targeted approach. Members were informed that if an area was improved and moved off the priority list other areas could then be looked at and added to the list and that should any major issue arise, focus could be shifted in order to help tackle any problems. It was reiterated that this was with the understanding that the Authority would still act as a safety net should it be required.

The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager explained that therefore the challenge for both Members and Officers was to communicate that the approach is not to look at any individual empty property specifically unless a major issues arises, rather to look strategically at priority areas with a Project Team approach being more effective. Members were referred to “before and after” pictures of an empty property at Craghead that had been brought back into use and that the Manager for that area had been able to help improve the vacancy rate from 15% in 2010 to a current percentage of 4%. Councillors were assured that there was a visible improvement to the area and that the area was becoming more sustainable as a result. It was noted that improvements included Standard Energy Procedure (SAP) energy efficiency ratings being raised from below 50 to 90 through measures such as providing an insulating render and the addition of photovoltaic cells. Councillors were informed that work had been undertaken with the help of outside investment and persuasion of private landlords and residents/homeowners to invest to help improve the perception of the area and to help ensure a healthy mixed community.

The Committee noted that there was a joint protocol in place with the Environmental Protection Team and this was monitored by the Housing Improvement Team with quarterly meetings with colleagues from Environmental Health to discuss where persuasion would need to move to enforcement action such as an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO).

Members were keen to note that the Authority had applied for 2 EDMOs, one property having been empty since 1976, and that a decision on these would be made in March this year. Councillors were asked to note that EDMOs required a lot of work in order to gather evidence and information and the process was lengthy and potential costly and therefore was an option to use in only the most extreme cases, however these first cases could be used as an advertisement of the “teeth” the Council could bring to bear should landlords and property owners were not willing to bring empty homes back into use.

The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager explained that the Financial Assistance Policy had been reviewed and amended in respect of loans for owners of empty properties, with 3 loan products being made available with many people becoming “accidental” landlords and therefore the Council helps to get properties back into use quickly and can often be a better option than an owner approaching a bank, especially in the current financial climate. Members noted that the Financial Assistance Policy was reviewed annually and this would mean another review in April 2012.

The Committee learned that the Council supported Register Providers to submit bids in order to access Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) funding and whilst this was not a large number of properties, being around 10, it was important to ensure that Durham was effectively getting “its fair share” of this particular funding stream. Members were informed that an Officer was allocated full-time to the development of a Private Sector Leasing Scheme in areas of high vacancy and low demand, for example to encourage Private Landlords to take properties on and bring them back into use. The Committee were informed that the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) / enforced sales was perhaps a more practical and workable alternative to EDMOs and in the case where the Authority cannot find the owner of a property, then it can be advantageous as with no owner, then the CPO requires no compensation to be paid, so an investment of around £5,000 - £10,000 in order to secure a property could generate an amount of £50,000 or more. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager added that this could then be kept by the Authority and be ringfenced to help bolster work in this regard should Members wish.

Councillors were reminded that Central Government’s position was that tackling empty homes was high on the housing agenda and in May 2011 the Housing Minister, Grant Shapps M.P. said “...there are too many empty homes blighting too many communities”. It was noted that the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Business Plan 2011-15 as set out in November 2010 pledged to “develop a strategy to bring more empty homes back into use, working with Local Authorities, Housing Associations and some of the Property Owners, Neighbours and others affected”. Members were also informed that in February 2011, Government confirmed that bringing empty homes back into use will count as new homes under the New Homes Bonus Scheme, for the next six years. Councillors heard that there were plans to force Local Authorities to wait 2 years before pursuing a EDMO rather than the current 6 months and nationally, since the introduction of EDMOs in 2006, there has only been 43 successful EDMOs noting the difficulty in gathering evidence and information. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager explained that from 2012 the HCA would be supporting Registered Providers with £100 Million from Government to refurbish more than 3,000 empty properties, of around 750,000 nationally, and to manage them at near market rent for a period of up to 10 years. Members noted that this could have some benefit for high value properties in good areas.

The Committee learned that whilst it was difficult to predict how policy and the economy would change in the future, it was thought that as the current predictions for the economy are poor then this in turn could mean vacancy levels could rise, though they are likely to reduce slightly, by around a few hundred or so. It was noted that the number of accidental landlords who are unable to complete repairs in order to rent or sell their property was also likely to increase. Members took some comfort in the fact that there was unlikely to be a risk of over-supply, and as there were less opportunities for Registered Providers to build, diversifying and looking to existing housing stock would likely increase.

The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager explained that options for the future included a review of the PSHS, perhaps looking to see which functions were required and where to prioritise resources, for example in tackling empty homes; for the Council to take on an enabling role in order to help Registered Providers acquire empty properties; and to continue to prioritise economic development. Members also learned that there were options to help maximise the New Homes Bonus received by the Council, with examples at other Local Authorities being:

- Sheffield City Council – used funding to establish a new “local growth fund” for housing regeneration projects and initiatives to bring empty homes back into use
- Kent – Loans for landlords
- Cheshire West and Chester – £500,000 funding pot for Registered Providers to bring empties back into use.

Councillors were asked to note the main points raised were:

- The vacancy rate for Durham is slightly higher than the national average
- The vacancy rate for Durham is skewed by weaker housing markets, some in the former coalfield areas
- Whilst the open market and economic factors largely dictate the vacancy levels, Local Authorities can effectively intervene through a targeted approach
- Equating the problem of homelessness and empty homes and saying they would be able to “cancel each other out” is an oversimplification
- There would be considerable benefits to reducing vacancy levels
- Should the Council decide it has serious intentions in this regard, there would be a need to develop new products and initiatives and to look at policies linked to homelessness and allocations.

The Chair thanked the Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager and asked if Members had questions for the Officer.

Councillor J Cordon asked whether there was further information as regards the examples shown at Craghead, the number of houses and the costs and noted the scheme at St. Peter’s Court in Sacriston a refurbished old peoples’ home that was for ex-servicemen and women. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that the Project Manager for the scheme at Craghead was the Housing Regeneration Team Leader, Adrian Cantle-Jones and that he organised meetings looking to see what approaches could be used and noted that the Council had funded 120 properties. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted she did not have the number of empty properties brought back into use to hand; however, the information could be circulated back to Members accordingly.

Members were informed that the Council was working with Derwentside Homes and 2 other large private landlords, which were akin to Register Social Landlords (RSLs), and information could be provided showing how many properties by each organisation.

Councillor P Stradling noted that in the area he represented, Accent had invested around £5 Million and Durham Aged Miners Housing Association (DAMHA) had invested around £4 Million via East Durham Homes (EDH) in order to make properties more desirable and asked what Durham County Council (DCC) were doing to invest in this manner.

The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager reminded Members of the priority areas as previously stated, and noted that for the East of the County, Easington Colliery and Dawdon were the priority areas. Accordingly, focus groups had been set up in those areas to look to improve the situation with regard empty homes, adding that DCC would still provide the “safety net” coverage for the other areas in East Durham, as it did for the whole County outside of the priority areas as well as tackling any serious issues that may arise. Councillors were informed that Accent had launched “Good Neighbour, Good Landlord and Good Letting Agents Agreements”, with Michael Fishwick of Accent being in attendance at the launch event together with the Portfolio Holder of Housing, Councillor Clive Robson on 14 February 2012, working with 2 local properties letting agents, Acorn and Castledene, together with 11 local Residents’ Associations.

Councillor M Wilkes noted the information as regards the different types of figures being used to show the number of empty properties, understanding that demolished properties or those scheduled for demolition would skew figures. Councillor M Wilkes added that at a budget meeting it was explained to Members that the Authority received around £1.3 Million in respect of the New Homes Bonus and that this was fed into the General Fund rather than ringfenced to Housing. Whilst recognising the financial position of the Council, Councillor M Wilkes added that he felt the Committee should recommend that the New Homes Bonus be ringfenced to Housing. Councillor M Wilkes asked how many staff had been charged to look at the issues of empty homes at the former District Authorities in comparison to the new Unitary Authority and whether the 3 full-time equivalents was a sufficient staffing level to tackle the issues raised, noting the New Homes Bonus as previously mentioned. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that whilst it was not for her to comment in relation to budget decisions, a report was being prepared for RED showing which Local Authorities had ringfenced their New Homes Bonus and how and where this had led to effective action in tackling housing issues. Members noted that some Local Authorities had a mind to “grow their pot”, to invest their New Homes Bonus in such a way to help attract further New Homes Bonus. In respect of staffing, the Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager explained that prior to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) there was one Officer at the former Derwentside Authority, one at the former Easington Authority, whilst accepting that those Officers did not solely deal with empty homes. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager explained that in respect of the staffing levels currently, the Authority need to be able to react to changing circumstances and that therefore it would be necessary to work with Corporate Human Resources to look at any needs as required.

Councillor A Shield asked whether there was any promotion of fixed price rent schemes, such as that operated by Prince Bishops Homes. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that many company flyers were already advertising similar schemes and this seemed to be a trend and DCC could lend support and share intelligence, whilst keeping in mind issues of data protection.

Councillor A Shield asked whether the Government’s Welfare Reform changes would lead to properties becoming undesirable. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that some RSLs actively want to tackle so-called “benefit areas” and therefore it may be possible to link where RSLs are looking to make relatively quick turnaround with Area Based Regeneration that was linked to where DCC wished to increase “affordable” housing.

Councillor C Walker noted that the Council should be wary of “speculators” grabbing lots of building plots and existing stock and then not delivering the results we need, citing an example in his local area where he felt that projects were “managing the decline” rather than regenerating the area and that in many cases, there was a need for renewal and not re-use as many older properties are no longer suitable. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager agreed that there have been cases, where a lot of properties were snapped up in the last major property crash in the late 1980’s, where many properties have been taken on by private landlords who were failing in their responsibilities.

Councillor D Boyes noted that the involvement of RSLs in tackling the issue of empty homes was welcome, recalling a meeting with the Chief Executive of EDH, Paul Tanney last week and noted that the EDMO route was potentially a legal minefield and was not surprised that this route had not been used more. Councillor D Boyes added that the Selective Licensing Scheme was also heralded as a solution to many housing problems, including empty properties, although with only 50% of landlords signing up in the pilot areas, and without enough Staff to enforce, there had not been much success. Councillor D Boyes noted that whilst the Staff involved in Housing were excellent, there was perhaps a need to have additional staff to cope with workloads, or to be less ambitious with the number of schemes and initiatives being operated. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that the Landlord Initiative Team Leader, Angela Stephenson would be leading a review on the effectiveness of the Selective Licensing Scheme and the outcome would be communicated in due course. Councillor D Boyes noted that he was aware of a single estate that had 77 empty properties and was disappointed that television news Reporters would often use this area to report from, giving a jaundiced view of our area.

Councillor P Jopling noted that only 2 EDMOs had been sought by DCC and asked whether seeking to have a property demolished was not a more cost effective solution. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that it would be possible to provide Members with a breakdown of the costs involved regarding an EDMO and the repairs and management to properties over 7 years, however, as previously stated it was felt that EDMOs were an option of final resort, should other options fail and that also care would need to be taken when CPO properties were marketed to ensure that they did not return back to similarly disreputable private landlords.

Councillor B Arthur reiterated the points raised by Councillors C Walker and D Boyes and noted that the issues of empty homes, blight and so on were important and needed tackling and the scrapping of the Landlord Accreditation Scheme was a step backwards and that more pressure was needed on landlords. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that whilst most Local Authorities in the North East have in place or have tried such schemes, it was only the “top 10%” of Landlords that sign up and it was not easy to demonstrate the effectiveness of such schemes, for example in Durham, on 1% of around 30,000 properties were accredited.

It was noted, however, that within a review of Choice Based Lettings - Durham Key Options (DKO), there may be an opportunity to tie-in Accredited Landlords, having this listed via DKO, making it cheaper for landlords to advertise their properties.

Mr JB Walker noted that The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles M.P. had announced that Government wish to reduce under-occupancy within existing properties and he felt that this may cause a great deal of harm and an update on this could be useful for Members in due course.

Ms E Roebuck noted that there was a community safety aspect that needed to be considered however there was a need for more accurate data as regards the concentration of empty homes and also the criteria used to identify “priority areas” would be useful for Committee Members to help understand the processes in place to be able to liaise with Durham Constabulary in targeting anti-social behaviour, hate crimes and so on. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that her Team were undergoing training in the use of the Council’s Graphical Information System (GIS) and this would enable such information and they would work with the Safer Communities Manager, Caroline Duckworth in alignment with High Impact Localities (HILs) such that if a property was not within a priority area, though was within a HIL it would be prioritised over those not within a HIL. As regards issues of blight and fly tipping, it was noted that Accent had some success in other regions with schemes tackling this and it may be possible to liaise with them on similar schemes for our area.

Mr T Batson asked whether there were figures as split by Area Action Partnership (AAP) and whether as per DCC policy, Town and Parish Councils were consulted on issues such as empty homes. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that AAPs were heavily involved in issues of housing regeneration and that many AAP Members were representatives on Housing Steering Groups and AAPs gave regeneration as one of their key areas of focus. Members were informed that part of the Housing Strategy consultation was specifically with Parish Councils, and the PSHS was a business level document and in that sense, it had not been subject to a consultation exercise as such.

Councillor J Hunter reiterated Councillor J Cordon’s request for cost information for the scheme at Craghead and added that should the issue of empty homes be topic of a review group, a site visit to those properties may be useful for Members.

Mr M Iveson asked whether the numbers of empty properties in areas equated to the demand / housing need in an area. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that unfortunately this was not the case and that many thriving areas are those with high demand and area that are not areas with the large numbers of empty properties. Also, it was noted that through the DKO scheme, people have the ability to request where they wish to be housed and therefore there the more popular areas are always in high demand.

Councillor C Potts noted that the Selective Licensing Scheme at Chilton had been very good and 49 properties had been improved and a Group Repair scheme was in place and this may also be useful as a potential site visit for Members.

Councillor M Wilkes noted the comments of Councillor C Walker as regards renewal over re-use; however, he felt that the benefit in bringing empty homes back into use had been demonstrated.

Councillor M Wilkes asked whether there was further information as regards the number of landlords DCC have helped via loan schemes, how the Council Tax changes post-April 2012 would affect empty homes numbers and whether the Council policy to look for new-build on “greenfield” sites would need to be looked at to perhaps give more weight to bringing empty homes back into use. The Housing Renewal and Improvement Manager noted that in some cases, giving an example at Seaham, a housing scheme had allocated funding in lieu of “affordable housing provision” which could be used for bringing empty homes back into use. Councillor M Wilkes appreciated this, but noted that Community Infrastructure Levies (CILs) had a finite distance cut off that would apply and with Durham City being the focus of development and regeneration, he was concerned that some areas may not receive these types of benefits.

Councillor R Todd concurred with the point raised by Councillor C Walker that many of the older style “back-to-back” properties were no longer practical for modern living and these would not make suitable candidates for re-use, and renewal would be preferable in these cases.

The Chair thanked Members for their comments and asked the Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer to give a summary of the next steps.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer explained that the issue of “Empty Homes” remained a priority for the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee and at the meeting scheduled for 29 March 2012, a refresh of the Committee’s Work Programme would reflect this and there would be updates on empty homes, including at the meeting on 29 March 2012. Members were reminded that the updated performance management reporting would now also include information on housing performance and the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor C Robson had noted that whilst the Quarter 3 performance report noted that the Authority was not quite “at target”, any review of the issue by Overview and Scrutiny Members was welcomed. The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer added that a scoping/briefing report would be provided for Members shortly.

The Chair noted that the input from the Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee was most appreciated, and Councillor D Boyes thanked the Chair for the opportunity to feed into the review and Members for their attendance today.