

## **Item 5(b) – Balanced Communities Vision 2010-13**

### **Services Select Committee's Recommendation to Cabinet**

At its meeting on 9 September 2010 the Services Select Committee considered the matter as follows:

The Head of Housing informed Members that the document had been unique in Kent when it was first produced by the Council and many Councils still did not have one. She informed Members that it had been considered exceptionally good practice by a number of funding organisation and had proved very successful in helping the Council obtain external funding. Balanced Communities was part of the Councils vision and included balancing the housing market and sustaining local communities. She further explained that the new style document was shorter and more succinct with reference to supporting documentation. The resulting actions were included in the Sustainable Community Action Plan.

ACTION 1 – The Head of Housing undertook to find out from the Head of Community Development what percentage of children living in the District attended an LEA school.

ACTION 2 – The Head of Housing undertook to find out from the Head of Community Development how many children between 11-18 lived in the District.

During a wide-ranging discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- The document did not give sufficient consideration to people working in traditional rural industries such as forestry and agriculture, given that 93% of the District was in the Green Belt.
- There was a general problem with poor energy efficiency housing in the District, not just amongst those on low incomes.
- That the three year time period of the strategy seemed a little arbitrary and that it might be better not to set a time period and to review only when circumstances required.
- For some Members, the document contained significant amounts of language which was too emotive and which suggested more serious issues of community cohesion than some Members felt existed in the District.
- There was always going to be a significant number of very wealthy people who lived in the District, given the very good train service into the City of London, which would lead to high house prices.
- That the only conceivable way of lowering house prices in the District would be to relax green belt boundaries, which the Council and the

community was not in favour of.

In response to some of these points, the Head of Housing explained that the aim of the document was to set the scene of what could happen in unbalanced communities, before explaining the Council's vision to maintain a balanced community in the District. She also explained to Members that achieving balanced communities was not simply about access to housing but a range of social issues.

Members then agreed to consider the document in detail and suggested the following specific amendments:

- Page 3, left-hand column, first bullet point, 2<sup>nd</sup> line: replace “opportunity and access to” with “opportunity and there is access to”.
- Page 4, right-hand column, third sentence: Replace with “There are six areas in the District which are more deprived than the national average.”
- Page 4, right-hand column, first full sentence: Replace with “There is thus a risk of house prices excluding all but the very affluent from residing in the District and this in turn leading to the prospect of lower paid workers not being able to afford to live locally.”
- Page 4, right-hand column, first bullet point: Insert “in extreme circumstances” at the end of the first line.
- Page 4, right-hand column, second bullet point, first sentence: Insert “sufficient” after “without”.
- Page 20 – A Member commented that the District did not get as much funding for NHS Dentistry as other areas and felt that this should be reflected in the report here.
- Page 21 – Members felt that an extra bullet point should be included at this point to state that advice on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) was needed for older people, as this group was seeing the largest increase in STDs.
- Page 22 – All references to “JSA” should be replaced with “Job Seekers’ Allowance”.
- Page 23 first bullet point 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph: should read after “have and have nots” can in extreme circumstances create etc
- Page 23 second bullet point: should read “sufficient affordable housing” and after “excluding” it should read lower paid workers
- Page 27 – Replace last sentence with “The Council will soon be producing a Climate Change Strategy, outlining the Council’s plans to work towards a low-carbon future for Sevenoaks District.”

- Page 27 should include the total number of homes in district and provide a definition of affordable housing.

In response to questions regarding the HERO project, the Head of Housing informed Members that this provided residents with a one-stop shop where they could receive advice on a range of services, as well as housing advice. She informed Members that the funding for this project was in place until June next year.

Resolved: That subject to the comments made above, the Cabinet be recommended to ask the Council to adopt the Balanced Communities Vision 2010 – 13 as District Council policy.

*This matter was also considered by the Cabinet on 30 September 2010 and the minute from that meeting is reproduced below:*

### **Cabinet's Recommendation to Council**

At its meeting on 30 September 2010 the Cabinet considered the matter as follows:

The Portfolio Holder for Balanced Communities informed Members that she had carefully considered the comments made by the Services Select Committee and thanked them for their thorough consideration of the document. She stated that she was in favour of making the changes suggested by the Services Select Committee, with the exception of:

- “Page 4, right-hand column, first bullet point: Insert “in extreme circumstances” at the end of the first line”. The Portfolio Holder for Balanced Communities stated that whilst she accepted that there were not serious social difficulties in most areas of the District, there were pockets which did suffer from significant social issues.
- “Page 21 – Members felt that an extra bullet point should be included at this point to state that advice on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) was needed for older people, as this group was seeing the largest increase in STDs.” The Portfolio Holder for Balanced Communities stated that this could not be included where suggested as the page related to projects that had already been undertaken.

Members suggested that the Portfolio Holder for Balanced Communities should be given authority to agree minor presentational changes to the document before Council considered it.

Resolved:

- (a) That the suggestions made by the Services Select Committee be incorporated into the document for the reasons given by that Committee, except the two issues

highlighted above.

- (b) That the Portfolio Holder for Balanced Community be given delegated authority to agree minor presentational changes to the document before its submission to the Council meeting.
- (c) **That Council be recommended to adopt the Balanced Communities Vision 2010-2013 as District Council Policy.**