



Coventry City Council

Briefing note

Scrutiny Coordinating Committee

6th November 2013

Title:

Strategic Built Environment Group

1. Background

- 1 At the Cabinet Member (Community Safety & Equalities) meeting on 31st January 2013, the creation of the Strategic Built Environment Group was sanctioned. This group is designed to facilitate the closer working of the Council's various regulatory activities. It is currently chaired by Sara Roach, Deputy Director.
- 2 The group was created and first convened on 18th March 2013. Appendix one gives details of the group's 'terms of reference'.
- 3 The work of the group is focused on "problem properties" or issues which, in most cases, have previously proved difficult to resolve by one department working alone, and cut across professional disciplines. Appendix two details the past and current work of the group.

Craig Hickin
Head of Environmental Services

Appendix One: Proposed Terms of Reference for the Strategic Built Environment Group, Coventry City Council

1. Background

The Strategic Built Environment Group was sanctioned by Cabinet Member (Community Safety & Equalities) to encourage cross-directorate working by the various regulatory services in the Council in seeking to resolve problems associated with specific properties and parcels of land within the City.

2. Purpose of the Group

The Group will deal with complex cases which require clear strategic leadership. The Assistant Director for Public Safety & Housing will chair this group and be charged with finding solutions and identifying resources to solving the specific issues, or where there is no clear or easily attainable solution, mitigating the resultant damage or nuisance.

3. Membership

Name	Title
Sara Roach	Deputy Director – Communities & Strategy, People Directorate
Paul Boulton	Head of Traffic & Transportation, Place Directorate
Tracy Darke	Group Manager, Planning & Building Control, Place Directorate
Graham Hood	Head of Streetpride and Greenspace, Place Directorate
Neil Cowper	Highways, Place Directorate
Craig Hickin	Head of Environmental Services, People Directorate
Hamish Simmonds	Head of Regulatory Services, People Directorate
Mandie Watson	Head of Community Safety, People Directorate
Andrew Burton	Senior Solicitor, Legal Services, Resource Directorate

3.1 Administration

The PA to the Asst. Director Public Safety & Housing will provide administrative and secretarial services including agendas, minutes and discussion papers.

3.2 Substitutes

Members are expected to attend the group meetings personally. Substitutes may attend meetings when members are unavoidably absent but will be expected to provide updates on individual cases and to be able to respond to requests for action from their respective directorate/service area.

3.3 Guests

Representatives from partner agencies may be invited for relevant items.

3 **Role**

- To provide direction for the resolution of problems emanating from properties, businesses, or parcels of land within the City, which are currently cause, or have the potential to cause, either risks to the public, damage or degradation to important buildings, environmental damage, or crime/anti-social behaviour.
- To ensure Council resources are prioritised and targeted to those areas presenting the most problems and greatest risk.
- To promote collaboration and partnership working as a way of maximising value for money in service delivery.
- To maintain cross-directorate ownership and challenge to ensure that issues are resolved in a timely manner.
- To minimise or negate adverse publicity to the Council from any of the above-mentioned issues.
- To provide a conduit for disseminating key messages and information throughout the Council's regulatory services.
- To promote consistency in regulatory activity within the Council; specifically in relation to City Services and Development and Public Safety & Housing.

4 **Method of Operation**

- Members of the group will submit issues for consideration to the Assistant Director Public Safety & Housing on the agreed template form. The issues submitted will generally be those which 'cut across' directorates, or represent a substantial risk.
- Members of the group will study the submissions and come to the meetings with suggestions and proposals as to how they or others can assist in resolving the issue.
- Members of the group will deliver on the actions to which they have committed.

5 **Reporting Relationships**

The Assistant Director Public Safety & Housing will have responsibility for reporting on the actions of the group to the Cabinet Member (Community safety & Equalities) and more generally into the political process where required.

6 **Decision Rights**

The Assistant Director Public Safety & Housing will decide which issues are considered by the group.

7 **Meeting Frequency**

The group will meet on a monthly basis. However additional meetings may be arranged by the chair if the subject matter is deemed sufficiently important.

7.2 **Submissions and Reports**

Submissions may be made by any group member. They should be made:

- On the agreed template form and sent to the PA to the Assistant Director Public Safety & Housing
- In a timely manner and not less than 7 days before the next meeting.

- Urgent matters may be submitted later than this deadline, but only with the approval of the Assistant Director Public Safety & Housing.

7.3 Agenda and Papers

Submissions will be circulated to group members, along with the agenda, five days before the meeting.

7.4 Minutes

The PA to the Assistant Director Public Safety & Housing will take minutes of meetings. Minutes will be approved by the Group at the following meeting.

7.5 Responsibility for Actions

Delivery on actions will reside with the relevant manager or head of service.

7.6 Maintenance of Records

The PA to the Assistant Director Public Safety & Housing will maintain records as to the activities of the group.

15th April 2013

Appendix two: Case management		
Property	Issue/Background	Action
Case 1	Block of flats. The company owning the freehold went into liquidation whereupon title to the land passed to the Crown. The flats within the block are held by individual tenants on long leases and are owned by three separate entities, with four of the flats owned by one company. The flats are in good condition internally (responsibility of the leaseholder), but the external fabric of the flats, the common parts, and the external yard and garages are in a poor state of repair and suffer from fly-tipping and dog foul. These areas are the responsibility of the freeholder i.e. the Crown, but the Crown has legal immunity which means enforcement action cannot be taken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact was made with solicitors for the Crown Estates. Their position is clear in that they have possession, but do not intend on doing any works because to do so would potentially imply that they have responsibility. We can carry out work but it is at our own liability and cost. Any sale of the property must be open and fair, with preference given to those most affected (the leaseholders), but the sale must be for market value and the Crown's legal costs in the matter must be met up front. • We have boarded up the garages and removed the fly-tipped waste. • We are removing dog foul from the site and have spoken to those occupiers who own dogs regarding the consequences of continued fouling. • The good news is that there is an unknown person/body (acting through an agent) who is interested in purchasing the freehold. We are courting this individual/company.
Case 2	Family scrap metal business operated from a domestic end terrace property. Scrap articles are stored in both front and rear gardens, a fully laden vehicle is parked in the front garden, and there are not less than two other scrap-laden vehicles in the street. This is causing consternation in the area and is affecting the marketability of neighbouring properties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A notice was served under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act, and the rear garden and rear area were subsequently cleared of items. • Determined that the premise was a licensed scrap metal business. We cannot refuse a licence. • Worked with the Police to ensure that the vehicles used by the business were legally compliant. This was found to be the case. • Worked with the Environment Agency to ensure the owners and drivers of the vehicles were licensed waste carriers. This was found

		<p>to be the case.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enforcement notice served under planning legislation on 31st May 2013 regarding the unauthorised use of a domestic property for use of the land for the storage, sorting and processing of scrap metal, white goods and other materials. Notice took effect on the 4th July and they had one month for compliance. Monitoring has taken place since the notice was served and the use had ceased, however, officers have been contacted in the last few days as allegations state that the unauthorised use has since re-commenced. This is being investigated again and a verbal update will be given.
Case 3	Use of a fork-lift truck on the highway, the encroachment of goods for sale on the pavement up to the pavement barriers forcing pedestrians into the road, and illegal Sunday trading.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of the fork-lift truck examined and deemed to be safe. We are preparing to prosecute for breach of Sunday trading laws. The business is not alone in pavement encroachment. A holistic approach and solution is being worked upon by colleagues in Planning and Highways to secure a 20 mph zone, removal of street barriers and furniture, and a clear demarcation on the pavement of the area on which goods for sale can be displayed. Enforcement will follow if necessary in due course.
Case 4	Portacabins have been constructed on the site without planning permission. It is understood that there has been a long-running dispute between different groups of users. On-going process to deal with the issues had stalled after a failed informal mediation process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAG is being convened with close involvement of the police following a preliminary meeting in February lead by Planning.
Case 5	Relates to an empty semi-detached property which is fire-damaged and derelict, and an	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structural survey of the property undertaken. Vegetation and fly-tipped rubbish has been removed.

	<p>area of fly- tipping and ASB complaints. The vegetation in the garden is overgrown and there are issues with the drains and rats. The previous owner of the property died intestate and potential beneficiaries of the estate are currently loath to take possession of the assets and liabilities of the estate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drainage investigation is underway and rat treatments will follow. • We are converting land charges to registered charges and will seek orders for the sale of the property in due course. • The aim is to have the site developed for residential purposes and the new property/properties occupied within 12 months.
Case 6	<p>These premises have been the subject of ASB, noise complaints, and concerns from the Police and Fire Service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of licence called for and was duly suspended. • The club has subsequently opened after complying with a number of requirements. • Building Control is currently looking at the safety of plate glass windows at the front of the premises.