

Committee: COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item

Date: March 13, 2008

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Title: LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT

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Item for decision

Summary

1. This report updates Members on matters arising from the minutes that are not otherwise on this Agenda and provides two information items.

Recommendations

2. That the report is noted.

Background Papers

3. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report.

- Minutes of Community Committee 24 January 2008.

Situation/Update

There are updates from the January 2008 meeting followed by items for information.

4 Stray Dogs

Following the last Meeting talks have continued to find a simple and straightforward arrangement for the finder of a stray dog to take the animal to a secure place if it was found outside normal office hours.

A local veterinary practice have agreed to act as our reception centre for stray dogs found outside office hours charging the Council an annual retainer and a charge per dog taken in, which we can in turn recover from the owner of the dog.

We are still working on the details but are confident that our existing Out of Hours Service can be used to provide the finder of a stray dog with the contact telephone number of the on call vet and so arrange to take the animal to their premises.

5 Henham Post Office Closure

The consultation period on the proposed closure of Henham Post Office closed on 15 February 2008. At the time of writing this report no decision has been published but should this arrive by the time of the meeting a verbal update will be provided.

6 Land at Great Dunmow

The developer was advised that the Committee were prepared to consider the proposal and they subsequently provided drawings of their proposed route. All relevant documentation has been sent to the District Valuer and we are awaiting confirmation of when the valuation will take place so that we can attend with our surveyor.

7 Thaxted Day Centre

Following approval by this Committee to proceed under exemption to standing orders KK12 specialised nature of the works, negotiation with the two contractor who's schemes most closely matched our requirements took place, followed by a contractor evaluation meeting the decision was made to place a contract for the "Design and Build" of the new day centre with Elliott Fastrack. Also it was decided to dispense with the services of the Quantity Surveyor and manage this aspect of the project inhouse.

The next step will be for officers to organize the transfer of the existing facility to its temporary location in Vicarage Mead and to arrange disconnection of services followed by demolition. Completion of the new Day Centre is still aimed at September 2008.

8 Empty Homes

Following a question at Council the following information has been provided for Members of this Committee on the issue of empty homes in the District.

Information from the Council Tax system at the end of January this year identified that there were 312 properties that had been empty for longer than 6 months. This is a fluctuating figure as properties drop in and out of use. There are a number of reasons why owners leave their property vacant, for example there may be extensive repairs required or the site may subject to a planning application for redevelopment.

The Council removed the Council tax discount on long term empty homes in 2004 and is a member of a pilot scheme to grant fund the renovation of long term empty properties in return for a 3 year lease to a register social landlord to re-house families from the housing waiting list details of this PLACE scheme will be available to Members at the meeting. New powers enabling Council's to effectively take over long term empty properties for up to 5 years were introduced in 2006, but the Council would need to finance any refurbishment of the property and management costs from rental income.

9 Change of Emergency Planning Officer

A new Emergency Planning Officer has been appointed to take over the role vacated by Jason Dear as he leaves to take up his new post with another Local Authority. Lisa Lipscombe will have assumed the role by the time of this meeting. She can be contacted on 01799 510436 or 07976 071836.