

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

4 March 2014

Present:

Councillor Norman Shiel (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, Bowkett, Branston, Bull, Choules, Clark, Crow, Macdonald, Morris, Payne and Spackman

Apologies:

Councillor Mottram

Also present:

Chief Executive & Growth Director, Deputy Chief Executive, Assistant Director Environment, Assistant Director Housing, Assistant Director Public Realm, Principal Accountant (SR) and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

In attendance:

Andrew White - Devon and Cornwall PCC

9 **Minutes**

Subject to the amendment of the third paragraph of Min. No. 8 to read "proposed for December 2012" rather than "December of last year", the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2014 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

10 **Declaration of Interests**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were declared.

11 **Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order 20**

In accordance with Standing Order 20, Councillor Morris put a question to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Customer Access in respect of Mobile Homes and a question to the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Wellbeing in respect of play areas within developments. A copy of the questions had previously been circulated to Members.

In accordance with Standing Order 20, Councillor Mitchell put a question to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Customer Access in respect of the HRA and questions to the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Wellbeing in respect of Community Patrols and Re-cycling. A copy of the questions had previously been circulated to Members.

The questions and the replies from the Portfolio Holders (in italics) are appended to the minutes.

PRESENTATION TO COMMITTEE

12 **Devon and Cornwall PCC**

The Chair welcomed Andrew White, Chief Executive of the Devon and Cornwall PCC, to the meeting

Details of the draft Police and Crime Panel Plan 2014-17 were circulated.

Mr White set out the following six priority areas of the Police and Crime Plan:-

- to make our area safer;
- a focus on cutting alcohol-related harm;
- a renewed drive for efficiency and reducing cost;
- a more effective criminal justice system;
- establishing new victim support services; and
- to enable citizens to play their part in community safety.

His presentation also covered the new approach of the PCC to performance measurement, CSP funding, use of the small grants fund, the four year funding allocation, Force resource allocation and the officer and staff profile.

He responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- the number of police officers on the beat had remained at a consistent level and he suggested that there was only a perception of reduced numbers. Special Constables continued to be recruited and use was increasingly being made of their specialist skills in respect of areas such as cyber related crime;
- the wider population had an important role to play in crime prevention through, for example, Neighbourhood Watch and participation in general volunteering in the community such as youth groups, sports clubs etc. However, it was recognised that the Force could benefit from a greater willingness to embrace the public desire to become involved;
- there was a greater emphasis in encouraging the reporting of domestic violence and abuse but this impacted on overall crime figures. The PCC was keen not to discourage reporting and therefore disaggregated the reported figures from overall crime statistics. It was currently assessing Minister of Justice guidance on re-direction of funding to ensure that there would be minimal impact on the three existing refuges in Devon;
- the PCC would assume responsibility for Victim Services from April 2015 with the management of this role currently being determined;
- there was no intention of re-allocating police resources on the basis of comparative crime levels between Exeter and other parts of Devon;
- volunteers were a valuable resource and, because of rigorous assessment and an emphasis on confidentiality, access to data was not an issue. They offered excellent support and were utilised, for example, in areas such as review of CCTV evidence;
- information on the use of private companies by the Force and details of officers on restricted duties would be circulated separately to Members;
- 826 individuals had been detained in 2013 under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act, largely for their own safety. It was recognised that, given the absence of properly trained medical staff, the current system was not fit for purpose and the PCC was in dialogue with all CCG's to review this system and to ensure that the Mental Health concordat was being honoured. Ian Ansell, the Criminal

Justice, Partnership and Commissioning Manager was attending a conference at St. Mellon on this topic shortly;

- the PCC was collating all community safety initiatives across the City, the results to be released within the next six months;
- he acknowledged Members' confirmation that there was little consistency at Councillor briefings because of the frequent changes in personnel at Inspector level and above. He would take this concern back;
- although alcohol related violence and crime was a priority there was equal emphasis on drug related problems. Legal highs were now also a concern and this situation was being monitored closely. The dangers of legal and illegal drugs were explained in school visits;
- although the small grant fund had been utilised in the past to support CCTV provision, the overwhelming number of requests had led to all support for these facilities being withdrawn as it was not possible to fund one request over another; and
- changes in the Probation Service were being closely monitored. Ian Ansell served on the Minister of Justice Committee which was tasked with monitoring roll out across the country.

The Chair thanked Mr White for his presentation.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

13 Alternative Giving Scheme and Begging Enforcement Policy

The Chair advised that this report was deferred for consideration at a future meeting.

14 Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring to December 2013

The Chair welcomed the new reporting style and acknowledged the good work of the Financial Reporting Task and Finish Group. He advised that if Members had any difficulty with any areas of the report and which may not already have been addressed or if they had any further suggestions for improvement to contact the Scrutiny Programme Officer.

The Assistant Director Housing advised Members of any major differences by management unit to the revised budget. The total budget variances indicated that there would be a net deficit of £157,264 in 2013/14. This represented a decrease of £1,037,024 compared to the revised budgeted surplus of £879,760 for 2013-14. The main deviations from budget were set out in the report.

The Assistant Director emphasised the range of issues that were putting pressure on the HRA including welfare reform, new ways of working in terms of "designing against demand", limitations of an incremental approach to budget setting, an unexpectedly high level of voids, a very wet winter and the consequences of a deep recession. He responded in detail to Members' queries in respect of:-

- the new regime for the inspection of voids;
- kitchen replacements; and
- debt management and debt recovery in respect of unacceptable damage to assets.

Members welcomed the points set out in the Action Plan.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

15 **Community Budget Monitoring to December 2013**

The Principal Accountant advised Members of any major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first six months of the financial year up to 31 December 2013.

The current forecast suggested that net expenditure for this Committee would increase from the revised budget by a total of £150,910 after transfers from reserves and revenue contributions to capital, as set out in the report. This represented a variation of 1.67% from the revised budget. This included supplementary budgets of £19,950. Capital charges had been deducted from this to provide the total budget for management accounting purposes.

The following responses were given to Members' queries:-

- the redundancy cost relating to the Community Patroller Post had been previously reported to this Committee;
- £12,000 had been allocated for removal of illegal campers;
- recommendations on the £250,000 New Homes Bonus Local Infrastructure Fund (NHB LIF) were submitted to Executive after consideration by the new Major Grants and Homes Bonus Panel. The fund was intended for areas of the City with significant past or future growth. Therefore, applications should be for proposals needed as a result of development to meet existing deficiencies, additional pressures on existing facilities and/or to enhance community infrastructure. In addition, one of the criteria was that the proposal should be consistent with the principle of incentivising communities to accept growth. Applications which had been granted therefore did benefit communities that were under pressure from growth. Members were able to make further representations on the recommendations at Executive; and
- the presence or development of sustainable communities was important for new facilities to flourish.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

16 **Re-cycling Plan Annual Review**

The Assistant Director Environment presented the report updating Members on progress with the Recycling Plan since its approval in 2011 and seeking ongoing support for recycling initiatives.

The report set out targets and the key reasons for reduction in kerbside dry re-cycling tonnages over the last few years, together with updates on garden waste collection, compost bin sales, trade recycling, bring banks, work with schools, communication and events.

Responding to the question in respect of re-cycling referred to in Min. No. 11 above, he detailed the performance of other authorities in comparison with Exeter. This is set out in the appendix to these minutes.

The following responses were given to Members' queries:-

- it was the intention to at least maintain the recycling rate as the economic climate continued to affect the purchasing of newspapers, etc. and manufacturers continued to reduce the weight of packaging;
- closer working with Devon County Council colleagues to encourage waste minimisation especially the minimisation of food waste, glass and garden waste. Information was available about what could be re-cycled, but it was planned to improve upon this;
- in respect of the recently circulated recycling leaflet, a response to the Member would be given in relation to the disposal of W.E.E. goods;
- ending the free Saturday bulk collections and encouraging the use of recycling centres will help reduce the huge amount of waste to landfill;
- consideration will be given to the management of slave bins;
- work closely with Housing Services to overcome barriers to recycling in a number of blocks of flats, by reviewing collection and storage points, providing micro bottle-banks, and engaging with tenants to understand their particular issues; and
- in collaboration with Devon County Council, work with the University and Guild to improve recycling with the student population.

Scrutiny Committee Community:-

- (1) noted the progress that the Council had made to date in implementing the Recycling Plan 2011-16; and
- (2) supported the ongoing actions planned for 2014 as set out in the report.

17 **Dog Enforcement Measures at Belmont Park**

The Assistant Director Public Realm presented the report advising Members of the enforcement options available to help deter future dog attacks at Belmont Park.

It was proposed to continue to allow dogs to be exercised off the lead in Belmont Park but to maintain CCTV coverage, in the short term, to compliment the ongoing high visibility patrols by Council staff.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Health and Wellbeing reported that he had attended the AGM of the Newtown Community Association as well as a further meeting when dog control had been discussed. Approximately 30% of attendees had been dog owners. At one of these meetings, of the 24 present, only one had requested that dogs be kept on leads. He explained that different regimes operated in different parks with dogs required to be kept on leads in the smaller parks such as Bury Meadow. The larger parks were designated as "Dogs On Leads by Direction" which provided the opportunity to deal with any problems. It was noted that this issue should be considered in the context of the loss of the Dog Warden's post and additional duties being required of the Community Patrollers.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

ITEM FOR INFORMATION ONLY

18 Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel

Details of Police and Crime Panel meetings were circulated after each meeting to Members of this Committee to enable them to raise any issues of concern or interest at these Scrutiny meetings. No issues were raised.

19 Sally Reeve - Principal Accountant

The Chair reported that this would be last Scrutiny Committee - Community meeting of Sally Reeve, Principal Accountant, who would be retiring. The Chair and Members thanked Sally for her hard work and service to the Council over the years and wished her well for her retirement.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.50 pm

Chair