

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

27 February 2007

Present:

Councillor Rachel Lyons (Chair)

Councillors Winterbottom, Branston, Choules, Cole, Mrs Danks, Mrs Evans, Hobden, Mills, Mitchell, Robson and R Smith

Director of Community and Environment, Head of Contracts and Direct Services, Head of Housing and Social Inclusion, Head of Leisure and Museums, Principal Environmental Health Officer (RP) and Member Services Officer (HB)

Also present:

Councillor Dilys Baldwin - Portfolio Holder Housing and Social Inclusion.

Councillor Peter Edwards - Portfolio Holder Environment and Leisure.

15. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2007 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

16. **Declaration of Interests**

Members declared the following personal interests as indicated:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Lyons	17 (lives adjacent to Clifton Hill Golf Centre)
Councillor Mrs Evans	21 (Member of Topsham Community Association)
Councillor Cole	24 (tenant of a City Council leaseholder)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE

Scrutiny Committee – Community is invited to comment on the following reports before they are submitted to the Executive for decision.

17. **Leisure Facilities in Exeter**

The Head of Leisure and Museums presented a report seeking approval for the strategy for the development and management of the Council's major leisure facilities for the next 10 to 25 years.

He responded as follows to individual queries from Members:-

- a report would be submitted to Executive seeking approval to enter into a 15-year agreement with the current operator of the Clifton Hill Golf Centre. It

was believed that this change to the lease allied to financial investment by the operator to provide additional facilities would resolve difficulties being experienced with the operation of late;

- current Council policy was to provide a new pool on the Clifton Hill site which, because of site constraints, could not be a 50 metre pool; and
- all clubs and interested parties using the Pyramids Centre would be kept informed of developments in the provision of a new pool.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community supported:-

- 1) the report and asked Executive to recommend that the Council continues to provide the current leisure facilities portfolio; and
- 2) the proposal that future management be procured through a contract with a commercial leisure operator and that the Head of Contracts and Direct Services be authorised to publish a prior Information Notice in the near future.

(Report circulated)

18. Downsizing Incentives for Council Tenants

The Head of Housing Services presented a report seeking agreement to implement an enhanced downsizing incentive scheme for Council tenants to improve the management of the housing stock and increase the supply of family housing to applicants on the Home Choice register.

A Member welcomed the strategy in order to help make better use of the housing stock. In response to her query, the Head of Housing Services advised that the precise number of under occupied properties was not known. For example, it was often difficult to keep track of children leaving home. However, a much more accurate picture would be available shortly following the completion of a tenants' census. He advised that the proposal had been brought forward following research undertaken into similar schemes run by other authorities which had operated successfully. A Member complimented officers on the care taken in respect of a specific case where an elderly gentleman had been helped to downsize.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and asked Executive to adopt the policy document, Reducing Under-Occupation in the Council's Housing Stock - Incentives for Downsizing.

(Report circulated)

19. Food Service Delivery Plan 2007/08 and Review of Food Service Delivery Plan 2006/07

The Principal Environmental Health Officer presented the report summarising key activities forming the food safety service and highlighting variances from the previous Food Service Delivery Plan of 2006/07. The recommendations of the Food Service Delivery Plan 2007/08 were also submitted for approval and adoption.

He highlighted a number of key actions undertaken in 2006/07 by the Food Services unit including the Safer Food Better Business, Get Cookin' and Junior Life Skills

initiatives. In response to a Member, he confirmed that the owners of fast food vans were encouraged to undergo training both at the point when they applied for a street trading license and during the course of inspections. Although qualifications could not be demanded as a condition of licence, the majority of individuals undertook at least a Foundation course.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and asked Executive to:-

- (1) approve the Food Service Delivery Plan 2006/07; and
- (2) authorise the Director Community and Environment to amend the service plans as necessary during the year in light of operational experiences.

(Report circulated)

20. **Historic Parks Heritage Lottery Fund Bid**

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services outlined the contents of the Stage I Historic Parks Heritage Lottery Bid and the process necessary to gain approval prior to submission in March 2007.

He emphasised plans to link the proposals with neighbouring sites and the bid would draw on links to the RAMM, the Castle, the Phoenix and the Library. The intention was to develop a community of interest with the relevant stakeholders and other potential interested parties. Work done to date indicated that approximately £4.5 million would be needed to fund the proposals contained within the preferred option and that the Council would need to provide match funding up to a maximum of £1.1 million.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- 1) supported the Stage I Historic Parks Heritage Lottery Bid as set out in the report; and
- 2) requested Executive to formally approve the bid and to delegate to the Director Community and Environment and the project leader further improvements to the bid documents in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Leisure such that the finalised bid documents can be submitted to the Heritage Lottery in March 2007.

(Report circulated)

21. **Refurbishment and extension of the Matthews Hall**

The Head of Leisure and Museums presented a report seeking Members' views on a proposal by the Topsham Community Association to refurbish and extend Matthews Hall.

It was noted that the current lease obliged the Association to maintain the inside of the building, while the Council retained responsibility for structural and outside repairs and it was proposed that the Council should also assume responsibility for the long

term maintenance of the extension. Members welcomed the proposal as improvements to the Hall had long been needed and thanked the Topsham Community Association for bringing forward the project. It was confirmed that interested parties such as the Police and Bowling Club would be involved in the project and that the proposals would not have an impact on the adjacent car park.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and asked Executive to:-

- 1) permit the Topsham Community Association to pursue the project;
- 2) support the advertising of the intention to allow building on the public open space;
- 3) approve the building of the planned extension on the neighbouring open space, subject to planning permission and the resolution of access issues for neighbouring sites and provided that there are no sustainable objections; and
- 4) instruct the Head of Estates to agree the terms of a new lease taking into account the land to be occupied and that the new extension be included on the present terms with regard to external repairs and that it become the property of the Council.

(Report circulated)

22. **Health Act 2006 - Implementation of Smoke Free Legislation**

The Principal Environmental Health Officer presented the report setting out information about the smoke free provisions of the Health Act 2006 which was to come into force on 1 July 2007. The report also sought support for the actions proposed to ensure this important piece of legislation was successfully introduced in Exeter.

A number of key activities would be undertaken to raise awareness of the legislation to assist businesses in complying with it such as:-

- seminars in early April;
- presentation to interested groups;
- publications, articles and advertising;
- information on website; and
- training for enforcement staff.

He confirmed that £63,755 had been allocated by the Department of Health to the City Council to assist in the cost of improvements, £10,789 for 2006/07 and £52,966 for 2007/08. Up to £30,000 of the 2007/08 allocation would be used to extend the duration of employment and remit of the litter enforcement officers and approximately £19,000 would help fund the programme of training and advice. It was hoped that the additional policing undertaken by environmental health officers and the involvement and co-operation of owners would lead to the successful implementation of the legislation. Judging from evidence from elsewhere, the public were likely to co-operate and a significant amount of self-policing was likely. He confirmed that once

final details had been provided on the operation of the scheme, information leaflets would be produced covering planning, cleansing and nuisance issues etc.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- 1) noted the Council's new responsibilities under the Health Act 2006 and proposals for implementing these; and
- 2) requested Executive to approve additional spending of up to £63,000 for implementing the new Health Act 2006 smoke free provisions, up to £10,000 of which may be spent in the current financial year.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

23. Litter Enforcement

The Principal Environmental Health Officer updated Members on litter enforcement work undertaken by the three temporary Litter Enforcement Officers and sought views on the future of the service.

A budget had been set aside to employ a Senior Litter Enforcement Officer and two Litter Enforcement Officers from 12 July 2006 to 9 July 2007. The proposal to extend their temporary contracts by 12 months would be part funded by using the money from the litter fixed penalty notices with a contribution of up to £30,000 from the Department of Health funding. It was noted that officers had issued an average of over fifty £75 notices per month to date.

In response to Members' queries, he confirmed that some of the budget would be utilized to provide additional bins throughout the City and that further details on the results of appeals could be provided on request. A Member emphasised the importance of targeting littering in early and late evening and referred to problems caused by the distribution of flyers advertising late night venues. It was confirmed that there would be additional focus on known littering hot spots and that enforcement staff could liaise with nightclub owners. The Director Community and Environment advised that dog related issues fell within the remit of the Dog Wardens and that some 100 tickets had been issued during the course of a year. Members welcomed the report and gave their full support to the proposals. Members endorsed the robust approach to litter enforcement that was being followed.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- 1) noted the work undertaken by the Litter Enforcement Officer;
- 2) supported the principle of retaining the temporary contracts for a further 12 months; and
- 3) requested a report back on progress after twelve months.

(Report circulated)

24. Review of Repairs Policy

The Head of Housing Services presented the report informing Members of current progress in the review of the responsive maintenance service provided across the Council's housing stock.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- 1) supported the adoption of the draft document, Responsive Maintenance Service Standards; and
- 2) requested further reports to be submitted as the review process continues to identify additional changes and service standards.

(Report circulated)

25. Motorbike Misuse in Private and Public Open Space

Councillor Martin attended the meeting and spoke on this item having given notice under Standing Order No. 44.

The Head of Leisure and Museums presented the report informing Members on the issues relating to unauthorised motorbike use on open space land in Exeter generally, and specifically on land to the north of the City around Mincinglake Valley Park.

The report was in response to a petition presented to the City Council on 12 December by Cllr Martin, on behalf of residents of Beacon Heath, asking that "*the Council take action to ensure motorbikes are not ridden in or near the parkland to the north of the Beacon Heath Estate causing noise and nuisance to residents*". The Councillor advised that the petition had been presented in advance of the drier weather when most of the problems were experienced. With regard to the area north of Beacon Heath, he outlined the position in respect of the individual parcels of land. Activity on hotspots marked "not current" were, in fact, historic as activity no longer occurred due to physical barriers to access. Of the two current hotspots, it was believed that only one was used and he suggested that the City Council should look to purchase or lease both, particularly as land to the north at Drakes Meadow was already in City Council ownership. A further concern expressed by local residents was the potential for the motorbikers to ride through the estate particularly the narrow alleyways which was particularly dangerous to pedestrians. Although local intelligence could be used to report individuals to the Police he proposed the provision of signs clearly prohibiting this activity in the identified areas as a simple solution.

The Head of Leisure and Museums stated that there were no plans for the Council to purchase additional land in this area. He also advised that the Police had in the past used motorbikes themselves to apprehend unauthorised motorbike riders.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- 1) requested officers to work with stakeholders and encourage their involvement with implementing a package of measures to try to reduce the problem of unauthorised motorbike use on land on the northern edge of the City; and
- 2) the Police Commander be requested to assist in targeting this problem in a positive and sustainable way.

(Report circulated)

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

26. Community Services Stewardship to 31 December 2006

The Director Community and Environment reported on any major differences by management unit to the outturn variances forecast for the third quarter of the financial year up to 31 December 2006 compared with those reported for the second quarter that had ended on 30 September 2006. The current forecast suggested that there would be a net surplus of £317,030 and that of this £217,030 would be transferred to the working balance at 31 March 2007 and an additional £100,000 would be utilized to fund capital works associated with the Decent Homes Standard.

Referring to the approved overspend which would arise in respect of maintaining and moving CCTV cameras, Members referred to previous requests for coverage for specific areas of the City. The Director advised that it was hoped to extend coverage following upgrades and refinements to the system.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

27. Housing Revenue Account Stewardship to December 2006

The Director Community and Environment reported on any major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first nine months of the financial year up to 31 December 2006. During this period the total of the variances indicated that there would be a net surplus of £317,030 which would be used to fund work in respect of the Government's Decent Homes Standard. The working balance would therefore remain at £2,971,972.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

28. National Performance Indicator Results 2005-06 - How Exeter's Results Compare

The report set out a full analysis of Exeter's performance indicator results for 2005/06 which had been sent to Members under separate cover. The report provided an overview of the performance of those services covered by this Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

29. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next Scrutiny Committee - Community will be held on Tuesday 5 June 2007 at 5.30p.m.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.05 pm

Chair