

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

6 November 2007

Present:

Councillor Baldwin (Chair)

Councillors Robson, Bond, Branston, S Brock, Mrs Danks, Mitchell, Moore, Newton, Shiel and Winterbottom.

Director Community and Environment, Head of Leisure and Museums, Head of Housing Services, Head of Environmental Health Services, Assistant Chief Executive and Member Services Officer (HB).

65. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2007 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

66. **Declaration of Interests**

A Member declared the following personal interest:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Winterbottom	71 (user of Pyramids and Clifton Hill Sports Centre)

67. **Review of Exeter Social Inclusion Strategy 2003-2006**

The Assistant Chief Executive presented the report updating Members on the position in respect of the Social Inclusion Strategy 2003-06 and proposing a way forward in developing a new strategy for addressing issues relating to community involvement and inclusion within Exeter.

She reported that the Social Health and Inclusion Partnership had for a number of years helped develop and deliver on priorities relating to building stronger communities, promoting social inclusion and addressing public health issues.

In anticipation of Exeter achieving unitary status, work had commenced on a review of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) - the Exeter Vision Partnership - which would retain its existing responsibility for developing a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). The LSP would assume responsibility for developing and delivering a Local Area Agreement (LAA) for Exeter, from April 2009. A fundamental part of the LAA would be delivering on the priorities within the SCS. There was likely to be a number of priorities that related to inclusion and involvement that the SHIP or a body performing a similar role would have to develop and deliver.

The Devon LAA was set to be agreed in April 2008. The Government had indicated that in areas where Districts were seeking unitary status, the LAA should be developed in a way that was possible to detach the part that related to the District at the point where unitary status was secured in April 2009. Devon County Council had indicated that, regardless of the unitary decision, they recognised the need for one part of the LAA to be customised for Exeter, in recognition of the particular needs of the City.

Members of the SHIP had been reviewing the role of the Group and, in particular, its relationship to Exeter's LSP. The SHIP had agreed to focus its future work on issues related to the stronger communities and health and well being elements of the LAA.

A draft Community Involvement and Inclusion Strategy would be developed for consideration by Members once the relevant priorities in the SCS and the LAA had been developed. The Strategy would also be informed by an analysis of the Neighbourhood Engagement Pilots. The timing of this was likely to be December 2008.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the process for developing the Council's new Strategy for Community Involvement and Inclusion.

(Report circulated)

68. Performance Monitoring

The Chair advised Members that the Policy Officer would provide some training on performance management and interpretation of performance indicators at a Members' Briefing.

The Director Community and Environment advised Members of performance in the middle of the year on a range of services across the Directorate. It was noted that the targets were generally on course to be met. The following responses were made to issues raised by Members in respect of the performance indicators:-

- the average time to re-let a Council property had increased as a result of the success of the incentive scheme to encourage tenants to downsize - some 25-30 to date. Approximately half of these were the result of tenants moving to the 16 flats for over 55's provided at the McCarthy and Stone site at Honeywell Court in Heavitree as 13 three bed and two two bed houses had been made available as a result;
- void figures were over target but still remained within acceptable tolerances; and
- over the winter period (December to February), although regular fortnightly collections of green waste would stop, green waste could still be collected on request, including biodegradable sacks.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

69. **Scrutiny Committee Sub Group**

As set out in the operational guidelines for Scrutiny Committees, the Committee was required to establish a sub group to:-

- review progress in the current year;
- consider initial proposals for the following year's work programme; and
- consider general issues relating to the overall workload and operation of the Committee.

Members considered a list of potential policy areas for possible scrutiny. With regard to a proposed re-structuring of cemetery fees, the Director Community and Environment suggested that selected Members consider the way forward in advance of the sub group. Any further suggested areas could be forwarded to the Member Services Officer.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported:-

- (1) the restructuring of cemetery charges being considered by the Chair, Deputy Chair and Councillors Mrs Danks, Shiel and Winterbottom at 4.30pm on Wednesday 14 November 2007;
- (2) the consideration of the full list of suggested areas by the sub group on Monday 26 November 2007 at 4.00pm, the sub group to comprise the Chair, Deputy Chair and Councillors Bond, Mrs Danks, Mitchell and Shiel; and
- (3) Committee Members being invited to put forward any further policy areas for consideration by the sub group.

70. **Statement of Licensing Policy - Result of Consultation**

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report on the results of the consultation exercise in respect of the Draft Licensing Policy. The Council was required to prepare and publish a Statement of Licensing Policy every three years. In the first three-year period, the policy had been kept under review. Although the licensing authority could make such revisions, as considered appropriate, the policy has been demonstrated to be robust and only minor alterations were therefore necessary. The results of the consultation exercise and a schedule of the proposals received and how they were dealt with was made available to Members.

Members considered the views and comments received from various consultees.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive and Council to approve the revised Licensing Policy, to take effect from 7 January 2008.

(Report circulated)

71. **New Swimming Pool at Clifton Hill**

Councillor Winterbottom declared a personal interest as he used both the Pyramids and the Clifton Hill Sports Centre.

The Head of Leisure and Museums presented the report outlining the results of the feasibility study into the suitability of Clifton Hill as a site for a new pool to replace the Pyramids and seeking approval for development funding of up to £85,000 to obtain a RIBA Stage C design for a 25 metre 8 lane pool.

The feasibility study had looked at three options for a new pool for the City: a 50 metre pool, an 8 lane 25 metre pool and a 6 lane 25 metre pool. Each option was to include provision for a learner pool. There was insufficient space to pursue a 50 metre option and the costs of providing and running a 50 metre pool were much greater than for a 25 metre pool with the cost of removing contaminated land fill very high. A 50 metre pool would also need substantially more ancillary room if it was going to fulfil national and regional competition needs. The Amateur Swimming Association had expressed a preference for a 50 metre pool in Plymouth.

Either of the two 25 metre options would fit on the site. An 8 lane pool would provide significantly more flexibility than a 6 lane pool and also be able to host national events. It was likely that a 20 metre wide, 8 lane (2.5 metre lane width), 2.5 metre deep main pool would satisfy all of the main users' aspirations, especially if part of it had a moving floor. However, the costings and the fitting of the pool within the uncontaminated land were based on a 16 metre wide pool (2 metres per lane) so it may not be possible to achieve everything.

There was approximately £27,000 remaining in the feasibility study budget and it was suggested that an additional sum of up to £85,000 be allocated for the work needed to reach RIBA Stage C, to create a development budget of up to £112,000.

A Member welcomed the proposal and hoped it would be developed as a centre of excellence for swimming to complement other sporting facilities in the City such as at the Arena, at the University and at the new Rugby Stadium. Given that a 50 metre pool had not been considered appropriate, he hoped that a facility of the highest standard would be provided. In response to Members' comments, the Head of Leisure and Museums stated that a diving facility had not been incorporated into the proposal as this would have necessitated a separate and deeper area as well as a higher ceiling. In addition, there was no significant demand. He agreed that street lighting around and along the approach roads to the Clifton Hill Centre should be of a high standard and this would be examined as part of the overall project as would the potential for improving public transport access to the site, possibly by seeking a bus service to the Centre. It was noted that the bus station was close to the Centre.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested the Executive and Council to:-

- (1) confirm the intentions to build a new 8 lane, 25 metre swimming pool at Clifton Hill to replace Pyramids subject to it being affordable within the framework of the Council's current medium term financial plan;

- (2) proceed to the appointment of a design team; and
- (3) allocate funding for the procurement of architectural services to design a 25 metre 8 lane pool to RIBA Stage C level of detail.

(Report circulated)

72. Proposal to purchase Glencoe, Alphington Street, Exeter

The Head of Housing Services presented the report seeking approval for the purchase of Glencoe, Alphington Street, Exeter for use as an emergency accommodation for homeless families.

In response to a Member, he stated that a negotiated purchase price had been agreed with the owner within the budget allocated.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to authorise the Head of Estates Services, in consultation with the Director Community and Environment and subject to prior consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Social Inclusion, to purchase Glencoe, subject to the following conditions:-

- (a) the cost of the purchase price and any capital works required to be within the budget as set out in the report; and
- (b) planning permission being granted for use of the property as a hostel.

(Report circulated)

73. Review of Disabled Adaptations Policy and Procedure (Council Properties)

The Head of Housing Services presented the report seeking approval for the revised Disabled Adaptations Policy and Procedure following a comprehensive review.

A review had been undertaken as timescales for adaptations varied depending on the complexity of work required and the budget available. Therefore, whilst minor adaptations could take a few weeks or months to install, some applicants had experienced waits of over 12 months for major adaptations such as walk-in showers. The review would lead to a more effective assessment of tenants' needs and speed up the time taken from referral to completion of the work.

Responding to Members, he stated that a joint Exeter City Council and Devon County Council funded occupational therapist worked with the City Council's housing staff to help assess tenants requiring assistance. He confirmed that there were links with individual charities providing housing support and agreed to explore the potential for assistance from the City Council to the Exeter Municipal Charities. He advised that where disabled individuals were not eligible for full downsizing support, alternative support packages were available, such as assistance with carpet and curtain removal.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to agree to:-

- (a) adopt the Disabled Adaptations Policy and Procedure document; and
- (b) include performance information relating to this new policy within the Housing Unit's Performance Digest.

(Report circulated)

74. Temporary Accommodation Manager Post

The Head of Housing Services presented the report seeking approval to make the post of Temporary Accommodation Manager (C306216) within the Housing Services Unit permanent.

Since the post has been established there has been a reduction in the time temporary accommodation remained empty before being re-occupied (from an average of almost 20 days in August 2005 to an average of 10 days in the first quarter of 2007/08), greater control over expenditure on repairs and maintenance of properties, improved relations with external contractors and landlords and improved tenancy management and sustainment for the homeless households accommodated in temporary accommodation.

In addition to supervising the staff in the temporary accommodation team, the Temporary Accommodation Manager's post was responsible for delivery of the Council's temporary accommodation reduction plan and would be responsible for overseeing the management of the Council's first local authority hostel at Glencoe. The work undertaken by the postholder had resulted in significant efficiency savings to the Council. For example, the reduction in average void times had saved an average of £21,000 per annum.

The post had initially been made on a temporary basis for a period of one year ending on 8 September 2006 and extended for a further 12 months until 8 September 2007. It had then been further extended for the proposal for a permanent appointment to be considered at this Committee.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to make the post of Temporary Accommodation Manger (CE06216) permanent from 8 September 2007.

(Report circulated)

75. Housing Revenue Account Stewardship to September 2007

The Director Community and Environment advised Members of any major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first six months of the financial year up to 30 September 2007. During this period the total of the variances indicated that there would be a net surplus of £83,860, which would be transferred to the working balance as at 31 March 2008 increasing it to £2,927,028.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

76. **Community Services - Stewardship to September 2007**

The Director Community and Environment advised Members of any major differences by management unit to the revised budget.

The current forecast suggested, that after adjusting for approved additional expenditure of £32,550, deferred contributions of £147,749, reductions of capital charges of £44,703, deferred AIM expenditure of £58,300, net movements to reserves of £10,517 and revenue contributions to capital of £20,000, net expenditure for this Committee would increase from the revised budget by a total of £75,369, which represented a variation of 0.5% from the revised budget.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.40 pm

Chair