

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

3 June 2008

Present:

Councillor D Baldwin (Chair)

Councillors Shiel, Branston, Choules, Mrs Danks, Edwards, A Hannaford, Hobden, Newcombe, Newton, R Smith, Taghdissian and Thompson

Director Community and Environment, Head of Leisure and Museums, Head of Contacts and Direct Services, Head of Environmental Health Services, Housing Needs Manager and Member Services Officer (HB)

Also present:

Councillor R.A. Hannaford - Portfolio Holder Housing and Social Inclusion
Councillor Mitchell - Portfolio Holder Environment and Leisure

30 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2008 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

31 **Declaration of Interests**

Members declared the following personal interests:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Newton	40 (Employee of the Meaningful Occupation Project (part of Exeter Shilhay)
Councillor Newcombe	48 (Devon County Council Children and Young People's Play Champion)

32 **Questions from the Public under Standing Order 19**

In accordance with Standing Order 19, a question in respect of play facilities at Kings Heath was submitted, to which the Chair replied. A copy of the question had been circulated to Members and was made available at the meeting. The question and the reply from the Chair (in italics) is appended to the minutes.

Scrutiny Committee - Community agreed that a report providing an update on the provision of the play area at Kings Heath be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee.

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

In accordance with Standing Order 20, a question from a Member was submitted to which the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Leisure replied. A copy of the question had been circulated to Members and was made available at the meeting.

The question and the reply from the portfolio holder (in italics) is appended to the minutes.

Portfolio Holders to present their priorities for the Forthcoming Year

Councillor R.M. Hannaford presented the following priorities within the Housing and Social Inclusion Portfolio for the forthcoming year:-

- Provide 100 new affordable homes for rent and look at ways we can bring more investment in affordable housing in the City. In particular we will explore new ways of obtaining land on which affordable housing can be built.
- Explore whether we can build council housing directly with the introduction of changes to housing law.
- Review the Older Persons Warden Service in line with the emerging Supporting People Strategy.
- Review existing sheltered accommodation, taking account of the above service review and future projected needs.
- Develop a Quality Management System for housing services that includes feedback/complaints/customer satisfaction/performance/costs etc. and contribute to service reviews and change implementation.
- Start financial benchmarking through Housemark/LA benchmarking clubs.
- Review the existing Tenancy Agreement and make changes as necessary. Include a clause to allow service charges for tenants.
- Review the existing Grounds Maintenance/communal cleaning arrangement to establish specification of the service and its cost.
- Continue to collect and input Tenant Census Information and start to use in service delivery/design.
- Establish a Tenancy Services Review Group to assess the existing Estate Officer role and develop a new 'neighbourhood management' framework. Dealing robustly with anti-social behaviour will be one of our priorities.
- Lead the development of the Choice Based Lettings Regional Scheme for Devon.
- Publish an Empty Homes Strategy as part of the suite of documents to accompany the Housing Strategy.
- Develop a Warm Zone to help reduce fuel poverty.
- Review and update the licences for the City's four mobile home sites.
- Review the Neighbourhood Engagement Pilot Project to establish the most appropriate model for Neighbourhood Engagement for Exeter Communities, in conjunction with information on ward profiles for the City.
- Use information gained from the Neighbourhood Engagement Pilots to develop a Community Engagement Strategy for the Council.
- Examine information from Local Futures analysis as well as local ward information to identify neighbourhoods with priority needs.

The following responses were given to Members' questions:-

- provision of any additional housing would be undertaken in conjunction with other housing providers with emphasis on maximising windfall sites. The downturn in the housing market might assist. The PFI process was not a viable option for building council housing.
- it was hoped that the review of tenancy agreements would help improve tenant behaviour although every effort would be made to avoid making individuals homeless. Measures to reduce rent arrears would also be examined. It was hoped to encourage Housing Associations to adopt some of the City Council practices.

- the review of cleansing of communal arrangements would concentrate on City Council owned properties. All householders would be consulted and consideration given to changing the service charges.
- Ward Members would be kept informed of the introduction of new licenses for mobile home sites following changes in the model standards. The changes would seek to ensure sufficiently high quality upgrades were undertaken.

Councillor Mitchell presented the following priorities within the Environment and Leisure Portfolio for the forthcoming year:-

- Start building work on the main museum project.
- Continue with our RAMM out-and-about programme.
- Run an exciting and varied programme of events in the Valley Parks.
- Complete work on the new parks at Summerway, Wyvern and Digby and work with the community west of the Exe on their ideas for a sports Hub Club.
- Continue work towards providing a new pool at Clifton Hill.
- Continue our Free Play City project so that children are encouraged to play safely out of doors.
- Publish and distribute 101 Free Things To Do For Children.
- Support the Wild City Project in partnership with the new Devon Wildlife Trust and look at ways we can enhance wildlife especially in the canal and quay area.
- Extend the Green Accord to other areas in the Council and seek to gain external accreditation for the scheme working with partners including businesses in the City.
- Develop a Tree and Woodland Strategy in consultation with elected Members, officers and partners that protects and enhances the City's treescape in a sustainable way making allowance for the effects of global warming.
- Achieve Green Flag accreditation for one city centre park.
- Implement the action from both the Local Authority Carbon Management Programme and the Climate Change Strategy.
- Improve the City's recycling rate to more than 35% and look for opportunities to expand the range of materials we collect from the doorstep.
- Continue to improve our care of public places including authorisation and training of police community support officers to deal with litter and similar offences.
- Install more dog bins and continue with improvements to this service.
- Consider a 'scores on the doors' scheme for city food businesses.
- Work with the police and trading standards to reduce the sale of alcohol to minors.
- Increase the use of mobile CCTV both via a new van mounted system and by increasing the range of our existing cameras.
- Review whether we should de-restrict the number of hackney carriages.

The following responses were given to Members' questions:-

- consultation had been undertaken on the de-restriction of taxis and a report would shortly be submitted to the Licensing Committee.
- Heavitree Pleasure Ground had been identified as the first park to be considered for Green Flag status. One staff Member had been appointed as a Green Flag Judge.
- the 101 Free Things To Do for Children was due to be published and widely distributed in the City.
- additional mobile CCTV equipment had been purchased with improved reception which would help extend coverage to additional areas of the City.

- the Hub Club Partnership at Flowerpot Fields was being supported by the Council.
- the Tree and Woodland Strategy would cover all trees across the City.
- squash clubs would not be replaced at Clifton Hill as part of the new swimming pool project, but a watching brief would be maintained on squash provision in the City.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the priorities presented.

35 **Scrutiny Issues**

Consideration was given to the Membership of the following working groups. It was noted that the Dog Bin Group had completed its work, the Trees Working Group was currently meeting and that it had been the intention that each working group would meet in the order set out once each had completed their respective reviews. It was felt that nominations should be made to each working group for meetings to be held shortly at which Chairs would be appointed and the way forward agreed. The existing Membership, together with the inclusion of Councillor Shiel on the latter working group as agreed at the meeting, are set out below:-

- (1) **Trees Working Group** - Councillor Mrs Danks;
- (2) **Toilets** - Councillors Mrs Danks, Newcombe and Shiel;
- (3) **Re-cycling** - Councillors Mrs Danks and Newcombe; and
- (4) **Review of Sports Provision** - Councillors Branston, Choules, Mrs Danks Newton and Shiel.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the proposal that nominations be made, as appropriate, in order for meetings to be held.

36 **Museum Development Project Working Group**

A Museum Development Project Working Group had been established on 8 July 2002 to oversee the enhancement scheme of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum. Membership comprised the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holders for Leisure and Environment and for Best Value and Human Resources and two Members of this Committee (the Chair of Scrutiny Committee - Community and Councillor P.A. Smith).

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- (1) confirmed Councillor D. Baldwin and appointed Councillor Shiel as Members to serve on the working group; and
- (2) asked for a visit to RAMM to be arranged for all Members of this Committee.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

37 **Food Law Enforcement Plan 2008/09**

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report informing Members of the Council's performance against the previous year's Food Law Enforcement Plan. The report also sought approval for the adoption of the Food Law Enforcement

Plan 2008/09, which set out the Council's regulatory function in respect of food safety over the forthcoming year.

In response to a Member, he explained that informal notices were made in respect of minor breaches of regulations and formal notices for persistent and/or serious offences. They were not necessarily linked to one another.

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

- (1) approve the Food Law Enforcement Plan; and
- (2) authorise the Head of Environmental Health Services to agree changes to the Enforcement Plan in the light of centrally issued guidance and/or to meet operational needs.

(Report circulated)

38 Health and Safety Service Plan Annual Review 2008/09

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report seeking approval of the Health and Safety Service Plan for 2008/09 setting out the Council's functions for regulating health and safety in businesses for the forthcoming year.

In response to a Member, he detailed the various measures that would be used to scrutinise and monitor the progress of the Plan.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to approve the Health and Safety Plan 2008/09.

(Report circulated)

39 Local Air Quality Management - Air Quality Action Plan

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report updating Members on the Council's duties relating to local air quality management and the outcome of the consultation exercise for the proposed Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP).

In response to a Member, he confirmed that not all consultees had responded to the draft Plan although the key consultees had. The same Member had referred to the diversion of Paris Street traffic right into Sidwell Street during the Princesshay works and the subsequent decision of the County Council to retain this traffic flow after the completion of the scheme. This traffic flow had impacted on air quality in the Sidwell Street area and, referring also to air quality along Heavitree Road, he was anxious to know if the County Council were proposing further reviews of traffic management in these areas and that, if so, they should be asked to ensure that Ward Members would be consulted.

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

- (1) seek a meeting between its Chair and the Chair of this Committee with the County Council to seek how they plan to reduce the pollution that is caused along the five routes coming in and out of the City;
- (2) agree to requesting the County Council to review the current traffic management arrangements for Sidwell Street, with all local Councillors to be involved; and

- (3) approve the Exeter Air Quality Action Plan 2008-2011.

(Report circulated)

40 Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013

Councillor Newton declared a personal interest as an employee of the Meaningful Occupation Project (part of Exeter Shilhay).

The Housing Needs Manager presented the report seeking endorsement of the content of the revised Homelessness Strategy.

In response to Members, he enlarged on the relationship with Home Choice particularly in respect of the accommodation at Trailways, Venny Bridge and briefly explained the process relating to the rough sleepers count. He also advised that the City Council had sought a fair allocation of resources through the Devon Joint Commissioning Body of the Supporting People project.

A Member stated that she was aware of a number of individuals who might be categorised as intentionally homeless but because of the chaotic nature of their lives and their vulnerability could or had become homeless through no fault of their own. She was anxious to ensure that each case was thoroughly assessed and that, had they been made homeless through no fault of their own, they should be given a second chance.

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

- (a) adopt the revised Homelessness Strategy document 2008-11;
- (b) agree to an annual report being submitted outlining progress against the Strategy's action plan; and
- (c) agree to a further report being made to the next meeting of this Committee providing information on how homelessness decisions were reached relating to vulnerable people.

(Report circulated)

41 Private Sector Housing Strategy - Annual Review

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report proposing specific changes to the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy in order to address local needs, as identified in the on-going private sector house condition survey.

It was noted that the Regional Housing pot allocation had been set at £583,000 for 2008/09, a reduction of nearly £300,000 on the 2007/08 allocation. However, the allocation would have been reduced further had not robust representations been made.

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

- (1) adopt the changes to the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy outlined in the report;
- (2) agree to the monitoring of the expenditure of the single pot allocation and to the proposed financial allocation to each of the proposed schemes;

- (3) agree to the development of further schemes, subject to the approval of the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Social Inclusion; and
- (4) agree to the review of the policy on an annual basis, or sooner if needs be, in order to ensure that it addresses local needs and/or Government policy.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

42 Revenue Final Accounts - Community 2007/08

The Director Community and Environment advised Members of the overall financial performance of the Community and Environment Directorate for the 2007/08 financial year ended 31 March 2008.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

43 Housing Revenue Account - Final Accounts 2007/08

The Director Community and Environment advised Members of the overall financial performance of the Housing Revenue Account for the 2007/08 financial year ended 31 March 2008.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

44 HRA Capital and Revenue and AIM Property Maintenance Outturn report 2007/08

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services submitted a report detailing the fourth quarterly/outturn report, covering the period from January to March 2008 (but including updated figures at 19 May 2008). It included the financial position of the £14.5m programme of reactive and planned property maintenance and refurbishment and both Revenue and Capital schemes as approved by Council for the financial year 2007/08 and budgets for schemes rolled forward from 2006/07. Where necessary, the report also provided specific details on significant programme variations.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the outturn financial position and works in 2007/08 as detailed in the report.

(Report circulated)

45 AIM Property Maintenance Proposed Programme 2008/09

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services presented the report detailing the proposed programme of property asset related project work in relation to the budgets set in 2008/09 in respect of reactive and planned maintenance, improvement and refurbishment to housing and non-housing properties and other projects to be

monitored by the Asset Improvement and Maintenance (AIM) group in 2008/09. The programme took account of those similar project works and budgets rolled forward from the financial year 2007/08.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the programme of property asset related work for 2008/09, as detailed in the report.

(Report circulated)

46 Performance Monitoring

The Director Community and Environment presented the report advising Members of performance at the end of the year on a range of services across the Directorate.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

47 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 - Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part I, Schedule 12A of the Act.

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

48 Leisure and Museums Restructure

Councillor Newcombe declared a personal interest as Devon County Council's Children and Young People's Play Champion.

The Head of Leisure and Museums presented the report on the proposed restructuring of the Leisure and Museums Unit in order to create future savings in the revenue budget.

Members were very concerned that, as a result of the proposals, reductions in services would be necessary. Amongst areas of work to be lost were the SPLASH scheme, provision of support to some community associations, preparation of funding applications for Council activities, fund raising research and strategic input into wider groups, the capacity to organise major events and the promotion of workplace health to businesses in the City and a cardiac rehabilitation service. It was recognised that the latter was essentially a function of the PCT but, as with SPLASH, funding from partners had been withdrawn. It was inequitable for the City Council to pick up funding that was the responsibility of other bodies. A Member referred specifically to the impact of the ending of the Splash scheme, including the provision of holiday activities, in the Exwick area.

The Head of Leisure and Museums stated that, overall, expenditure on Museums was approximately half that of sport, recreation and play, expenditure on the latter would also increase significantly with the construction of the Swimming Pool.

Scrutiny Committee - Community did not support the proposals and requested Executive to agree to a reassessment of the options for a further report to be submitted to this Committee and Executive.

(Report circulated to Members)

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.40 pm)

Chair

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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY - 3 JUNE 2008

QUESTION FROM MEMBER OF PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDER NO.19

Question from Ms Laura Horner re : Kings Heath

Do the Members of the Community Scrutiny Committee agree with the Digby Residents Association that:-

- all the children of Kings Heath have a right to play in a safe environment;
- the priorities of officers in arranging for a rock sculpture to be installed in an open space but not order the park equipment are at odds with the wishes of the Council Members to construct the park play equipment as soon as possible (Development Control Committee September 2007);
- the delays on the part of the Council since December 2007 regarding the construction of the park were unnecessary and could have been avoided;
- the City Council should now take steps in consultation with the Residents Association to mitigate against the lack of promised play facilities for this Summer (for the avoidance of doubt this promise is minuted at a public meeting in October 2007) and to now give the highest priority to the ordering of the park equipment and arranging for its early installation ?

Digby Residents Association

Answer

The entire aim of the work carried out by our Leisure team in the area of play is to provide for all children who live in the city safe but challenging opportunities for play within an appropriate distance from their homes.

With respect to the new park at Kings Heath, what the Residents Association refers to as a sculpture is in fact a large rock intended to be used for play: it is the first of three pieces of equipment which the officers have specifically brought forward because they knew it was going to be impossible to realize the plans for main play area before the summer holidays started. There is already on site a fully complete multi-use games area. A set of goalposts for use on the grassed area has been arranged.

It is not a question of prioritizing anything before "ordering" equipment – as the Association is aware the plans for Kings Heath involve a more imaginative approach to play, and the scheme has to be properly designed and planned, precisely because it does not consist of equipment bought off the shelf.

No promise was made at the residents' meeting, although officers did say that they would do their best to get the new facility finished. At the moment the Council is working on an unprecedented number of major new play facilities, while the same team is occupied on other, equally important and more complex issues. We regret very much the slippage of the timetable, and will continue to do all we can to get all the facilities ready, including as mentioned above bringing in three pieces of equipment and the goalposts before the holidays.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY - 3 JUNE 2008

QUESTION FOR PORTFOLIO HOLDER UNDER STANDING ORDER NO.20

Question from Cllr Mrs Danks for the Portfolio Holder - Environment and Leisure

Could the Portfolio Holder please explain why the installation of play equipment for Kings Heath has not been implemented. The consultation took place in October the day the area was passed to the Council and was promised to be in by the summer. This was the most successful of the neighbourhood pilot projects but this lack of commitment makes the Council look inept

Answer

The design for the play area at Kings Heath is almost finalised and we have now reached the stage of planning its installation with a local installer. The initial consultation event was held on site on Sat 17 Nov '07, and at the time it was hoped that equipment would be installed before the school holidays this summer, although this was not promised or guaranteed. The delay has largely been due to the fact that Kings Heath represents a change in approach to play areas from the traditional metal or wood equipment. As opposed to simply selecting equipment and arranging for it to be installed as has been the case with sites in the past, we are shaping the play area around a large naturalistic feature which will itself provide many different play opportunities. Getting this feature right has caused us the most delay, as it has involved elements of work we haven't encountered in this field before, such as using an artist, using landscape design techniques, producing detailed technical drawings etc so that equipment and materials selected for the feature are suitable. Furthermore actually sourcing materials for the feature such as stone for the walls has proved quite complicated and time consuming.

It is now hoped that the play area will be fully installed this autumn, but as it will not be ready for the summer holidays we have decided to install a few items in the eastern end of the Park as soon as possible. These will not be traditional items of play equipment but will fit in with the feel of that area of the Park and can also be used as informal play equipment. There will be two timber features designed for climbing, hiding or simply sitting on, these will add to the large granite sculptural stone installed earlier this week, which can again be used for various play activities and is also a striking visual feature. It has been suggested that some goalposts could be installed temporarily within the play area to be used throughout the summer and taken down when we install the play equipment in autumn, as the area is clearly heavily used for kickabouts (even though a Multi Use Games Area has already been provided). This is an excellent idea, and the Parks and Open Spaces Manager is aiming to have a set erected as soon as possible.

To summarise - the project is progressing well, and we are treating the project as a priority. We have scheduled an autumn installation for the play area and we are confident that it will be of a high quality, and much enjoyed by residents. It will be unique within the city and will also incorporate aspects requested by residents at the initial consultation and subsequent residents association meetings that we have attended.

In conclusion, we would like to apologise to residents for the delay, and ensure them that the Leisure team is doing everything it can to get the facilities on site at the earliest opportunity.

