

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

4 March 2008

Present:

Councillor M Baldwin (Chair)

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

Also present:-

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

15. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2008 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

16. **Declaration of Interests**

Members declared the following interests:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Mitchell	18 (lives in one of the pilot areas)
Councillor Hannaford	18 (member of Exwick Community Association)
Councillor Mrs Brock	20 (business could be subject to inspection by Environmental Health Officers)
Councillor Newcombe	24 (Member of Devon County Council's Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee)
Councillor Newton	24 (works with children)

17. **Carbon Management Strategy and Implementation Plan**

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report setting out the outcomes of the Council's Carbon Management Programme and seeking support for the Strategy and Implementation Plan. In response to a Member, he advised that the annual budget of £100,000 to implement the Carbon Management Programme was for a five year period from 2008/09 to 2012/13 and that there would be sustainable savings in the medium and longer term from a reduction in energy consumption by following the programme.

The baseline figure for 2006/07 of the Council's carbon dioxide emissions had been estimated at 2,925 tonnes by the Carbon Trust.

In response to another Member, he advised that the bio-diesel for use in two of the refuse collection vehicles was sourced locally from Clyst St Mary (the bio-diesel was made from re-cycled vegetable oil collected from local catering establishments) and that there had been no conversion costs to the diesel vehicles using this alternative energy source. Older refuse collection vehicles had been used and the fleet manager planned to roll out use of this fuel to a further ten vehicles initially and to monitor maintenance before extending this to a larger pool of fleet vehicles.

Feedback from the vehicle drivers was that the vegetable oil led to a reduction in particulate matter at start up and that performance was equal to, if not slightly better than, mineral diesel. The cost of the bio-diesel was comparable to mineral diesel at present.

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

- (1) approve the Carbon Management Strategy and Implementation Plan;
- (2) ensure the monitoring of the aims of the Strategy and Implementation Plan on an annual basis with a report to the Scrutiny Committee-Community;
- (3) ensure the revision of the action plan on an annual basis; and
- (4) commit to undertaking a full review of the Strategy and Implementation Plan in five years' time (2013).

(Report circulated)

18. **Update on Neighbourhood Engagement Pilot**

Councillor Hannaford attended the meeting and spoke on this item having given notice under Standing Order No. 44. He declared a personal interest as a member of the Exwick Community Association.

Councillor Mitchell declared an interest as he lived in one of the pilot areas.

The Community Inclusion and Engagement Officer presented the report on progress with the Council's 18 month Neighbourhood Engagement Pilot launched in June 2007 aimed at increasing citizenship participation at neighbourhood level in four areas in the City - Exwick, St. David's, Newtown/Polsloe and Kings Heath/Clyst Heath. Each area was working on establishing a partnership of local people, local Councillors, Council officers, police officers and other invited representatives. Each partnership had a brief to identify local issues for addressing by a range of agencies and had been allocated an initial budget of £5,000 per area. They would be able to decide on the use of small grants for local initiatives to improve the neighbourhood.

Councillor Hannaford spoke on progress with the initiative in the Exwick area. It was a large area with a number of isolated residential streets making the development of an overall sense of community difficult. Although a lot of consultative work had been undertaken, he sought a greater focus on action and capacity building especially around the Exwick Community Association. On raising issues such as litter, condition

of play areas, general cleanliness etc. he had been advised by City Council officers that some action could not be taken due to a lack of resources. The County Council's Exeter Committee were supportive of the pilot. He suggested a greater focus on engaging social housing landlords and hard to reach groups. He referred to Exeter Community Initiative run workshops in 2004 for the Farm Hill Residents Association and suggested that there was a danger of consultation fatigue.

Another Member referred to the problems associated with the Exwick area surrounding Wessex RFC and difficulties in engaging local youths. A regular youth club with mentoring for young people would be of great value. She also suggested head hunting community leaders. Another Member suggested a focus on developing support for youth facilities with another Member stating that this was the County Council's responsibility.

The Community Inclusion and Engagement Officer stated that much work to date in Exwick had involved initial community outreach with a number of public meetings having already taken place, although the geography of some areas made it difficult for those without transport to attend meetings. Analysis of each area depicted the varying degrees of success of current and future engagement work. Kings Heath, in particular, had been a real success with good support from local residents and with many partner agencies having been involved in picking up a number of local issues.

The Police had started on a process of promoting their community engagement work through the launch of the PACT (Partners and Community Together) and were aiming to have quarterly meetings in each locality to invite residents to share their concerns regarding community safety and to suggest improvements for the community. In the four My Neighbourhood areas, the Police were working in partnership with the City Council.

Local residents and existing community organisations had been targeted in the project with the aim of setting up partnership groups to develop future sustainability. Project workers progressed and monitored issues with the City Council, the Police and Stagecoach etc. This would enable tracking of the progress of issues and allow more effective feedback to be given back to the community on the outcome or status of an issue raised. Efforts were also being made to involve social landlords.

Two Members remarked that the use of the existing community organisation, the St. David's Neighbourhood Partnership (SDNP), could lead to the exclusion of other interested groups especially as the ward was very diverse. Grant distribution, for example, could be affected by differences of opinion between individuals. The use of surplus funding at the end of the pilot period was also questioned.

The Community Inclusion and Engagement Officer stated that the basis of administering the neighbourhood consultation groups, including the distribution of funds, had been agreed by a Steering Group comprising a cross party group of Local Councillors, Council officers and voluntary sector agencies. Local Councillors in the pilot areas had demonstrated support for the projects by regularly attending partnership meetings. In the SDNP example, grants were to be considered by a five member sub group including officer and Councillor representation and appropriate mechanisms were in place to ensure the fair distribution of grants. This included making sure the criteria was based on an agreed vision and aims for the area.

Although £5,000 was a small figure, it was hoped it would be a useful participatory budgeting process that would be evaluated for future use.

A Councillor referred to the cost and rationale of circulating a leaflet and personal letter to every resident in the Newtown/Polsloe area seeking their views on how to spend their grant and to advise of a public meeting on 6 March and whether consideration had been given to utilising a company rather than direct post. Another Councillor confirmed that the Newtown Members had requested a direct mail drop to all residents. This had not utilised the £5,000 allocated to the area but had come from administrative expenses. He stated that 120 replies had been received with 180 suggestions but was concerned if expectations were being raised too high and whether there were sufficient funds to respond adequately. He believed that it was vital for Councillors to be fully engaged in the decision making process.

Another Councillor stated that the Citizen was an ideal mechanism for publicising the pilots but with greater prominence given to the articles.

The Community Inclusion and Engagement Officer confirmed that the letter to Newtown residents had been to alert the public to the £5,000 pot available and to invite suggestions for small schemes. She also stated that £50,000 had been used to contract with two voluntary sector organisations - Exeter Community Initiatives and Exeter CVS. They were developing and supporting local partnerships in addition to offering their existing services and resources to complement the project (e.g. funding, constitutional advice and training).

Courses were being run to develop the skills and confidence of interested members of the public to become more involved in their communities by, for example, setting up resident associations and to understand how democracy works. There was concern however that the residents' budgets for funding venue hire, refreshments and leaflets was diminishing.

The Director Community and Environment stated that requests from the public would be responded to via existing mechanisms such as those set up to deal with requests for dog bins. The pilot would be evaluated further in 2008 for a decision on the way forward to be made. It was important to note that as this was a pilot a variety of methods were being tested. She accepted that the Exwick area presented unique challenges despite dedicated community development workers having been funded to work in the area over a number of years.

A Councillor contrasted the difficulties experienced in some of the trial areas with Kings Heath, a new community, in need of support where the response had been very positive.

Further progress reports would be submitted to this Committee.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted:-

- (1) progress in the Pilot; and
- (2) the review of activities in each of the Pilot areas.

(Report circulated)

19. Review of Pilot Trade Waste Recycling Service

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report on the outcome of the City-wide pilot trade recycling service. The continuation of the service was recommended.

The pilot had been very successful with 550 of the 1,200 trade waste clients signed up, making the scheme financially sustainable. The client base had the potential to grow to a maximum capacity of approximately 575 based upon one smaller vehicle and crew.

The Director Community and Environment stated that it was a matter of judgement on the need for a larger vehicle and that, on balance, it was believed better to opt for a smaller one at present. In response to a question on recycling of plastics, the Head of Environmental Health Services advised that the Council collected all plastics, whilst many other local authorities collected certain grades only. Successful recycling was reliant on making it easy for the public and this was seen as extremely important in achieving Exeter's high recycling rates.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- (1) noted the success of the pilot trade waste recycling service in terms of client base size, waste recycled and income generated; and
- (2) authorised the Head of Environmental Health Services, subject to prior consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Leisure, to procure a vehicle at a capital cost of £50,000 and appoint a permanent crew a revenue cost of £50,000 per annum.

(Report circulated)

20. Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (Scores on the Doors)

Councillor Mrs Brock declared a personal interest as her business could be subject to inspection by Environmental Health Officers.

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report describing food hygiene rating schemes and outlining how the concept incorporated many of the aims of better regulation as well as promoting good standards of hygiene in food business. The report sought the introduction of a pilot scheme for Exeter in order to evaluate its merits and to determine the value of a longer term scheme.

Food hygiene rating schemes involved the conversion of the results of a food hygiene inspection, completed by Environmental Health Officers into a visual display such as stars. Zero stars equated to a poor food hygiene score and five to an excellent score.

Although the scheme could be applied to any shop selling food, canteens, bakeries etc., it was the intention to initially concentrate on restaurants and cafes as these possessed the highest public profile. Takeaways would be included.

A Member expressed concern that inspections of premises might occur at difficult times for owners who would then suffer from a poor report. It was emphasised that difficult circumstances could occur at any time and that therefore a food business should have good management systems in place to cope with this. The Head of Environmental Health Services confirmed that even if the scoring was low, a premises may remain open although serious failings presented a substantial risk to public health and would result in closure. In addition, owners would be able to request a re-inspection where significant improvements had been made.

A survey had concluded that food safety practices were primarily driven by customer expectations, the need to avoid bad publicity and the need to secure and maintain customer confidence and business reputation. Food hygiene scores provided a powerful incentive to businesses to self improve and raise standards. Although it was not possible to force owners to display their individual scores, those that scored well would be motivated to do so and those that did not may face questions from potential customers. All would be available for viewing on the Council's web site.

He confirmed that there would be a media campaign to publicise the scheme as such schemes generated a lot of interest.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community supported:-

- (1) the implementation of a pilot Food Hygiene Rating Scheme for Exeter, initially to be funded from within existing budgets;
- (2) the implementation of the scheme by subscription to an existing established provider with national or regional presence; and
- (3) subject to available funding and a successful Exeter Food Hygiene Rating Scheme pilot, a further report on proposals for a permanent scheme be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee.

(Report circulated)

21. **Changes in Arrangements for receiving Stray Dogs Out of Hours**

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report informing Members of changes in arrangements for dealing with stray dogs out of hours, initiated by the withdrawal of provision by the Police nationally, following the forthcoming enactment of legislation. The Control of Dogs Order 1992 provided that dogs must wear a collar and tag giving the name and address of the owner when in a public place. Many dog owners were unaware of the requirement to ensure that tags are used in order to reduce the potential for strays. A publicity drive was proposed.

In response to a Member, who enquired why it was felt necessary to collect a stray dog out of hours, the Head of Environmental Health Services stated that stray dogs could cause traffic accidents, lead to a potential nuisance and increase the possibility of dog attacks. There were four officers trained to handle dogs but it was not the intention at this stage to train and involve Community Patrollers in the collection of strays because this would be a diversion from other duties.

A 21.00 hour cut off point for the collection of strays had been chosen because of anticipated drop off of customer calls in the later evening and officer safety in responding to these calls. This would mean a gap in provision to receive stray dogs after 21.00 hours, although callers would be advised by the Control Room about arrangements to collect the dog as soon as possible the next day.

In response to a Member, the Head of Environmental Health Services explained the procedure when a stray dog was seized and the options once seven days had elapsed. He agreed to add further wording to the report in order to expand upon the Council's efforts to re-home stray dogs. He explained that it had not been considered appropriate to use the Council's two holding pens as an acceptance point as there was no reception facilities and due to the potential security risk posed by owners attempting to visit the facility in order to regain their pet.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

22. **Draft Tree and Woodland Strategy**

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services presented the report setting out proposals to introduce a tree and woodland strategy for the City and seeking approval of a draft for consultation. He stated that a formal strategy would be submitted to the Committee after further consultation. The responses and role of stakeholders would be of particular importance.

A Member congratulated the Head of Contracts and Direct Services on the scheme, run in association with St. Valentine's Day, when 22 individuals had sponsored a tree with a certificate provided. This had been a joint City Council/Express and Echo initiative and it was proposed to follow up with a slightly different scheme in 2009.

A Member remarked that a key element would be to encourage private land owners to plant trees and she referred in particular to new developments where there was only limited scope for planting because of the small size of the gardens. Another Member suggested that guidance be provided to private land owners on types of tree and the suitability of proposed locations for planting. The latter was particularly important given that overlooking trees sometimes created nuisances to neighbours through loss of light etc.

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services agreed that trees were an emotive subject and that consultation was important to ensure the planting of the right tree in the right location. A Member suggested the replacement of felled trees in a "walk" of trees along Topsham Road. He was advised that replacing diseased trees with new ones

was sometimes inappropriate given the location. Those adjacent to highways were the responsibility of the County Council. He stated that 10,000 trees had been planted in the last 12 months.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- (1) supported the proposal to produce a tree and woodlands strategy for Exeter;
- (2) approved the draft tree and woodlands strategy, as set out in the report, as the basis for wider consultation with stakeholders; and
- (3) supported the presentation of a further report to this Committee following consultation on the final version of the tree and woodlands strategy.

(Report circulated)

23. Allotment Strategy Review

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

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services presented the report on progress made to date on the action plan outlined in the revised Allotment Strategy, the report detailing further action plans for 2008/09. He reported that due to the good work of the Allotment and Play Equipment Officer the number of plots had been increased by 100.

Councillor Hannaford enquired as to progress on seeking contributions towards allotment provision as part of Section 106 Agreements and to difficulties being experienced in the supply of water as several sites in the West Exe area had no access to water. He stated that the allotments in the St. Thomas and Cowick areas were a great success.

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services stated that negotiations in respect of Section 106 Agreements were very complex and that consultations were ongoing with Planning Services on this issue. Supply of water was a problem across the whole of the City and work was being done on securing water run off from other areas to supply allotments. The provision of an additional allotment site was unlikely at present.

A Member referred to the importance of securing sites in association with new developments where small gardens were increasingly the norm in high density locations. Encouraging families to grow vegetables would assist the environment and reduce transportation costs.

A Member referred to the praise received from the Chartermark assessor for work at the Marypole allotments and asked that the thanks of the Committee be passed on to the Allotment and Play Equipment Officer for his work on allotments. He was pleased to note the increased involvement of young people in allotments but, referring to the

overall drop out rate, asked that people be advised of the commitment necessary to maintain an allotment. Every effort was made to make sites more tenantable and some plots were being subdivided to increase participation. A demand from young families was noticeable.

Scrutiny Committee noted progress and supported future proposals.

(Report circulated)

24. Devon Children's Trust Draft - Children and Young People's Plan 2008/11

Councillor Newcombe declared a personal interest as a member of Devon County Council's Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Newton declared a personal interest as she worked with children.

The Director Community and Environment presented the report seeking views on the draft Children and Young People's Plan 2008-11. Her response to the initial draft had been circulated. She advised that a second draft circulated on 29 February 2008 was substantially different. Comments on the initial draft had sought a more positive tone with a focus on enjoyable activities for children. There was also a need for greater clarity between responsibility of individual organisations and responsibilities shared by all bodies.

Reference was made to the Special Education Needs Task group which was looking at children's needs and it was felt that there should be a focus on developing key skills such as financial awareness, tenancy issues etc. There was also a need to provide a structure for mentoring young people. A Member referred to the role of the PCT and hoped that it would not again experience a budget crisis as this could lead to a cut back in its funding of services for young people.

A Member referred to the work of both Sure Start and Home Start and felt that there should be greater publicity for the good work of the latter in the area of early years.

The time scale for commenting on the revised draft was short with comments sought by 18 March for implementation on 1 April 2008.

Members' comments would be included in the response to the County Council.

(Report circulated)

25. Stewardship - Community to December 2007

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 2007 compared with those reported for the second quarter that had ended on 30 September 2007.

The current forecast suggests, after adjusting for approved additional expenditure of £32,550, reductions of capital charges of £44,703, deferred AIM expenditure of £92,000, net movements to reserves of £124,640, and revenue contributions to capital

of £20,000, that net expenditure for this Committee will decrease from the revised budget by a total of £67,310 representing a variation of 0.5% from the revised budget.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

26. **Stewardship - Housing Revenue Account to December 2007**

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 2007. During this period the total of the variances indicated that there would be a net surplus of £114,860 which would be used to fund work in respect of the Government's Decent Homes Standard. The working balance would therefore remain at £2,843,168.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

27. **National Performance Indicator Results 2006/07 How Exeter's Results Compare**

The report set out a full analysis of Exeter's performance indicator results for 2006/07 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)

28. **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.

29. **RAMM Staffing 2008/09**

The Head of Leisure and Museums presented the report on reductions in the Renaissance in the Regions funding programme and seeking approval for resultant changes to staff numbers.

A Member felt that, given the importance of the ethnography collection, the post of Assistant Curator should be retained. Further, it was possible that after making the individual redundant, that person would be able to apply for a re-advertised post if/when the RAMM re-development had been completed in two years time. In the event of the individual being re-appointed an unnecessary expenditure would have occurred in respect of the redundancy payment. A motion to retain the post was put to the vote and carried.

The Head of Leisure and Museums explained that he was unable at this stage to foresee what funding would be available in 2010 or what posts would be in the establishment. Moreover, the costs of redundancy in this instance were being borne by the Renaissance programme. The posts had been selected for redundancy following a transparent process agreed with the unions.

Other than the position in respect of post no. CE12161, Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the proposals and requested Executive to:-

- (1) with the exception of post CE12161, which it is recommended be retained, all other posts, as set out in the report, be not renewed or terminated as appropriate on the 31st March 2008 with the holders paid, where relevant, a compensation payment in accordance with the discretion exercised by the Council under the provisions of the Local Government (Early Termination)(Discretionary Compensation)(England and Wales) Regulations 2006 with a payment also made in respect of any notice period due the employee at 31 March 2008;
- (2) delete the resultant posts from the establishment of the Council;
- (3) extend all other museum posts on temporary Renaissance funded contracts, as set out in the report to 31 March 2009, and extend contracts funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to 31 March 2010 unless otherwise indicated; and
- (4) make the temporary post of part time cleaner, CE121001, permanent.

(Report circulated to Members)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.25 pm

Chair