

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

31 August 2010

Present:

Councillor Dilys Baldwin (Chair)

Councillors Newby, Mrs Danks, R M Hannaford, Payne, Wardle and Winterbottom

Director Community and Environment, Head of Housing Services, Re-cycling Manager, Environmental Health Technician (AB) and Member Services Officer (HB)

Also present:

Councillor Mitchell - Portfolio Holder for Environment and Leisure

45 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 1 June, 7 June and 8 July 2010 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

46 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

47 Minutes of Community Safety Strategy Group

The minutes of Community Safety Strategy Group meetings are circulated after each meeting to Members of this Scrutiny Committee to enable them to raise any issues of concern or interest at these meetings and, if necessary, request referrals back to the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) for a response. Members can request individual agencies represented at the CDRP to attend a meeting of this Committee to answer any questions or address any concerns.

Members had no queries on the latest minutes circulated, those of 28 July 2010.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE

48 Draft Older Person's Housing Strategy 2010-2015

The Head of Housing Services presented the report seeking approval for the Older Person's Housing Strategy 2010-2015.

He enlarged on the report in response to Members' queries:

- although many of the actions set out in the Strategy were not reliant on funding, a clearer picture on what could be achieved would only be apparent following the announcement of the Comprehensive Spending Review in October;
- the occupational therapist's post, jointly funded with Devon County Council over the last three years, had been of great value but there was concern that the County might not be able to continue offering support in the future;
- the St. Loyes development included a 50 unit extra care scheme that charged social rents. Funding for the care element would come from Devon County Council's Domiciliary Care Support budget;

- those moving to new properties would not receive downsizing grants, although removal costs, together with general support, would be provided; and
- the garden assistance scheme could not be extended to other tenures but the availability of existing external providers was being examined.

Members requested an early update on progress with the strategy once the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review was known, with greater detail to be provided in the progress column.

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

- (1) approve the Older Person's Housing Strategy;
- (2) ensure the submission, to the March meeting of this Committee, of a progress report on the Strategy in light of the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review;
- (3) ensure the provision of further reports on an annual basis, on progress against the action plan; and
- (4) in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, ensure the placement of the draft Older Person's Housing Strategy and Action Plan on the website for further comments to be invited from the community.

(Report circulated)

49 **Local Air Quality Management 2010 - Air Quality Progress Report**

The Environmental Health Technician presented the report updating Members on the Council's duties relating to local air quality management and seeking comments on the findings of the 2010 Air Quality Progress Report and proposed amendments to the Air Quality Area Management Order.

She responded as follows to Members' queries:

- measures set out in the Action Plan to tackle pollution were drawn from four strategies - the Local Transport Plan, Second Round, the Environmental Strategy, the Climate Change Strategy and the Local Plan;
- responding to a Member who, given the cuts in the transport budget for Exeter, queried whether the Devon County Council approach was sufficiently joined up, she advised that the City Council's role was to monitor Air Quality and to press the County for solutions where problems were apparent. Congestion reduction and health improvements were strands within the Local Transport Plan rather than a specific reduction in air pollution. There were no legal sanctions available to the City Council to combat problems of pollution, although the Government was liable to fines if it failed to meet EU standards;
- air quality in the High Street was monitored. With modern technology public vehicles were now much improved and encouraging greater use of public transport was an important strand within the Local Transport Plan;
- the County possessed a Freight Quality Partnership and Members expressed the hope that there would be greater control of heavy vehicles using the main arterial routes as there was an impact on both pollution levels and road conditions.

Members were advised of the location of monitoring stations along Topsham Road. They welcomed the report and recognised the City Council's important role in contributing to the Local Transport Plan through air monitoring, recognising that the County, through its transport role, was ultimately responsible for ensuring that air quality remained of a high standard.

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

- (1) the noting of the 2010 Air Quality Progress Report;
- (2) the approval of the amended Air Quality Management Area Order, as set out in the report; and
- (3) the sealing of the Air Quality Management Area Order with a copy submitted to DEFRA.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

50 Council Own Build Programme Update

The Head of Housing Services presented the report updating Members on the Council's house building programme.

He enlarged on the report in response to Members' queries:

- very good progress was being made on the house building programme, the Council having successfully secured £1,545,000 from the Homes and Community Agency (HCA) for the first wave of Council development. This related to 18 new homes at Merlin Crescent and three new homes at Sivell Place. All homes were designed to be occupied by over 55's as part of the Council's down-sizing initiative and to meet Passiv Haus Certified Standards. They would be cutting edge, eco friendly developments and the Council would be the first Local Authority in the UK to build social housing to this high standard. It was hoped that these new developments would receive national recognition;
- responding to a Member who, with reference to the 6,000+ housing waiting list, expressed his disappointment that additional resources had not been made available to the Council as part of Wave 2, he advised that the HCA had opted to provide support at £40-45,000 per unit for the second round compared with the £75,000 level of support secured by the City Council for the first round. With economies of scale, the City Council second round bid had come in at £65,000 per unit. Authorities in the north of England had largely benefitted from Wave 2, having bid for smaller amounts of grant; and
- with Government cutbacks, it was anticipated that the HCA would be seeking premiums from developers and expecting Housing Associations to utilise more of their budgets for future schemes. In this regard, Sovereign Housing Association who had been a strategic partner for a number of years and were developing the sites at Leypark Road, Shakespeare Road, Beacon Lane and Wonford Street, had indicated that they would meet the necessary costs in the event of reduced, or no, HCA support.

A Member referred to the wider economic and social impact of a reduced building programme as a result of Government budget cuts.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

51 **2010 Review of Recycling Plan (2006-2011)**

The Recycling Manager presented the report updating Members on progress with the Recycling Plan since its approval in 2006 and seeking ongoing support for recycling initiatives.

She responded as follows to Members' queries:

- the Green Team, set up in partnership with the Express and Echo and Gregory's Haulage Company, would continue although it was not known if Devon County Council, through the LAA, would continue to fund the Education Officer's post after the remainder of the academic year. The sponsors were meeting shortly to discuss future funding for the project. If there was no further funding for this post, decisions would have to be made about allocating existing resources to support the Green Team by reducing work in other areas;
- new legislation from the EU might be interpreted by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs so as not to allow composted waste that was not to the industry standard of PAS 100 to be brought into future recycling figures. Officers undertook to advise all Members as soon as possible on the consultation taking place on these proposed changes. It was proposed to respond to consultations on these changes on a Devon wide basis through the Devon Authorities Waste Reduction and Recycling Committee;
- subject to the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010 coming into force on the 1 October 2011 only 80 tonnes of material would be allowed on the Council's green waste site at any one time. This would prevent use of the site to produce compost from the parks waste and, as a consequence, the Parks and Open Spaces team were reviewing how to manage their green waste with a view to shredding more material at the point of production;
- some 14,000 of the 18,000 properties on weekly collections would move to fortnightly from September 2010, the balance representing those properties with no space outside their properties to leave waste bins;
- savings were projected from the remodelled collection rounds scheduled to go live on 20 September with the new collection calendars to be circulated shortly; and
- through WRAP (Waste Resources Action Programme), a City wide mail drop had been undertaken to educate the public on the importance of not contaminating recycling and there had been a significant reduction in contamination at the MRF. Warning letters and support for those with disabilities were undertaken rather than seeking prosecutions. Previously, there had been three education/enforcement officers with one transferred to full educational duties and the remaining two subsequently reduced to one. Members expressed their concerns at this reduction in the number of enforcement staff, but were reassured that this had not led to any reduction in the quality of materials being collected for recycling.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:

- (1) noted the progress that the Council had made to date in implementing the Recycling Plan 2006-2011;
- (2) supported the Recycling Improvement Plan for 2010/11;

- (3) asked for an update as soon as possible to all Members on the implications of the changes resulting from the new EU legislation that may result in the requirement to compost to an industry standard before it is deemed “recycled”; and
- (4) asked for their concerns regarding the reduction in the number of enforcement staff as a result of the introduction of new collection areas to be examined.

(Report circulated)

52 **Progress Update - Environmental and Climate Change Strategies**

The Director Community and Environment presented the report outlining the progress made by the Council in implementing the action plans of the Environmental Strategy, the Climate Change Strategy and the Carbon Management Plan.

With on going housing developments at Newcourt and Monkerton and other potential developments to the east of the City, a Member expressed concern regarding the potential impact of reduced or nil funding for transport schemes and infrastructure provision.

The following responses were given to Members’ queries:

- dog fouling issues were pursued by a number of environmental health staff and the community patrollers in addition to the Senior Dog Warden. Criteria for prioritising the introduction of further dog waste collection bins had been agreed by a Dogs Working Group;
- the officers’ Task Group set up in June 2010 to tackle refuse problems throughout the City had concentrated initially on the City Centre/Fore Street area. Work had also taken place in student areas of the City; and
- new techniques to improve vehicle efficiency were constantly being explored, one such initiative being a trial of hydrogen hybrid technology.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:

- (1) noted the examples of progress made to date;
- (2) reaffirmed the Council’s commitment to manage and continually improve its own sustainability performance;
- (3) noted the current status of the Council’s Carbon Management Strategy and Implementation Plan;
- (4) supported the Council continuing to work in partnership with other organisations within the City and with the community to tackle climate change and improve the quality of life in the City; and
- (5) supported the submission of progress reports to this Committee on an annual basis.

(Report circulated)

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

53 **Corporate Environmental Performance Indicators - Results and Progress**

The Director Community and Environment presented the report setting out information on the Council's corporate environmental performance indicators for the period 2009/10.

The specific indicators under consideration were:-

- the reduction in the total quantity of paper resources used by the Council;
- the purchase of recycled paper;
- the reduction in waste produced from the Civic Centre;
- the reduction in carbon dioxide emissions within the Council; and
- the reduction in water consumption at the Civic Centre.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:

- (1) noted the improving results for paper use, purchase of re-cycled paper, waste production, carbon dioxide emissions and water consumption;
- (2) requested that the targets be kept under review; and
- (3) asked for a further report to be submitted to this Committee in 12 months time.

(Report circulated)

54 **Housing Services Account Stewardship to June 2010**

The Head of Housing Services presented the report on major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first three months of the financial year up to 30 June 2010. During this period, the total of the variances indicated that there would be a net deficit of £428,834, which would be transferred from the working balance at 31 March 2010. This represented a reduction of £213,736 compared to the budgeted reduction in the working balance of £642,570. It was estimated that the working balance would stand at £2,252,895 at 31 March 2011.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

55 **Meeting with Registered Social Landlords**

The Chair referred to the meeting with Registered Social Landlords on 30 July 2010 arranged as a result of concerns expressed by Members at a previous meeting of this Committee. Councillors D Baldwin, Mrs Danks and Shiel had been in attendance with a large number of representatives from RSL's also in attendance. The Head of Housing Services would circulate the minutes to Members of this Committee after the forthcoming local elections.

56 **Community Services - Stewardship to 30 June 2010**

The Director Community and Environment presented the report advising Members of any major differences by management unit to the revised budget. The current forecast suggests that net expenditure for this committee will decrease from the revised budget by a total of £32,960 which represents a variation of 0.26% from the revised budget. The budgets for 2010/11 included a provision of 0.7% for the pay award.

She advised that the River and Canal would be the responsibility of the Head of Operational Services and Transport and would therefore be reported to the Scrutiny Committee - Economy in future.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.50 pm

Chair