

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

9 November 2010

Present:

Councillor Kevin Mitchell (Chair)

Councillors Shiel, Branston, Mrs Danks, Hobden, Morris, Mottram, Newton, Robson, Sterry, Wardle and Winterbottom

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

Also present:

Councillor D. Baldwin - Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement

Councillor R.M. Hannaford - Portfolio Holder for Environment and Leisure

57 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 August 2010 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

58 **Declaration of Interests**

A Member declared the following personal interest:

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Wardle	Min. No. 66 (Member of the Devon Archaeology Society)

59 **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 8 September 2010.

60 **Reports of Portfolio Holders**

Councillors R.M. Hannaford and D. Baldwin presented progress reports on priorities within the Environment and Leisure Portfolio and the Housing and Community Involvement Portfolio respectively. The priorities are set out below together with responses (in italics) given to Members' queries:

Environment and Leisure

- to manage the RAMM redevelopment project to minimise the cost and reopen in December 2011;
 - to make necessary savings in a careful and considered way trying to minimise the impact on the public;
 - to continue to implement the changes to the refuse collection service and make any necessary adjustments; and
 - to maintain all our current play areas to a good standard, to tackle vandalism and maximise the use of Section 106 monies to make improvements.
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- *the RAMM project had been overseen by a senior Member Working Group and it was anticipated that there would be no further deviation from the budget;*
 - *the preservation and maintenance of play areas had been identified as a priority, partly to counter the impact on children and young people resulting from recent cutbacks in Government funding and there would be a greater channelling of Section 106 monies for this purpose. As the full impact of the Government cuts was not yet fully clear, it was not possible at this stage to provide detailed information on other priorities - for example, the future of the Play Rangers;*
 - *with Devon County Council having resolved not to upgrade the Central Library at a cost of £10 million, there could be a case for seeking expenditure of this money for the provision of a new swimming pool for the City; and*
 - *the importance of the Green Team was acknowledged but confirmation was awaited as to whether the County Council would continue funding the Temporary Education Officer. A generation of young people were now more environmentally aware and it was hoped to maintain this initiative into the future.*

Housing and Community Involvement

- to work with the Social Health and Inclusion Partnership to focus our work to support priority groups and areas;
 - to provide at least 100 new units of affordable housing;
 - to effectively manage the new council housing repairs contract, ensuring a smooth transition that delivers service improvements;
 - to consult council housing residents on the new Tenant Services Authority regulatory framework for social housing and develop a set of local standards for Exeter to meet our obligations;
 - to continue to work with the Resident Auditor Team for Council Housing and act on their findings;
 - to review the My Neighbourhood/PACT project and use the evaluation to drive forward continuing improvements to our community involvement work; and
 - to review the processes by which the need for disabled adaptations are assessed and provided.
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- *the Council housing stock is an asset and maintaining and improving the quality of housing is important. Many of the empty properties visible throughout the City are not Council owned; and*
 - *a progress report on My Neighbourhood/PACT will be submitted to a future meeting.*

The portfolio holders' reports had been circulated electronically in advance of the meeting after the agenda had been circulated. A number of Members expressed dissatisfaction at the brevity of the reports.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:

- (1) noted the reports; and
- (2) asked that Council be made aware of Members' dissatisfaction over the lack of detail in the portfolio holders' reports and of their hope that greater information will be provided in the future.

61 Domestic Waste Collections and Recycling Collections

The Head of Environmental Health Services updated Members on the progress with the changes to the domestic waste and recycling collections. He explained the background to the changes. After consideration by a Member Working Group, a remodelling of the old inefficient rounds had been undertaken together with moving a residual 14,000 properties suitable for a bi-weekly collection to bring them in line with the rest of the City. There had been public resistance to changing from back alley to front gate collection and the staff had not supported a move to a four day working week which meant that these latter two proposals were not carried.

The changes had been introduced on 20 September 2010 and the new regime was therefore now in week seven. He highlighted the following issues:

- because of the volume of properties, initial public responses seeking clarifications etc. had been very high but had now settled down with data updated and improved;
- problem areas were being examined, Monks Road in Polsloe, for example, had remained a back alley collection but had still suffered from the public leaving their rubbish out too early for collection. The Enforcement Officers and Community Patrol had helped educate the public to reduce the problem;
- minor adjustments were being made to the rounds as the crews settled in to the new collection regime. Certain ad hoc arrangements with individual members of the public had changed;
- the existing 11 crews had been reduced to 10, with one less crew and vehicle. Although there was a greater balance between the workloads, minor differences remained that had to be examined. There was also less call on agency staff. The task and finish regime remained, but consultations were being held with the Union to consider moving to a 37 hour week;
- extra enforcement and public education was being carried out, especially in student areas of the City, where refuse had been presented at the wrong time; and
- average weekly times showed eight crews working just under 37 hours per week with two crews just over 37 hours per week. There had been an average of 33 hours of overtime per week (equating to one hour per operative) but overtime had always been incurred for vehicle breakdown and cleaning back lanes and it was anticipated that this would reduce as crews became familiar with their new rounds.

In response to Members' queries, he advised that:

- a whole scale change from back alley to front collections had not been carried out but where there were small pockets of back alley collection points in predominantly front collection areas, those pockets had been changed, where practical, for operational efficiency;
- Fore Street was another complex problem area targeted by enforcement officers. It comprised a mix of flats above shops, retail premises, houses in multiple

- occupation and housing association properties and there were a variety of causes for the rubbish being presented incorrectly;
- it was too early to decide if the volume of re-cyclates had increased, but it was anticipated that the new regime would result in an increase in recycling of 22% for those moved to alternate weekly collection;
 - in monitoring the bulky waste collection, around half of the 26 areas had decreased in the tonnage of refuse collected, whereas some areas had produced very high tonnage of nearly 100 tonnes. There were problems with bulky collection - people dumped waste too early, dumped dangerous waste such as LPG cylinders and asbestos cement and the service was abused by non domestic users. The service, in some ways, went against the Council policy of minimising waste, as it did not encourage recycling or re-use;
 - although there had originally been a consensus supporting a four day working week, the staff had subsequently voted against such a change. However, a four day working week would need to remain a long term objective;
 - there was a good working relationship with the University Liaison Officer and student wardens were also very supportive, so there was close working with the University;
 - an important element of these large scale logistical changes was encouraging feedback from the crews who, from their in-depth knowledge of the rounds, could advise on further fine tuning to improve efficiency; and
 - the service would seek to further reduce overtime.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

62 Private Sector Housing Policy - 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.

He emphasised that the strategy focused on housing standards and did not impact on the nature and composition of development sites for students.

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; and
- (2) agree to the incorporation of the Private Sector Housing Strategy as a sub-strategy of the Council's overall Housing Strategy, with amendments made, as appropriate, in order to address local needs and changing Government policy.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

63 Housing Strategy 2007-2012

The Head of Housing Services presented the report updating Members on progress in meeting the targets set out in the revised Housing Strategy 2007-2012.

The following responses were given to Members' queries:

- the full impact of the Government Spending Review would not become apparent until the end of the year. The grant to the Homes and Community Agency had been cut by 50% and a decision on the allocation on a national basis was not yet known. The response of developers to the Government changes and the impact of reduced benefits was unknown at present;
- the challenging 2005 Government target of reducing the homeless figure of 350 by 50% had been achieved one year early, with 130 homeless and in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2010. This had been achieved, in part, by improvements in preventative measures. It was a multi agency approach and the value of the voluntary sector was recognised;
- an officer had been seconded for two days a week to work on modernisation schemes for people with learning disabilities;
- new initiatives to engage young people were of value and the Resident Involvement Manager was seeking to improve communication with this difficult to engage group;
- a budget of £50,000 remained for downsizing and it was likely that interest would increase with new infill developments coming on line;
- the majority of Devon Councils, including Exeter, had met the Government target for reducing youth homelessness; and
- the PORCH scheme, previously funded through a one off Government grant, had been valuable and it was hoped that an element of the homelessness grant could be utilised to maintain this service.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:

- (1) noted the progress being made towards achieving targets set out in the Housing Strategy 2007-12 Action Plan; and
- (2) requested the submission of a report in March 2011 setting out the effects of the Comprehensive Spending Review on the Council's Housing Strategy.

(Report circulated)

64 Empty Homes Strategy 2009-2014

The Head of Housing Services presented the report advising Members on progress in delivering the Empty Homes Strategy.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the progress being made towards achieving targets set out in the Empty Homes Strategy 2009-2014 Action Plan.

(Report circulated)

65 **Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013**

The Head of Housing Services presented the report updating Members on progress in meeting the targets set out in the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted:

- (1) the progress being made towards achieving targets set out in the Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013 Action Plan; and
- (2) the increased demand being placed on the homelessness service as a result of the economic climate.

(Report circulated)

66 **Restructuring Exeter's Museum Service for the Future**

Councillor Wardle declared a personal interest as a member of the Devon Archaeological Society.

The Head of Leisure and Museums presented the report setting out proposals for changes to museum staffing and to operational policies in preparation for the re-opening of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) and providing an update on the Renaissance in the Regions programme as it affects RAMM.

The support from the Renaissance in the Regions programme had been administered by the Museums Libraries and Archives Council which had signalled that it would end in its present form on 31 March 2011, the date the current funding agreement expired. RAMM was due to re-open to the public towards the end of 2011 with a formal opening date of 14 December 2011 fixed for some time. The broad aim was to create a new permanent staffing structure at the minimum level required to operate the public service, with additional services provided by Renaissance staff as and when finance was available.

The report set out in detail the advantages and disadvantages of introducing charging and, as the Heritage Lottery Fund had provided some £10.3 million towards the project, its views had been sought on introducing charges. It had referred to its stipulation when making the grant that the Museum should provide value for money when re-opened. A breakdown of charging structures from other museums was provided. A number of charging options were available. It was noted that a 60% reduction in visitor numbers could be anticipated with the introduction of charges. Although it was not unusual for voluntary museums to charge, national museums were free. Retention of free entry could lead to a loss of between £100,000 to £200,000 per annum. However, it would also be necessary to engage additional staff if charging was introduced.

With regard to opening, RAMM had previously opened on Mondays to Saturdays 10am to 5pm and closed on Sundays. It was proposed to open on Sundays and to close on Mondays with an additional option of a Tuesday closure if necessary. There was support for Sunday opening with closure on Mondays. The option for also closing on Tuesday could also be examined. It was noted that there were no additional payments for Sunday working.

RAMM had previously held archaeological finds from development sites in Devon but this had become unsustainable. There was currently a moratorium on accepting any more material from any archaeological contractor because of the pressure of the

project and there was a substantial backlog of material currently held by Exeter Archaeology. The formal stores would be full by 2012 and it would be necessary to consider the overall policy, both of maintaining the existing archive but, more importantly, of accepting material from digs. Storage was expensive, although these archives did not have to be in the city centre and could be shared with other museums.

While curriculum based education was a desirable service, it was felt that it was not a core function of RAMM. Any continuation post Renaissance therefore would have to be on the basis of full cost recovery and Members supported this. An approach would be made to the County Council for financial support, but most funding was now devolved to schools, so it was likely that the decision to pay for such services would lie with them. Much outreach work had been undertaken during the closure and would continue for 18 months after 1 April 2011. Thereafter, continuation would be dependent on any new format agreed for Renaissance in the Regions.

Members were fundamentally and unanimously opposed to charging and the possibility of a 60% reduction in visitor numbers was unacceptable. A reference was made to the reduction in visitor numbers at the Cathedral since a charging policy had been introduced - a drop from 300,000 to 150-200,000 visitors per annum. Noting that a large number of visitors to the Museum had been of a lower socioeconomic status, which was unusual for museums, a Member predicted that introducing charging would lead to a significant drop in attendance by such groups. One Member suggested that charging for high profile exhibitions could be appropriate.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted and supported the following:

- (1) a policy of no charging;
- (2) the need to restructure the staffing radically to create a core team to manage the new museum and work with the new funding regime. There would be a need for the core team to possess commissioning and external funding skills. Most of the team would be required to work five days out of seven;
- (3) the likelihood that there would be transitional Renaissance funding into 2012/13 so that some additional capability could be managed;
- (4) on the re-opening of RAMM, the museum to open on Sundays, with closure on Mondays, consideration to be given to closure on Tuesdays as well, if appropriate;
- (5) the education function to be self-funding; and
- (6) the need for the Council to address the issue of archaeological archives in early 2012.

(Report circulated)

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

67 Half Year Results of Performance Monitoring 2010/11

The Director Community and Environment advised Members of performance in the middle of the year on a range of services across the Directorate.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

68 Housing Revenue Account Stewardship to September 2010

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 2010. During this period, the total of the variances indicated that there would be a net deficit of £420,553 which would be transferred to the working balance as at 31 March 2011. This represented a reduction of £222,017 compared to the budgeted reduction to the working balance of £642,570. It was estimated that the working balance would stand at £2,261,176 at 31 March 2011.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

69 Community Services - Stewardship - Stewardship to September 2010

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

The current forecast suggested that, after adjustments for increased capital charges and net movements from reserves, net expenditure for this Committee would decrease from the revised budget by a total of £502,820, which represented a variation of 4.09% from the revised budget.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

70 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 items on the grounds that they 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

71 Restructure of the Housing Needs Service

The Head of Housing Services presented the report setting out proposals for the restructure of the Housing Needs Service to create a new Housing Options Team to provide a comprehensive housing options service to all those in housing need.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to agree to the following restructure of the Housing Needs Service:

- (1) the termination of the employment of the holders of the posts of Home Choice Assistant (CE06124 and CE06122) and Home Choice Officer (CE06217) on the grounds of redundancy upon implementation of the new structure in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 19 of the Local Government

Pension Scheme (Benefits, Membership and Contributions) Regulations 2007, with compensation being paid to the holders of the posts 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; payments of compensation to be made in respect of the notice/unexpired period of notice to which the employees would otherwise be entitled under their contracts of employment and the posts to be deleted from the establishment of the Council;

- (2) the creation of the post of Housing Options Officer;
- (3) the deletion from the establishment of the post of Former Tenant Arrears Officer (CE06218), in order to create the post of Housing Needs Support Officer;
- (4) the re-designation of Administration Team Leader (CE06125) to Housing Needs Support Team Leader;
- (5) renaming the Housing Advice Team the Housing Options Team;
- (6) re-designating all Housing Advice Officers as Housing Options Officers (CE06111, 6112, 6113, 6120, 6121, 6224, 6210, 6181, 6206);
- (7) re-designating the Housing Advice Team Leader (CE06207) the Housing Options Manager; and
- (8) re-designating all Administration Support Officers (CE06186 and CE06204) as Housing Needs Support Officers.

(Report circulated to Members)

72 **Restructure of the Tenancy Services Team**

The Head of Housing Services presented the report setting out proposals for the restructure of the Housing Unit's Tenancy Services Team to create a new neighbourhood management team that provided a range of responsive and proactive services to the Council's tenants and leaseholders.

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

- (1) approve a new structure for the Tenancy Services Team, as set out in the report, including the creation of two Neighbourhood Manager posts, a Voids and Lettings Co-ordinators post, a Neighbourhood Assistant post and a new Neighbourhood Support Officer post, subject to the completion of staff consultation on both the restructure and any resultant redundancies; and
- (2) agree, subject to full consultation, to the termination of the employment of the holders of the posts of Tenant Participation and Liaison Officer (CE06176) and Tenant Liaison Officer (CE06180) on the grounds of redundancy on the 31 December 2010 in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 19 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Benefits, Membership and Contributions) Regulations 2007, with compensation being paid to the holders of the posts 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; payments of compensation to be made in respect of the notice/unexpired period of notice

to which the employees would otherwise be entitled under their contracts of employment, the posts to be deleted from the establishment of the Council.

(Report circulated to Members)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.15 pm

Chair