

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

8 March 2011

Present:

Councillor Kevin Mitchell (Chair)

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

Director Community and Environment, Assistant Chief Executive, Head of Contracts and Direct Services, Head of Environmental Health Services, Community Inclusion and Engagement Officer 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

20 Minutes

Subject to the following amendments to the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2011:-

- (1) the amendment of Min. No. 8 to show that Councillor Newcombe's interest in Turntable was as a Committee Member and not a Trustee; and
- (2) the amendment of Min. No. 12 to show that the request for a report back on community toilets had been proposed by Councillor Newton and seconded by Councillor Hobden;

the minutes of the meetings held on 11 January and 18 January 2011 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

21 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

22 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 of the meeting held on 12 January 2011.

23 **Community Toilets**

The Head of Environmental Health Services reported on progress on research into community toilet schemes as requested at the previous meeting of this Committee. He confirmed that a report was tabled on the Forward Plan for the September meeting of this Committee and that it was necessary to examine in depth the practicalities of setting up a scheme, how that related to existing public toilet provision in the City, the potential scaling back of that provision in order to produce savings and issues related to the detailed operation of such a scheme over time. The report would also address the monitoring regime necessary for a scheme and the support needed to sustain its members. It was also necessary to carry out a detailed cost-benefit analysis of provision for different user types.

A Member stated that the introduction of community toilet schemes was gathering momentum across the country and she referred to a number of places similar in nature to Exeter where these had been introduced. She felt that Members of this Committee should be fully involved in the research and development of proposals and requested that a working group be established to fully scrutinise this issue for a report to the Committee. This proposal was moved and seconded.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- (1) noted the progress report; and
- (2) supported the proposal to establish a Community Toilets Working Group, membership to include one Member from each political group.

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

24 **Private Sector Housing Policy : Financial Assistance Packages 2011/12**

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report informing Members of the changes in financial assistance awarded to private sector households in 2010/11 in light of the Government's removal of the entire private sector renewal allocation and the Regional Single Housing Pot as well as the proposed changes to the types and levels of financial assistance that would be available in 2011/12. Financial assistance packages formed one of the policy tools available to improve housing conditions in the private sector. A review of the other policy tools would be contained in the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy that would form a sub-strategy of the Housing Strategy, which would be the subject of a report to this Committee in September.

In response to Members, he confirmed that means testing was an integral part of accessing financial assistance packages as they were aimed at low income households. He also explained that the reduction in Government funding for housing renewal over time would necessarily lead to the increased use of enforcement tools to address poor housing, where the Council had a Duty to act.

In response to a question from a Member, he advised that, in exceptional circumstances where housing conditions were very poor, legal action could include enforced vacation of a property and, in those exceptional cases, local ward Members would be informed.

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

- (1) approve the financial assistance tools, as set out in the circulated report, and their respective budget allocation; and
- (2) authorise the Head of Environmental Health Services, subject to prior consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement, to re-allocate uncommitted parts of the respective budget allocation between financial assistance tools, in order to meet need.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

25 Evaluation of the My Neighbourhood PACT project

The Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer presented the report providing an evaluation of the City Council's My Neighbourhood PACT project 2010, delivered in partnership with the Devon and Cornwall Police.

A Member felt that the project had been very positive and stated that she had been very impressed with the three Exeter Decides Events where groups had bid for a community grant of up to £500 to support community initiatives. Groups and the wider public had voted for their preferred bid at a well attended event at the Guildhall. She and other Members agreed that this had been a valuable networking exercise, bringing together different groups from across the City and, although the grants had been relatively small, they were beneficial in providing impetus and inspiration to local communities. A Member had also remarked that City Council officers who had acted as Area Liaison Officers as part of the project had benefitted from the experience in terms of gaining a wider understanding of the work of the City Council and other partner agencies in the City.

Referring to the work undertaken in the Digby area in the first "My Neighbourhood" pilot in 2007, a Member was very supportive and advised that an active Community Association with its own newsletter etc. had now been established as a result. This group continued to be very active and was able to take a lead role in organising partnership meetings to address priorities for that community. She felt that such partnership working was of great value within new communities and that it should be extended as other new communities came into being in the City. In the Newtown area, the Area Liaison Officer had organised a series of workshops inviting local people to contribute writing or art work about Living in Newtown. Over 50 people had taken part in the project leading to an exhibition of work held at local venues. It was felt that this was a very positive example of what could be achieved in a short amount of time.

One Member referred to the large number of groups who had attended the Exeter Decides events and to the disappointment that it had not been possible to support more of the applications, given the significant work that had been put into preparation and presentation. Over the three events, £13,600 had been given out in grants to 31 groups. The work had been recognised in national publications such as the Local Government Association "First" magazine and had helped the City Council receive an award and £12,500 from South West Councils as an exemplar authority in the region for its work in engaging with communities. It was confirmed that successful groups were asked for an evaluation and outcomes of the work funded by the grant they had received.

Members congratulated the Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer and Area Liaison Officers for their work on the project.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the outcomes of the evaluation of the community engagement project.

(Report circulated)

26 **Allotment Strategy Review**

The Director Community and Environment declared a personal interest as an allotment holder.

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services presented the report setting out progress to date on the Allotment Strategy Action Plan adopted by the Council in 2007. The report also set out further actions planned for 2011/12.

He reported that the cost of allotment hire in Exeter matched that of the national average, as did the level of subsidy for the over 60s and under 18s. The number of allotments was higher than the national average - 1,500 compared to 1,000 as was the average number of plots per site - 55 compared to 40. There was closer liaison with the Planning Section and allotment provision should benefit from the greater emphasis on utilising Section 106 monies on community uses rather than infrastructure issues.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the progress made and approved the future proposals contained in the plan.

(Report circulated)

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

27 **Stewardship - Housing Revenue Account to December 2010**

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 2010. During this period, the total of the variances indicated that there would be a net surplus of £765,737 which would be transferred to the working balance at 31 March 2010. This represented a reduction of £1,408,307 compared to the budgeted reduction to the working balance of £642,570. It was estimated that the working balance would stand at £3,447,466 at 31 March 2010.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

28 **Stewardship - Community to December 2010**

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 2010 compared with those reported for the second quarter that had ended on 30 September 2010.

The current forecast suggests that net expenditure for this Committee would decrease from the revised budget by a total of £769,160 representing a variation of 6.2% from the revised budget.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

29 **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 following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 4 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

30 **Cessation of Play and Sports Development Services**

The Head of Leisure and Museums presented the report setting out the formal arrangements for ending the sport and play services.

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

- (1) delete the posts of Lead Play Ranger (CE12242), Support Ranger (CE12243) and Support Ranger (CE12244) from the establishment of the Council, and terminate the employment of the holders of those posts on the grounds of redundancy on 31 March 2011 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; and
- (2) delete the posts of Sports Development Manager (CE12124), Sports Development Officer (CE12138), Play Development Manager (CE12122) and Play Development Officer (CE12126) from the establishment of the Council, and terminate the employment of the holders of those posts on the grounds of redundancy on 31 July 2011 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.

(Report circulated to Members)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.32 pm

Chair