

PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE COMMUNITY 10 NOVEMBER 2009
HALF-YEAR UPDATE

A City of Strong Communities

- Organise re-elections for the Tenant & Leaseholder Committee (TALC), and carry out training of new committee members so that they can contribute effectively.

Elections took place in June 2009 and the new committee was formed at its AGM in July. The new committee have agreed the content and format for formal induction training and this is now being organised.

- Continue to act on recommendations of Resident Auditor Team.

The Resident Auditor Team are currently finalising their report on the Council's Resident Involvement Strategy. Their recommendations will be fed into a review of the strategy in the latter part of this year

- Review of consultation and engagement practice across the council with recommendations for ways forward up to 2011, with reference to the new Duty to Involve. (Paper went to Executive 30 June 2009.)

Review completed, action plan developed to take forward actions over the next 18 months for:

- *Changing culture - information on the Duty to Involve and what it means for changing practice in the council.*
- *Training and support – on implementing the Duty to Involve and sharing best practice*
- *Exploration of social media to support on-line engagement and promote inclusion – development of new policy*
- *Development of framework and standards for consultation and engagement – to ensure a consistent approach to Duty to Involve*
- *Improved website area on all community engagement activity and duty to involve*
- Partnership with Exeter CVS on the 'Take Part - Active Learning for Active Citizenship' project, including community focused events and training on 'How your city works'.

How your city works tasters starting October 2009.

Actively promote Take Part pathfinder in any community consultation

Continue to be part of planning group for Take Part and link to city councils work on engaging communities

- Ongoing support for the My Neighbourhood pilot areas to support these areas to be 'trailblazers' in the city as a model of good practice in terms of city council partnership working with communities.

New and existing community/resident associations that were supported in the My Neighbourhood pilot areas continue to hold area community meetings in partnership with local councillors. Some of these groups have supported the consultation with residents regarding the changes to refuse collection (St.David's, Exwick, Newtown and Polsloe).

- Develop an appropriate model for roll out of the council's Neighbourhood Engagement work, (depending on the outcome of LGR.)

Proposals have been worked up over the summer and key stakeholders internally and externally have had an opportunity to contribute to the plans.

Proposals to be discussed at Community Scrutiny 10 November and agreed at Executive on 24 November.

- Develop a Consultation and Engagement Strategy for the council, ensuring that the council meets all of its requirements in line with relevant legislation and government guidance.

This will be developed 2011 – 12 once the neighbourhood engagement model is piloted.

- In the light of challenging financial circumstances, develop proposals for working with residents to develop budget proposals for consideration by elected members.

Residents will have the opportunity to comment on 2010/11 budget through the citizens panel, on line and through an engagement event scheduled to take place in October.

- Respond positively, and provide support to community groups developing proposals arising out of the Sustainable Communities Act.

A panel of Exeter residents took part in reviewing SCA proposals in May 2009. Two proposals were supported by the Executive and were submitted to the LGA by the deadline of end of July. We are waiting to hear which proposals the Government are going to take forward. At present there is no commitment to further rounds of the SCA from government.

A City Where Everyone Has a Home

- Provide at least 80 new units of affordable housing.

There are currently over 100 affordable homes 'on-site', most of which are predicted to complete within this financial year. This target should therefore be exceeded.

- Undertake a comprehensive review of the responsive repairs service for council housing, establish a procurement strategy and retender the work.

The Procurement Strategy was agreed at Executive on the 16 June 2009. Informal interviews have been held with a number of potential contractors to help with this process. A formal notice has been placed in the European Journal. A pre-qualification questionnaire has been sent out and is due to be evaluated in October/November which will determine the final shortlist of contractors to be invited to tender. Formal tender documents will be issued in December.

- Continue the Older Persons' service review in partnership with DCC's Supporting People team.

Work on the design of a new service is continuing in negotiation with Devon Supporting People. It is hoped the proposed new service will be reported to Members early in the new year with the service going live in April 2010.

- Implement the Devon Homechoice Scheme.

Implementation of Devon Home Choice will start in December 2009 with the proposed 'live' date for Exeter being January 2010.

- Implement service charges for tenants living in flats.

Work is on-going to identify those areas of work where service charges will apply and we have contacted a number of other landlords to help us understand the process of implementation. Calculations are also being made to 'de-pool' the charge from the current rent. We are on target to issue the new service charge statements with the rent notification letter in February 2010.

- Deliver the Private Sector Renewal Strategy in particular the development of the new loans scheme.

Comprehensive training for staff and the partner Home Improvement Agency on the new loans scheme will commence in October, with the loans being introduced in November 2009 administered by a partner organisation Wessex Home Improvement Loans.

A key part of the strategy is for high risk Houses in Multiple Occupation to be licensed by the Council, and a recent survey of Local Authorities showed that Exeter came 6th overall in England and Wales for the numbers so licensed. In addition, partnership work on an Accreditation Scheme for student houses has made a significant step forward with the appointment of a dedicated officer by the University Accommodation Service, with an anticipated implementation date in Quarter 4. Further partnership working includes the re-launch of a private sector landlord forum in October, with the National Landlords Association.

- Keep working to achieve the adoption of an effective housing and support protocol for young people by all the Devon district councils and Devon County Council.

Following a landmark ruling by the High Court placing responsibility for vulnerable homeless 16-17 years olds on Children's and Young People's Services, we are continuing to work with Devon County Council to agree a protocol for jointly assessing and supporting any such applicants to prevent them from becoming homeless.

A Safe City

- Review the antisocial behaviour and neighbourhood management policies in housing to deliver improved services.

The review of the existing anti-social behaviour policy has been completed and is on the agenda for tonight's meeting

- Continue to work with others to build strong and cohesive communities and meet the requirements of the Prevent agenda.

Several meetings have taken place between City Council, police, county council, community safety staff and Muslim community leaders and representatives. City Council staff are attending Advice and Information sessions at the mosque. The Chief Executive is involved in discussions with police and Government Office with regard to security of the city under the Prevent agenda.

A Prosperous City

- Use all the tools at our disposal to help owner occupiers retain their homes including participation in the national mortgage rescue schemes and advice and support.

The mortgage advice service continues to work with households who have difficulties paying their mortgage and/or who are in mortgage arrears. Since April, 24 clients have been referred to Homemaker South West. By helping clients with budgeting and benefits advice this work has resulted in each client increasing their income by an average of

£1,400. We have also successfully assisted one household through the national mortgage rescue scheme – the first in Devon – and their home has been purchased by a local association with them becoming the tenant.

- Implement the Enhanced Housing Options Scheme to help people access homes where there are jobs.

Staff have now been recruited to this scheme and are working across Devon to implement the services outlined in the bid document. A major part of the plan is to link the new Devon Home Choice scheme with other housing options, such as private sector renting, Extralets etc and to give all applicants the widest choice of housing solutions possible. The new service will also link housing opportunities with job vacancies