

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

10 November 2009

Present:

Councillor Dilys Baldwin (Chair)

Councillors Shiel, Branston, Mrs Danks, Hobden, Newcombe, R Smith, Taghdissian, Thompson and Wardle

Director Community and Environment, Head of Housing Services, Head of Environmental Health Services, Head of Contacts and Direct Services, Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer and Member Services Officer (HB)

Also present:

Councillor Mitchell
Councillor Newton

- Portfolio Holder for Environment and Leisure
- Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement

63 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 September 2009 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

64 **Declaration of Interests**

A Member declared the following personal interest:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Newcombe	67 (Member of Devon County Council and Chair of the Play Building Project Board)

65 **Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) and the Family Intervention Programme (FIP)**

The Chair reported that this Committee had agreed earlier this year to take on the responsibility for scrutinising the work of the CDRP as required by Government. Following a discussion with the Leader of the Council and Superintendent John Vellacott, the Chair of the Partnership, a briefing session on the work of the CDRP had been organised for Monday 15 February 2010 at 5.30pm. The Committee would also receive a presentation on the Family Intervention Programme. The presentations would be undertaken by Superintendent John Vellacott and Michael Miller, the Community Safety Partnership Manager.

66 **Trews Weir Allotments**

The Director Community and Environment declared a personal interest as she was on the waiting list for an allotment.

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services reported that the Planning Western Area Working Party had referred the planning application for a new site for the Trews Weir Allotments to the Planning Committee. It had first been necessary to meet with the

Environment Agency to alleviate their concerns relating to their projections of flood risk at the allotments. As a result, a new type of fencing had been identified and a revised application in respect of .9913 hectares had been registered on 22 October 2009 and was scheduled to be considered at the Western Area Working Party on 17 November 2009. If not determined under delegated powers at the Working Party, the application would go before the Planning Committee on 7 December 2009. A bio-diversity report and a contamination risk report would be provided as part of the application.

Although this matter had taken some time to resolve, with the Environment Agency on board, it was hoped that substantial progress would be made by the New Year. The Allotment Holders were being kept fully informed of developments.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the position.

67 **Half Yearly reports of Portfolio Holders**

Councillor Newcombe declared a personal interest as a Devon County Councillor and the Chair of the Play Building Project Board.

Councillors Newton and Mitchell presented progress reports on priorities within the Housing and Community Involvement Portfolio and the Environment and Leisure Portfolio respectively. The priorities and progress reported are appended to these minutes.

The former reported that, in respect of affordable housing, it was now anticipated that 138 units would be provided in this financial year.

The following responses were given to Members' questions:-

Housing and Community Involvement

- The 16-17 years Homelessness pathway covered access to all services including housing and was Social Services led; and
- Work with the Muslim community in respect of building strong and cohesive communities was part of a national project, one of the aims of which was to build closer relationships and therefore contribute to preventing extremism. Work with other ethnic groups was undertaken as part of the City Council's wider equalities work.

Environment and Leisure

- With regard to play in targeted areas including Kings Heath, Wyvern Park and Summerway, consultations were held with local representatives including ward Members prior to the installation of play equipment. In Summerway, for example, it was recognised that attracting young people to a site as a consequence of installing new equipment could impact on local residents living close to the amenity and liaison with them on this would continue;
- The "Students On The Move" pilot scheme fully funded by the University had resulted in the removal of 16 tonnes of rubbish from student areas and there had been extremely positive feedback from local residents;
- An update on progress of the Swimming Pool Working Group would be submitted to the January meeting of this Committee. Other than normal running costs, no additional expenditure had been incurred on the Pool;
- An independent report had recommended a new approach to the Renaissance management regime from 2011. The monies available for schemes across the

country was in a state of flux and it was unclear at present what funding would be available to optimise benefits for Exeter and Devon; and

- The work on parks and open spaces had been commended. New management systems had been introduced as part of the process of improving efficiency. Although some contracting out was proposed as part of the tree management process there was no intention at present of extending this to other parts of the parks service.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

68 Proposals for Community Involvement

The Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer presented the report seeking Members' views on proposals for the Council's approach to Community Involvement, the identification of priority neighbourhoods of the City as a focus for one aspect of the Council's involvement work and on the future format of Community Forums.

Proposals for Community Involvement, including the roll out of My NeighbourhoodPACT into eight neighbourhoods, had been identified through the Place Survey results 2009 and with reference to the Geography of Deprivation Priority Neighbourhoods. The Place Survey identified where residents were least satisfied with City Council services and felt least able to influence decisions. The areas where people were least satisfied correlated with the most deprived wards.

With regard to the Community Forums, two models had been proposed - a Question Time format and a thematic approach. It was proposed that four thematic forums and one Question Time a year be introduced.

Some Members queried the need for identifying Area Liaison Officers to work in the eight areas, suggesting that they would be duplicating the work of Councillors whom it was felt were the first point of contact for residents with issues. These Members felt that the Councillors themselves were able to pass on queries to relevant officers in the Council for which a first class response was provided. The question was also asked by a Member why Gloucestershire County Council rather than Gloucester City Council had been approached for guidance, the same Member expressing concern regarding duplication and increased bureaucracy.

The Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer explained that, although Gloucester City Council had a Community Engagement Officer who helped to co-ordinate partnerships across the City as part of a team, the County Council was operating a similar model to that proposed for Exeter with a number of officers across the authority identified as the point of contact for the community areas identified. This supported greater understanding of the importance of involving communities across the whole authority.

She explained that, as part of the Duty to Involve agenda, it was the responsibility of all public sector agencies to seek to improve engagement in their role as service providers. One of the goals of this agenda was to increase public participation in the democratic process including improving turnout at elections. Whilst it was important for Communities to develop their own agenda and that Councillors had a very significant role to play, the Area Liaison Officers would be a key element and would essentially play complementary roles. The Director Community and Environment explained that this initiative would generate greater activities in local areas, and not just focus on housing and environmental issues. Officers would therefore be supporting not supplanting Councillors.

A Member referred to outcomes in the Newtown/Polsloe area, chosen as one of the initial pilots. Use had been made of the Belmont Community Centre in Newtown and valuable work undertaken. The Polsloe Ward did not have a separate Community Centre but a Community Association had been formed. He welcomed the Community kitty of £15,000 to be made available to groups from across the City but suggested that the remainder of the £33,000 budget could be better spent if used by local Councillors themselves on similar lines to individual budgets allocated to Devon County Councillors for use in their areas.

Referring to work in the Digby/Clyst Heath area of the City, the local Member welcomed the rolling out of this initiative. She referred to the on-going joint work of a number of agencies in this area and to the significant number of local people who had attended local meetings.

Another Member, referring to Polsloe Ward, felt that there should be further consideration of the Duty to Involve agenda and what it was hoped to achieve by this programme. He did not oppose the proposal for Area Liaison Officers but emphasised that their roles should essentially be that of intermediates as ultimate responsibility rested with Councillors. Referring to the establishment of a Community Association in Polsloe resulting from the pilot in that area he suggested that communication with this body could be improved and that there should be greater outreach to those in the community who did not want to be involved in the Association.

The Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer emphasised that a key role of Area Liaison Officers was to work with Community Associations and to help ensure that these bodies worked in partnership with Councillors and other key partners. Part of their role would be to ensure that representatives of all relevant agencies were available at public meetings to address issues raised. This had been a key element and role of the officer when the initial pilots had been set up.

In response to the Chair, who suggested that much work in local neighbourhoods was already undertaken by housing officers, the Head of Housing Services explained the role of estate officers in managing Council housing estates who were funded through the Housing Revenue Account. The Area Liaison Officers would have a wider remit and it was not anticipated that there would be duplication of work between the two roles. The former did however have a contributory role in areas with a high percentage of Council houses.

The above views of Scrutiny Committee - Community Members on the proposals for the roll out of My NeighbourhoodPACT into Neighbourhoods identified through the Place Survey results 2009 and the Geography of Deprivation Priority Neighbourhoods would be reported to Executive on 24 November 2009.

Executive would also be advised of this Committee's support for the Community Forum model proposed for further consultation to take place with LSP partners on the thematic areas and format.

(Report circulated)

69 **Review of Anti Social Behaviour and Policy and Procedures for Housing Landlord Services**

The Head of Housing Services presented the report seeking Members' approval for the amended Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedures document following its regular review.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to adopt the revised Anti-Social Behaviour - Statement of Policy and Procedure.

(Report circulated)

70 **Tree Management in Exeter**

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services presented the report setting out recommendations for the safe, effective and sustainable management of trees within the Council's care.

In response to a Member, he agreed to change the title proposed in respect of Job No. CE11109 and explained that the precise cost of the changes were subject to the results of job evaluation.

A Member queried the need for committing the resources proposed to the management of trees and it was explained that many trees across the City, such as poplars, were coming to the end of their life span. It was important to minimise risks to the public by removing dangerous trees and it was also important when replanting to ensure that the correct species were used. He advised that the contractors used acted solely on the instruction of the Council officers as client and he explained the rationale behind the risk matrix. TPOs were an important part of the tree management process, the responsibility for these covered within the remit of the Head of Planning and Building Control.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to approve the proposals for tree management in Exeter including:

- revised funding proposals;
- the deletion of the posts of Arboricultural Officer (CE11109) and Assistant Arboricultural Officer (CE11148);
- the appointment to the post of Parks Tree Administration Support Officer (CE11109) at a grade to be determined by Job Evaluation and subject to the renaming of the post;
- developing the existing contractual arrangement to a partnership approach as detailed in section four of the report; and
- supporting the move from reactive to planned maintenance.

(Report circulated)

71 **Council Housing Energy and Sustainability Policy**

The Head of Housing Services presented the report seeking approval of the new Housing (Landlord Services) Energy and Sustainability Policy setting out how the energy efficiency of homes could be improved and incidents of fuel poverty for tenants reduced.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to adopt the Housing (Landlord Services) Energy and Sustainability Policy.

(Report circulated)

72 **Downsizing Incentives for Council Tenants**

Councillor Edwards spoke on this item having given notice under Standing Order No. 44.

The Head of Housing Services presented the report seeking agreement to implement an amended downsizing incentive scheme for Council tenants to improve the management of the housing stock and increase the supply of family housing to applicants on the Home Choice register.

Councillor Edwards stated that he had received a large number of requests for support for re-housing and that the downsizing scheme was a great help in facilitating such moves. As such, he believed that greater resources should be committed to this initiative. He asked that the annual budget of £50,000 proposed to be made available within the Housing Revenue Account to make downsizing payments to tenants should be increased to £100,000. He also felt that the individual cash incentive payments should not be reduced.

Some Members supported this request and also proposed that the £20,000 identified from reserves for 2009/10 for paying removal fees only for those people still willing to move but who require some financial assistance with the actual move should be used to continue paying cash incentives to move. Other Members did not support these proposals.

The Head of Housing Services advised that the motivation of those accepting support in moving was not always known but there were many advantage for moving and the payments helped greatly with the costs and stress of the process. With regard to moves to new build only help with the cost of removal was on offer as these properties possessed new facilities. The rental for these properties was greater than for existing properties.

He outlined the implications on the overall Housing Revenue Account of increasing the figure proposed for supporting downsizing. He advised that it would be unwise to reduce this account below a working balance of £1.5 million because of the need of a reserve for emergencies. There was also a possibility that borrowing to supplement the capital budget might be necessary in future years. He explained the additional costs associated with improvements necessary to void properties.

Because of the cost implications it was not considered appropriate to seek an increase in the budget to £100,000. The recommendation to request Executive to support the use of £20,000 identified from reserves to pay cash incentives was also not supported. This would be used for paying removal fees as proposed in the report.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to adopt the amended policy document - Reducing Under-Occupation in the Council's Housing Stock - Incentives for Downsizing.

(Report circulated)

73 **Funding of New Technology for Efficiency Gains in Cleansing Services**

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report seeking approval for the introduction of new technology and working practices as outlined in this report together with the initial costs.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to approve the introduction of new technology and working practises as set out in the report with the initial costs being met from external funding of £110,000 from SWRIEP and up to £127,100, subject to confirmation of final process from systems providers, from the Council's LGR and Mobile Working budget.

(Report circulated)

74 **Replacement of Homecall Equipment**

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report notifying Members of a forthcoming withdrawal of support by the Council's current provider for its Home Call equipment and systems and seeking approval to purchase new equipment and systems in this financial year.

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

- (1) adjust the 2009/10 capital programme to include capital funding of £58,800 from new borrowing, with an ongoing revenue cost of £12,000 for five years for the purchase of new Telecare equipment and systems and the purchase of a Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) in 2009/10 to replace the existing one before 31 March 2010;
- (2) approve revenue funding of £2,500 from the General Fund Reserve from April 2010 to maintain accreditation with the Telecare Services Association; and
- (3) support the expansion of the customer base subject to the available resources of the service.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

75 **Review of Control Room Resources**

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report seeking Members views of a review being undertaken of the Control Room resources and the likely impact that potential options may have on service delivery. He tabled the comments of the Police on the review. The Police were not able to support a reduction in CCTV real time monitoring and had also advised that they were not in a position to assist in funding the CCTV monitoring. Members felt that the proposals should only be discussed following the completion of consultations and when a detailed report had been finalised.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the contents of the report and rejected the proposals for a reduction in CCTV surveillance as set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report. They asked for the deferral of the report and for a further report to be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee.

(Report circulated)

76 **Noise Enforcement Update**

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report reviewing the work of Environmental Health Services relating to the investigation of noise complaints and enforcement action undertaken over the last 12 months and reviewing the pilot

scheme that had resulted in an extension of the hours worked by the Community Patrol on the noisiest days of the week and noisiest periods of the year in order to enhance the Council's response to late night noise complaints.

In response to a Member, he advised that, as part of the prosecution process, the full costs incurred by the Council were sought.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported:

- (1) the work undertaken by officers and noted the improvements to the Council's noise service; and
- (2) the proposal to continue with the extension of the hours of the Community Patrol to maintain an effective out of hours response to late night noise.

(Report circulated)

77 Licensing Policy Statement - Cumulative Impact Zone

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report informing Members of the recommendation of the Licensing Committee to introduce cumulative impact zones in the City Centre as part of the Council's Licensing Act 2003 Policy. He advised that the recommendation of that Committee would go straight to Council without the report being submitted to Executive on 8 December 2009.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report in relation to its potential beneficial effect on crime and disorder in the City Centre.

(Report circulated)

78 Energy Efficiency in Private Sector Housing

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report informing Members of the progress of initiatives to improve the energy efficiency in private sector housing and to reduce the level of fuel poverty in Exeter.

In response to a Member, he advised that properties targeted as being in need of grant support to improve energy efficiency were identified in a number of ways. These included knowledge of construction, age of house, inspection of private sector houses in respect of other issues together with publicising the availability of grants.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the progress made towards the NI 187 target contained in the Local Area Agreement.

(Report circulated)

79 Risk Management

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report advising Members of the risks identified relating to its areas and of the action taken and proposed to mitigate the risks concerned.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:

- (1) noted the risks relating to its areas; and

- (2) supported ongoing monitoring to ensure that the risk register remains current and risk assessments are valid and that the proposed mitigating action is taken by the agreed target dates.

(Report circulated)

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

80 Community Services - Stewardship to September 2009

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 increase from the revised budget by a total of £43,080, which represented a variation of 0.3% from the revised budget.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

81 Housing Revenue Account Stewardship to September 2009

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 2009. During this period, the total of the variances indicated that there would be a net deficit of £684,220 which would be transferred to the working balance as at 31 March 2010. £682,100 was the planned reduction in the working balance to support Revenue Contributions to capital expenditure (RCC) and £2,120 was the estimated additional deficit identified at the end of the second quarter stewardship. It was estimated that the working balance would stand at £2,174,045 at 31 March 2010.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

82 Results of Half Year Performance Monitoring 2009/10

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)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.25 pm

Chair