

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

1 June 2010

Present:

Councillor Dilys Baldwin (Chair)

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

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

Also present:

Councillor Mitchell
Councillor Newton

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

26 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2010 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

27 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

28 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 10 March and 12 May 2010.

29 Portfolio Holders priorities for the forthcoming year

Together with a list of achievements for 2009/10, Councillor Newton presented the following priorities within the Housing and Community Involvement Portfolio for the forthcoming year:-

Priorities for 2010/11

- To ensure that our vision for housing is communicated and that staff across the whole Council act together to deliver this.
- 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 begin building the homes in the Council's own-build programme.
- To look at ways of improving and investing in private sector housing more effectively.
- Continue to use all the tools at our disposal to help owner occupiers retain their homes.
- To prepare and start to implement an Older Persons' Housing Strategy.
- To let the new council housing repairs contract and ensure a smooth transition that delivers service improvements.
- 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 strengthen the Tenant and Leaseholder Committee and enhance its influence.
- To make efforts to tackle misconceptions and stigma surrounding social housing through consultation, positive media and communication with the public.
- To improve our engagement with users of our homelessness services and use what they tell us to improve services.
- To ensure that all new developments consider the needs of the biodiversity of the area and opportunities to support wildlife.
- To explore the possibilities of increasing the opportunities for more apprenticeships for young people.
- To continue to work with the Resident Auditor Team for Council housing and act on their findings.
- Explore the implementation of a Discretionary Licensing Scheme for Houses of Multiply Occupancy within areas of high student concentration.
- To build on how we can work with Devon County Council to ensure that appropriate accommodation and support is provided for 16-18 year olds.
- To review the My Neighbourhood PACT project and use the evaluation to drive forward continuing improvements to our community involvement work.
- To encourage better consultation with residents across the Council.
- To review the processes by which the need for disabled adaptations are assessed and provided.

The following responses were given to Members' questions:-

- The Government was yet to announce any changes to the grant support system for housing.
- The requested meeting with Registered Social Landlords would be progressed now that the Election had been held. It would be important to maintain existing good relations. It was suggested that one Member from each political group, together with the Chair of this Committee meet with the RSL representatives.
- Social housing schemes together with community facilities had been identified for the Foxhayes and Exwick middle school sites which the County Council were seeking to develop. Consultations were being held with the County to ensure the right mix of facilities were provided.
- Targets of affordable housing units had been exceeded and it was hoped that the current target would also be exceeded. As well as meeting quantitative targets, sustainable and eco homes were being provided thus improving overall quality.
- Devon Home Choice, fully launched on 1 June 2010, was operating well and bi-monthly meetings were held to monitor the patterns of movement in and out of Exeter and across Devon. The new system provided greater choice for tenants. Reference was made to covenants in certain rural parts of Devon limiting occupancy of new developments to local villagers but it was noted that these

were unique cases where local planning “exception site” policies had been used. The Code of Guidance for the allocation of social housing made it clear that local connection criteria could not be the main criteria for prioritising housing.

- There was strict guidance in respect of conversion from family dwellings to houses in multiple occupancy.
- The framework for consulting on new policies etc. would be tightened to ensure that the right format for consulting was in operation and took place earlier in the overall process.

Together with a list of achievements for 2009/10, Councillor Mitchell presented the following priorities within the Environment and Leisure Portfolio for the forthcoming year:-

Priorities for 2010/11

- To continue to seek external funding to help deliver the Play Strategy and to deliver a youth sports programme and promote physical activity in the City. Sport and play activities will continue to be targeted to the areas of the City identified as priorities by the Social Health and Inclusion Partnership.
- To continue with the RAMM project, closely monitoring the budget.
- To complete the letting of the new leisure management contract and ensure that the transfer is managed smoothly.
- To continue with the project to remodel waste collections to increase the number of homes on the twin bin system.
- To work with the allotment association to introduce more allotments at Trew’s Weir in a way that minimises the impact on the environment.
- Continue to implement and report on the Local Authority Carbon Management Programme and the Climate Change Strategy.
- Implement the agreed changes to the Community Patrol service and review the out of hours noise service.
- Introduce sustainable initiatives in the City’s cemeteries to minimise increased recycling and reduce resource use.
- Review the current toilet provision within the City and investigate the implementation of a community toilet scheme.

The following responses were given to Members’ questions:-

- A meeting was being sought with Superintendant Jo Tennant to discuss CCTV issues, the City Council to be represented by the Leader or the Portfolio Holder, the Chair of this Committee, along with officers.
- A meeting would be sought with the Dean and Chapter to discuss cleansing in Cathedral Yard.
- Concern by allotment holders at the withdrawal of compost delivery to various allotment sites would be examined. Planning services sought to ensure that allotments were provided as part of new developments through Section 106 Agreements but it was recognised that there was demand on the funding from other requirements.
- Progress was being made in encouraging commercial premises to utilise the Council’s trade recycling service. The amount of trade recycling did not count towards the Council’s recycling target for domestic waste.
- A further review of toilet provision would be undertaken with a working group comprising the Chair of this Committee, the Portfolio Holder and a Member from each Group to be established. Community toilet schemes, whereby local businesses permitted the use of their facilities by the general public, had been

successfully adopted by a number of local authorities such as Richmond, York, Chester, Cardiff and Sheffield and would be further examined.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the achievements and priorities presented.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

30 Food Law Enforcement Plan 2010/11

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report informing Members of the Council's performance against the previous year's Food Law Enforcement Plan and proposals for this current financial year.

He responded as follows to Members' queries:

- food testing at the RD&E laboratory had now been transferred to Bristol;
- a national model Scores on the Doors scheme was still awaited from the Food Standards Agency (FSA). Exeter had been accepted as an "early adopter" of the national scheme and had received funding from the FSA to assist implementation; and
- publicity was sought when food establishments were prosecuted.

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

- (1) approve the Food Law Enforcement Plan 2010/11, which included the revised Food Safety Enforcement Policy; and
- (2) authorise the Head of Environmental Health Services to change the Enforcement Plan, as necessary, in the light of centrally issued guidance and/or to meet operational needs.

(Report circulated)

31 Health and Safety Service Plan 2010/11

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report seeking approval of the Health and Safety Service Plan for 2010/11 which set out the Council's performance over the past year, proposals for requiring health and safety in businesses for the forthcoming year and included a revised health and safety enforcement policy.

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

- (1) approve the Health and Safety Service Plan 2010/11, which included the Health and Safety Enforcement Policy; and
- (2) authorise the Head of Environmental Health Services to change the Enforcement Plan, as necessary, in the light of centrally issued guidance and/or to meet operational needs.

(Report circulated)

32 **Housing Value for Money Strategy**

The Head of Housing Services presented the report seeking approval of the new Housing Value for Money Strategy.

In response to a Member, he confirmed that an important aspect of a contract to undertake improvement works was the need for the contractor to demonstrate that value for money would be provided.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to adopt the new Housing Value for Money Strategy with Members to receive an annual update on progress to this Committee.

(Report circulated)

33 **Private Sector Housing Policy : Financial Assistance Packages 2010/11**

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report informing Members of the financial assistance awarded to private sector households in 2009/10 and proposing changes to the types and levels of financial assistance that would be available in 2010/11. 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 reported to this Committee in September.

In response to a Member, who was concerned that there would now be an increase in requests for financial support to improve properties with a view to a quick sale before regulations on Capital Gains Tax were changed, he advised that any loans/grants provided were covered by claw back provisions on a subsequent sale. Such eventualities were not anticipated.

He confirmed that owner occupiers in poor housing, or housing needing adaptation, were the main recipients of financial assistance. He also explained the inspection process for houses in multiple occupation across the City and the operation of HMO licensing, with those in the worst condition being targeted in the first instance. It was noted that if landlords were running an unlicensed HMO, then their tenants could apply to the Residential Property Tribunal for a Rent Repayment Order of up to one year's rent.

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

- (1) adopt changes to the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy in respect of financial assistance packages as set out in the report;
- (2) ensure the close monitoring of the expenditure of the single pot allocation, with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement and Head of Environmental Health Services authorised to agree the proposed financial allocation to each of the schemes proposed or further schemes to be developed; and
- (3) agree to an annual review, or sooner if needs be, of the policy in order to ensure that it properly addresses local needs and/or government policy.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

34 Progress on changes to Domestic Waste Collections and Recycling Collections - Efficiency Gains

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report informing Members of progress in implementing changes to the waste collection service, following a review into potential efficiency gains reported to this Committee previously.

It was noted that managers had conducted an indicative ballot of staff, and a large majority had rejected the option of a four day week. Given this level of opposition from staff after they had considered the new rounds, managers had decided, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, not to pursue the four-day option. Subsequently, however, an indication had been received that staff wished to review their terms and conditions around task and finish, therefore there was an opportunity to take a fresh look at the four-day option alongside any other changes.

Since initial soundings indicating a positive response to the four day week, staff had been affected by the closure of the waste transfer station in Exeter and the subsequent directions by Devon County Council to take waste first to Heathfield and later to Greendale.

Members expressed concern at the length of time the recalculation of the rounds had taken and the associated costs. One Member felt that the working group had undertaken the review on the basis that a whole package of measures would be introduced whereas the final result had been the introduction of selected measures only. The Head of Environmental Health Services clarified that this had not been the case and referred Members to the report they had received in January 2010.

The Head of Environmental Health Services stated that the Working Group had received the full information on options available and that the key change of remodelling of routes to be introduced from September, coupled with the expansion of alternate weekly collections, would yield significant savings. This work was not wasted as it could be adjusted to suit a five day week regime, if necessary. In addition, changes in operation brought about by remodelling the rounds would allow the disruption caused by Bank Holiday Mondays to be lessened.

Councillor Wardle moved and Councillor Boyle seconded the following motion:

“A Working Group be formed to investigate how a change in the bin collection from a five day to a four day working week could be proposed without first negotiating with relevant Trade Unions, the working group to comprise four members, one from each group, and the Chair of this Committee. The working group to report back to this Committee on how much the exercise cost and with recommendations on how to proceed in the future.”

The motion was put to the vote and lost.

Councillor Boyle requested that, in accordance with Standing Order No. 43, his name be recorded as voting in favour of this motion.

The Chair stated that the proposals for changing the cleansing regime should have been discussed first by this Committee and that there should have been early discussions with the Union. She also stated that a full package of measures should have been introduced. She asked that Executive be requested to revisit the issue.

Scrutiny Committee - Community requested Executive to instruct Officers to re-examine options for the operation of Domestic Waste Collection and Recycling Collections with a view to securing additional savings and for a further report on the service to be submitted to Members.

(Report circulated)

35 Review of Leisure and Museums Strategy

The Head of Leisure and Museums presented the report reviewing progress towards the key outcomes in the strategy.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

36 HRA Capital and Revenue and AIM Property Maintenance Out-Turn Report 2009/10

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services submitted a report detailing the fourth quarterly/outturn report, covering the period from January to March 2010 (but including updated figures at 30 April 2010). It included the financial position of the £7.4 million programme of reactive and planned property maintenance and refurbishment at the end of 2009/10 and covered revenue funded housing and non-housing schemes as approved by Council for the financial year 2009/10 and budgets for schemes rolled forward from 2008/09. Where necessary, the report also provided specific details on significant programme variations.

In response to a Member, he confirmed that a scheme for gas central heating replacement at Rennes House remained programmed.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the outturn financial position and works in 2009/10, as detailed in the report.

(Report circulated)

37 AIM Property Maintenance Proposed Programme 2010/11

The Head of Contracts and Direct Services presented the report detailing the proposed programme of property asset related project work in relation to the budgets set in 2010/11 in respect of reactive and planned maintenance, improvement and refurbishment to housing and non-housing properties and other projects to be monitored by the Asset Improvement and Maintenance (AIM) group in 2010/11.

He responded to Members' queries in respect of kitchen replacements, the overall Adaptations budget and a scheme to deal with soil erosion at Clifton Hill.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the programme of property asset related work for 2010/11, as detailed in the report.

(Report circulated)

38 **Annual Results of Performance Monitoring 2009/10**

The Director Community and Environment presented the report advising Members of performance at the end of the year on a range of services across the Directorate.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

39 **Housing Revenue Account - Final Accounts 2009/10**

The Director Community and Environment advised Members of the overall financial performance of the Housing Revenue Account for the 2009/10 financial year ended 31 March 2010.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

40 **Revenue Final Accounts - Community 2009/10**

The Director Community and Environment advised Members of the overall financial performance of the Community and Environment Directorate for the 2009/10 financial year ended 31 March 2010.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.30 pm)

Chair