

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

6 September 2011

Present:

Councillor Mitchell (Chair)

Councillors Thompson, Branston, Bull, Clark, Crow, Morris, Newcombe, Tippins and Wardle

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

Also present:

Councillor RM Hannaford - Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement

Councillor Sheldon - Portfolio Holder for Environment and Leisure

50 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2011 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

51 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

52 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 meetings held on 9 March and 11 May 2011.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

53 Down-sizing Incentives for Council Tenants

The Acting 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 Devon Home Choice register.

In response to Members, he advised that an occupational therapist was jointly funded by the City and County Council to help assess housing applicants at the Civic Centre. He also stated that it was difficult to accurately determine the numbers under-

occupying Council properties but that those looking to move were recorded on Devon Home Choice, the current figure being 140. The downsizing initiative would be further publicised. It was agreed that a report on the outcomes of the scheme be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to adopt the amended policy document, *Reducing Under-Occupation – Incentives for Downsizing*.

(Report circulated)

54 **Home Adaptation Policy for Council Tenants**

The Acting Head of Housing Services presented the report seeking approval to implement and amend the Home Adaptation Policy for Council tenants. Every year the budget for adaptations was fully utilised and it was proposed that, in certain circumstances, tenants be asked to contribute financially towards the adaptation requested where the works were major and tenants had been assessed using the Disabled Facilities Grant model.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to adopt the amended policy document, *Home Adaptations*.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

55 **Homelessness Strategy 2008-13**

The Acting Head of Housing Services presented the report updating Members on progress in meeting the targets and actions set out in the Homelessness Strategy 2008-13.

Members were concerned at Devon County Council's cut to Supporting People Services in the Homelessness Sector of nearly 50% (£3.29 million of a £6.1 million budget). They were advised that senior Members and the Chief Executive had discussed the implications and sought alternative measures with their counterparts at the County Council. One of the consequences would be a reduction in accommodation facilities for young people but with a greater focus on providing floating support. Members asked for a further report on this issue, once the County Council had decided the way forward.

The NHS were hosting a co-ordinator post for roughsleeping work across Devon. Nicki Glassbrook, the Health Inequalities Manager, worked across all areas of housing but specifically on roughsleeping and Gypsies and Travellers. She had previously managed the Exeter Street Homeless Outreach Team.

Members noted that 60% of Council tenants were on housing benefit and that Council Housing Options staff were working at the Job Centre to advise job seekers on housing issues.

Scrutiny Committee – Community:-

(1) noted the report; and

- (2) requested a further report on the consequences of the cuts in the Supporting People Services budget and proposed alternative measures.

(Report circulated)

56 Housing Strategy 2007-12

The Acting Head of Housing Services presented the report updating Members on progress in meeting the targets as set out in the revised Housing Strategy 2007-12. He advised that this would be the last report on the current strategy, a report on a new strategy to be submitted to this Committee for consideration in 2012.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

57 Economic and Environmental Impact of Introducing a Separate Kerbside Collection of Glass in Exeter

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report exploring the economic and environmental impacts of introducing a separate kerbside glass collection service and comparing it to the present system of bring banks for glass in Exeter. The economic impact of introducing a kerbside collection of glass was summarised and it was seen that the costs of even the cheapest option of a monthly mixed glass collection would far exceed income likely to accrue as a result of collecting from domestic premises. Revenue costs were estimated at £367,241 per annum, with capital costs of £609,750 in the first year.

Responding to Members, he explained the different regime for collecting from commercial premises, many of which used private contractors. These collections were not included in the Council's recycling figures. The Council also collected from commercial premises and encouraged traders to segregate recyclates in order to reduce landfill and the cost of residual waste collections.

Members were concerned that there should be as equitable a distribution of banks throughout the City as possible, although one Member expressed concerns that some of the banks located in residential areas were so positioned that the noise from disposal resulted in disturbance at quieter times. The Head of Environmental Health Services confirmed that any problem sites would be investigated.

The Chair expressed thanks to Sally Fryer, the Re-cycling Officer, for help and advice given in respect of these issues.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

58 Back Alley Waste Collection

The Head of Environmental Health Services updated Members on measures being taken to address recently reported problems of waste collection from back alleys. It was difficult for refuse vehicles to access back alleys so bags, rather than wheelie bins, were used and the problems associated with this system were two fold. Bags were susceptible to damage and content spillage which could greatly spoil the appearance of an area. Furthermore, as back alleys were largely "out of sight and out of mind", residents often failed to exercise the same concern and responsibility for

the appearance of these areas as they would for a front of house location. This often resulted in bags of refuse being presented long before the collection day and being damaged by animals, vehicles and people.

Polsloe had traditionally been a problem area because of the preponderance of back alleys and the transient nature of a large proportion of residents, particularly students; a variety of solutions were being piloted. Landlords were being required to display posters to explain the collection regime to their tenants and information was also available on the City Council's web site. A concerted effort had been undertaken in the early part of the year to contact each householder in certain problem roads; community patrollers had given advice, left a letter detailing collection days and encouraged wrongly presented waste to be taken back to be properly presented. However, although there had been a short-term effect, it was apparent that re-reinforcement of advice and education was needed. The key solution was to move from bag collection to bins and, where appropriate, from back alley collection to front gate collection. Bags resistant to attack by seagulls were also being introduced.

A Member referred to problems caused by seagulls nesting on the new recycling centre in Pinhoe which, it was noted, was a County Council building.

A further measure would be stricter enforcement allied to greater education. Environmental Health Officers and the Community Patrollers would seek to encourage identified offenders to comply with best practice and it had been found that on the spot fines of £80 often achieved the desired result, the alternative being prosecution. Details of repeat offenders were catalogued to facilitate any enforcement measures.

Members requested that ward Councillors be notified of proposed changes to the collection methods so as to be forearmed should residents approach them with queries. The Head of Environmental Health Services agreed that prior notification should be undertaken. He referred to a meeting arranged for 15 September for the Chair and Polsloe Ward Members with himself to discuss further the measures proposed for this area and wider reference was also made to problems in the Alphington area which were also being investigated.

It was hoped that the above mentioned mix of solutions would help address the problems with domestic waste collection in identified problem areas.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

59 Housing Revenue Account Stewardship to June 2011

The Director Community and Environment presented the report on major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first three months of the financial year up to 30 June 2011. During this period, the total of the variances indicated that there would be a net surplus of £31,800, which would be transferred from the working balance at 31 March 2012. This represented a reduction of £467,390 compared to the budgeted reduction in the working balance of £499,390. It was estimated that the working balance would stand at £3,448,351 at 31 March 2012.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

60 **Community Services - Stewardship to 30 June 2011**

The Director Community and Environment presented the report advising Members of any major differences by management unit to the revised budget. The current forecast suggests that net expenditure for this Committee will decrease from the revised budget by a total of £157,310 which represents a variation of 1.4% from the revised budget.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.46 pm

Chair