

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

17 January 2012

Present:

Councillor Kevin Mitchell (Chair)

Councillors Thompson, Branston, Choules, Clark, Crow, A Hannaford, Hobden, Morris, Mottram, Newcombe, Tippins and Wardle

Also present:

Director Community and Environment, Head of Environmental Health Services, Head of Economy and Tourism, Acting Head of Housing and Contracts Services, Community Inclusion and Engagement Officer, Leisure Facilities Manager and Member Services Officer (HB)

In attendance:

Councillor RM Hannaford - Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement
Councillor Sheldon - Portfolio Holder for Environment and Leisure

In attendance - Devon County Council

Councillor Barker - Cabinet Member for Social Care
Ian Hobbs - Senior Manager, Commissioning
Max Sillars - Targeted Support Commissioner

1 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2011 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

2 **Apologies for absence**

No apologies for absence were received.

3 **Declaration of Interests**

Members declared the following personal (*prejudicial) interests:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Newcombe	6 (Member of Devon County Council and Chair of the County Council's People's Scrutiny Committee)
Councillor Mottram	*7 (his company undertakes work for Parkwood Leisure)
Councillor Morris	7 (husband holds Leisure Centre Membership with Parkwood Leisure)
Councillor Tippins	14 (member of group that had received a grant)

Councillor Choules	17 (wife employed by University of Exeter)
Councillor Mrs Thompson	17 (daughter owns a property in multiple occupation)

4 **Questions from the Public under Standing Order 19**

In accordance with Standing Order No. 19, a question from Mr Colin Hughes, the Chair of the Exonia Park Residents' Association, was put to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement. Copies of the question had been previously circulated to Members. The question and the reply from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement (in italics) are appended to the minutes.

Scrutiny Committee - Community agreed that the answer be noted.

5 **Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order 20**

In accordance with Standing Order No. 20, a question from a Member was put to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement in respect of legislation relating to Mobile Park Homes and Park Sites. Copies of the question had been previously circulated to Members. The question and the reply from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement (in italics) are appended to the minutes.

The Member enlarged on her question by referring to statistics produced following the return of questionnaires circulated to park home residents, as part of the recently launched Park Homes Justice Campaign. Problems reported included abuse and violence, sale blocking and bullying by unscrupulous park owners. In addition, many residents felt that there was insufficient local authority involvement. It was noted that 45% of residents were between 65-75 and 32% were over 75.

The Portfolio Holder responded that a momentum was building with a view to seeking better park home management, including MP involvement. He referred to specific problems experienced in Exeter and to remedial action taken. He agreed that a more proactive approach was required and confirmed that the City Council would be making a submission to the Communities and Local Government Committee.

6 **Targeted Support (Former Supporting People Budget)**

Councillor Newcombe declared a personal interest as a Member of Devon County Council and the Chair of the County Council's People's Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Stuart Barker, the County Council's Cabinet Member for Social Care, Ian Hobbs, Senior Manager, Commissioning and Max Sillars, Targeted Support Commissioner to the meeting. Councillor Barker had been invited to attend to respond to issues in respect of Targeted Support - formerly Supporting People.

With changes in Government funding necessitating a different approach to allocating support services for both the homeless and older people, Councillor Barker emphasised the importance of the County Council, District Councils and stakeholders all working together to address homelessness. He referred to a meeting held with the City Council's Leader and Chief Executive in January 2011 and to a number of meetings involving Exeter City Council and East Devon District Council officers. Four working models of a Community Assessment Hub had been put to Districts, Exeter

and East Devon having opted for the fourth model and negotiations were continuing to finalise these arrangements.

The current year's budget was £15.9 million, the proposed budget for 2012/13 being £16.854 million. The County Council's commitment to this service was such that the allocation would be above that made available by the Government of £16.2 million. The Targeted Support system now supported approximately 10,500, some 837 of whom were homeless and who were receiving 33% of the budget, this disproportionate spend again reflecting the importance attributed to addressing homelessness. Although there had been no reduction in homeless funding, the current year's budget included a redirection of resources to help address mental health issues. The homelessness strategy was informed by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which had shown a reduction in homelessness by 47% in the last few years.

The new model was based on a move away from property-based support to an assessed, person-based service as it increased efficiency and offered best value for money with a reduced budget. Person-based support would include support to overcome drug and alcohol dependency, provision of education and life skills and help with returning to employment. There was also now a greater emphasis on early intervention before individuals became homeless which helped contribute to improved efficiency.

No cuts had been made with regard to duty to those in care for under 18 funding and the County Council fully funded accommodation support for this group. Although not a mandatory requirement, accommodation costs for the over 18's were also met by the County Council.

Councillor Hannaford, the City Council's Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement, referred to a briefing paper for the County Council Labour Group which had not, however, been made available to this Committee. He acknowledged that the move to an assessed, person-based service was logical but criticised the severe impact on voluntary bodies and charities who were unable to offer the same level of support as a consequence of the cuts and could not provide a long term solution. He expressed his significant concerns about the likely impact changes to the County Councils' funding for housing related support would have on vulnerable people in the City. Exeter had particular problems as it absorbed the homeless from surrounding areas and he urged further meetings to seek more equitable solutions.

Councillor Newcombe advised that a day long County Council People's Scrutiny Committee meeting had been agreed to examine issues with stakeholders and Member and officer representatives from District Councils.

Councillor Barker responded, as follows, to Members' comments and queries (*responses in italics*):-

- the County Council has been slow to consult with service users and there are serious worries that people needing support, including residents with low needs, will fall outside the "eligibility criteria".
Outcomes for individuals in need is of paramount concern and the new system focuses on assessments of individual needs. Some 6,000 people are covered by the system. The average cost of housing a homeless person is £4,700, costs previously ranging from a minimal figure, as a result of support from charities etc., to upwards of £20,000 per person. The need to develop a more balanced system was therefore a priority.

- spot purchasing may appear logical but impact on charity and voluntary budgets has been drastic with total bed space cutbacks to date totalling 204.
- a number of stakeholder managers would welcome the opportunity to discuss the changes with County Council officers and the Cabinet Member. Shilhay has experienced a 25% budget cut and is no longer able to provide additional support for its clients, five staff having been made redundant. Clients who can no longer be supported often return to alcohol and/or drug dependencies.
*Although there has been a reduction in funding available for accommodation, there has been no overall reduction in funding of individuals and beds can only be provided following an assessment of an individual's needs.
A number of meetings have already been held with stakeholders, District Council Officers etc. but will investigate if requests for further meetings have not been met.*
- Westcountry Housing Association have made six project workers redundant with a resultant dismantling of social support for the most vulnerable. They can now only accommodate individuals in work. What are the plans for providing accommodation for vulnerable people under 18 ?
- How many under 18's are in County Council care in bed and breakfasts and what guarantees can be given for their future provision with reduced funding for bodies such as the YMCA, Gabriel House and the loss of the Amber Project in Mid Devon where 22 units of high support accommodation for young offenders will be lost? There has been an increase in the number of approaches from young people.
*Westcountry Housing are now more flexible in their operation and will be using the assessment system. A more collaborative approach to utilise a raft of funding systems will be important. For example, use of NHS funding and the £250,000 allocated to St Petrocks.
The County supports young people. For the period April-Nov 2011, 11 were in B&B accommodation. The number of 16-17 year olds homeless in Exeter in the first half of financial year rose from 32 to 51 which reflects the County wide position. In an effort to reduce this figure, supported lodging placements have been provided. In 2005, the number of those under 26 classified as homeless was 631, in 2011 it was 805. In the last three months, 70 under 18's have been referred for bed and breakfast accommodation.*
- Who assesses need?
Assessment is undertaken jointly with individual Districts. For both homelessness and older persons' services a trusted assessor will be contracted to manage the assessment and subsequent referrals to support providers. The assessor will assess anyone in need of support and determine the level of support required. This assessment will then inform the level of funding attached to the individual.
- is the Trusted Assessor system proceeding and how will it operate effectively with staffing cuts at the County Council ?
Yes, through the Community Assessment Hub. Ability to assess individual need is crucial and it will be important to avoid a tick box culture. The County Council's reorganisation included redundancies but with significant opportunities for retraining. There will be a sufficient number of assessors.
- why was the Joint Commissioning Board involving the County, eight districts and agencies, which made collective decisions on funding, abolished?
Supporting People funding commenced in 2006 and ended in April 2009. The Board was not considered to be effective and change coincided with reductions in Government funding. The Board turned down a proposal for allocating £2.5

million for those with mental health problems. Homelessness Steering Groups were established to consider options for the future and the County Council opted for Targeted Support which is considered to be more flexible and offer greater savings.

- organisations such as Shilhay, Gabriel House and the YMCA have offered both short term housing and assistance with move on. A reduction in floating support for those moving on from supported housing will mean that it is less likely that social landlords will offer a tenancy. Supported housing residents will move on less and those accommodation services 'silt up', not creating as many vacancies for new residents as previously available. Those who do move on and fail will again end up as homeless therefore defeating the object of the system.
The level of support provided reflects the needs of the individuals. In some cases minimal support may be provided where individuals do not, or no longer require, a complex package. The minimal support system is yet to be finalised but needs to be in place for the 'move on' process to function.
- the cuts in the Supporting People budget has had a severe impact on warden services for the elderly such as Eaton House. The loss of the warden service meant the loss of the 24 hour cover and three deaths occurred in the last six months which might have been prevented if welfare checks had been continued.
More flexible support is the key, using modern methods such as telecare and social media and individuals continue to exercise choice in respect of their retirement and care needs.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the £250,000 funding of St Petrocks was a one off payment and reiterated his significant concerns regarding the changes to the structure, remaining unconvinced that voluntary and charity organisations would be able to sustain involvement and whether the proper assessment of individual needs could be carried out effectively.

In conclusion, Councillor Barker reiterated that effective assessment of individuals and agreement of personal plans was the key to future care, rehabilitation and housing.

The Chair thanked Councillor Barker for attending.

7 Parkwood Leisure Management Contract for October and November 2011

Councillor Mottram declared a personal and prejudicial interest and left the meeting during consideration of this matter as his company undertook work for Parkwood Leisure.

Councillor Morris declared a personal interest as her husband holds Leisure Centre membership with Parkwood Leisure.

The Chair welcomed Darren Parrot, Assistant Regional Director and Jeremy Wright Exeter Contract Manager of Parkwood. The Parkwood representatives responded as follows to Members' queries and comments on performance information:-

- Health and Safety issues were taken very seriously. An improved access control system was being introduced at the Riverside Leisure Centre with customer services officers available at the gym entrance to help gym users and check on access;

- staff were encouraged to put forward new ideas on health and safety matters. The Safety Committee met twice a year and additional meetings were to be introduced;
- value for money was a critical criteria and recent figures appeared to show that more people were looking, for example, to use the Riverside Leisure Centre and, importantly, there had also been a reduction in the attrition figure (users leaving the centre);
- Councillors were welcome to attend Leisure Centre Forum meetings, the next dates being 9 April and 17 September at the Riverside both starting at 7pm. Improved customer information boards would shortly be introduced and would advertise events and display minutes of Forum meetings. Promotions would encourage the completion of feedback cards; and
- the cards were available at reception desks but kept with pamphlets etc. but would be transferred to the customer information board when erected. Following a Member's suggestion, all leisure centre managers had been instructed to undertake face to face interviews with users. To date, 140 interviews had been undertaken, with 200 to be completed by the end of the month. These would then be collated and assessed.

The Head of Economy and Tourism presented the report advising Members on the performance for October and November 2011, the first two months of year two of the Leisure Management Contract with Parkwood Leisure. He responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- individual Members were welcome to discuss detailed contract matters with himself or the Leisure Facilities Manager;
- a copy of Parkwood's presentation for the Members' briefing on 9 January would be made available to all Members and a note of the question and answer session would be circulated separately; and
- consideration would be given to introducing a separate feedback system for City Council purposes as part of an overall review of customer satisfaction; procedures. The Assistant Director Economy confirmed that a study of suitable systems and costs would be undertaken together with options for sharing the costs with Parkwood.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report and requested that a further report on proposals for an improved system with associated costs be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee.

8 Performance Housing Digest - Quarter II

The Acting Head of Housing and Contracts Services responded as follows to Members' queries on performance information:-

- the number of extralets to date was seven against the target of 35. The restructured housing development team anticipated reaching the target by the end of the year;
- the average turn around for a void property was currently 24 days. Regular meetings were being held with the contractor, including the South West Director, to improve this performance and incentives were available to tenants to leave properties in a clean and tidy condition;
- overall, the rate of repairs completed on time was 96%. This rate was improving and an increase of between 1-2% would see the Authority jump into the upper quartile; and

- work was continuing with the contractor to continue the turnaround rate of voids. Where the property was in an unsatisfactory condition, the Council would refuse to take the property back until the necessary work had been undertaken by the contractor.

9 **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 9 November 2011.

ESTIMATES, CAPITAL BIDS AND FEES AND CHARGES 2012/13

10 **Community - Housing Revenue Account - Estimates/New Capital Bids/Fees and Charges**

The Director Community and Environment presented the report on the Housing Revenue Account Estimates and Fees and Charges, which outlined the strategic framework within which the estimates had been prepared, changes in accounting practices which affected all budgets and gave detailed reasons for major changes in the Management Unit estimates. Detailed schedules of the capital programme for Housing were also attached to the report.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the draft Revenue Estimates for 2012/13 and Fees and Charges for approval by Executive.

(Report and Community and Housing Estimates and Fees and Charges circulated)

11 **Community - General Fund - Estimates/New Capital Bids/Fees and Charges**

The Director Community and Environment presented the report on the Community Revenue Account Estimates and Fees and Charges, which outlined the strategic framework within which the estimates had been prepared, changes in accounting practices which affected all budgets and gave detailed reasons for major changes in the Management Unit estimates. Detailed schedules of the capital programme for Community were also attached to the report.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the draft Revenue Estimates for 2012/13 and Fees and Charges for further consideration by the Executive.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE

12 **Housing Rents 2012/13**

The Acting Head of Housing and Contracts Services presented the report recommending a rent increase for council dwellings from 1 April 2012.

An increase was proposed reflecting a general inflationary increase of 5.6% together with a 0.5% convergence factor (RPI + 0.5% (+/- £2)) to reflect the number of years to meet target rent. The draft subsidy determination was based upon convergence, by 2015-16. The rent increase on average would be 6.84%.

It was proposed that the service charges will be increased by 6.1% (RPI 5.6% + 0.5%) in line with Section 18(1) of the Landlord and Tenants Act 1985 and in accordance with the Government's Guidance on Social Rent Reforms in the Local Authority Sector, except where cost increases were expected to be less, as set out in the report.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report and recommended Executive to:-

- (1) approve a rent increase by an average of 6.84% from 1 April 2012 which includes a general inflationary increase of 6.1% together with the phased introduction of the Government's rent restructuring proposals; and
- (2) approve a service charge increase of 6.1% with the exception of those charges expected to be less, as set out below:-
 - (a) Cleaning Communal Areas : + 2.0%
 - (b) Fire Alarm maintenance : 0.0%

(Report circulated)

13 **Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012-2042**

The Acting Head of Housing and Contracts Services presented the report informing Members of the outcome of the review of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

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

- (1) support the adoption by the Council of a 50 year equal maturing of the debt; and
- (2) agree to a further review being undertaken of the HRA Business Plan annually, the findings to be reported to Members.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

14 **Community Grants - 2011/12**

Councillor Tippins declared a personal interest as a member of a group that had received a grant.

The Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer presented the report updating Members on the dispersal of Local Area Community Grants 2011/12 and suggesting options for use of unspent funds in 2011/12. A breakdown of awards made in each ward was provided. The total cash remaining was £5,793.

Members remarked that the scheme had only been in operation for some seven months and therefore could benefit from further publicity in the wards and that Members should be provided with greater time to promote its availability.

Options for use of any underspend were:-

- any unspent funds after the 31 January 2012 to be made available as part of a central fund open to groups from across the City to apply; or
- any remaining funds at the end of the financial year to be carried forward into the next financial year.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- (1) noted the report; and
- (2) agreed that any remaining funds at the end of the financial year be ring fenced for each ward and carried forward into the next financial year, this to be reviewed at this stage next financial year.

(Report circulated)

15 **Current Incentives for Waste and Recycling**

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report advising Members of the £250,000 fund for supporting weekly rubbish collections and providing details of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's involvement with the Recycling Scheme Incentive and its possible relevance to Exeter City Council.

He responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- the introduction of a similar scheme for Exeter would cost £150,000 per annum as well as a subscription cost per household of £3 to £4 per annum; and
- the issue of bags of waste being presented on the highway at the wrong time was a chronic problem that was difficult to resolve. Officers had been working with businesses and landlords in various areas in an effort to improve the situation. Around 80% of the tipping complaints related to black bags in back lanes.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- (1) noted the current situation in relation to the weekly collection support scheme; and
- (2) supported the further examination and modelling of an incentive scheme in partnership with Devon County Council with a view to reporting back to a future meeting of this Committee should such a scheme appear viable in the future.

(Report circulated)

16 **New Approach to Building Contracts**

The Acting Head of Housing and Contracts Services presented the report outlining for Members the new arrangements being trailed for the delivery of the housing kitchen, bathroom and gas central heating replacements.

Members welcomed the new approach which, although necessitating a small budgetary increase, was likely to deliver enhanced performance and quality in the delivery of the service.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the initial progress made on the pilot and supported its continuation, subject to the submission of a report detailing projected costs and benefits to a future meeting of this Committee.

(Report circulated)

17 **Additional Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation**

Councillor Choules declared a personal interest as his wife was employed by the University.

Councillor Mrs Thompson declared a personal interest as her daughter owns a property in multiple occupation.

The Head of Environmental Health Services presented the report advising on the merits of the introduction of an additional licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) in parts of the City. He stated that the impact of the Article 4 Direction and the University's new accreditation scheme for student lets should be properly assessed before the introduction of any additional licensing schemes.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- (1) supported the proposal to review the success of the Article 4 Direction and landlord accreditation scheme in improving HMO conditions throughout the City; and
- (2) requested that a further report be brought to this Committee in 2013, detailing the success or otherwise of these initiatives and the relative merits of introducing an additional licensing scheme.

(Report circulated)

18 **Hazel Ball**

The Chair reported that this would be the last Scrutiny Committee - Community meeting of Hazel Ball, Strategic Director Community and Environment.

The Chair and Members recorded their appreciation for her commitment and hard work for the Council and wished her an enjoyable retirement.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.40 pm

Chair