

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

29 May 2012

Present:

Councillor Norman Shiel (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, Bowkett, Choules, Clark, Dawson, Donovan, Laws, Morris, Mottram, Payne and Tippins

Apologies:

Councillors Branston

Also present:

Strategic Director (KH), Strategic Director (MP), Assistant Director Environment, Assistant Director Economy, Assistant Director Finance, Assistant Director Housing and Contracts, Housing Operations Manager, Museums Manager, Leisure Facilities Manager and Member Services Officer (SJS)

In attendance:

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

29 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2012 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

30 Declaration of Interests

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

| COUNCILLOR | MINUTE |
|----------------------|---|
| Councillor Bowkett | 31 (Committee Member on the Synergy Housing Board (Astor Homes) and an employee of Exeter Council for Voluntary Services) |
| Councillor Hannaford | 31 (his parents had brought their property under the 'right to buy' scheme) |
| Councillor Mottram | 31 (his company undertakes work for Parkwood Leisure) 33* (his company undertakes work for Parkwood Leisure) |

31 **Portfolio Holders to present their priorities for the Forthcoming Year**

Councillor Bowkett declared a personal interest as Committee Member on the Synergy Housing Board (Astor Homes) and as an employee of Exeter Council for Voluntary Services.

Councillor Hannaford declared a personal interest as his parents had brought their property under the 'right to buy' scheme.

Councillor Mottram declared a personal interest as his company undertakes work for Parkwood Leisure.

Councillor Hannaford presented the priorities within the Housing and Community Involvement Portfolio for the forthcoming year. The report is attached to these minutes.

The following responses were given to Members' questions:-

- there were sites and parts of sites within the city with planning approval that had not yet been built on, the Council would work with developers to bring these sites forward
- the Council had a policy that required 5% of all new housing development to be Disability Discrimination Act compliant
- work was on-going to prevent residents becoming homeless
- the Council policy was for 35% affordable housing on new development wherever possible
- would work with and support the County Council in the development of the 150 Extra-Care bed units
- would discuss with officers and talk to Oxford City Council Portfolio Holder with regards to their Additional Licensing Scheme in respect of private sector HMO properties
- would explore the feasibility of having a private tenant led organisation to assist in improving standards in private sector rented properties
- would intervene to reduce the impact of Welfare Reform on residents; it could potentially affect up to 70 families within the city
- was not against the 'right to buy' scheme if the Council could keep 100% of the receipts to enable reinvestment in the development of new affordable housing; at present, the Council would only be able to replace one house for every three/four sold under the scheme
- the solar panels had already been installed; this was at no cost to the Council
- the Residential Park Forum had met twice and there was a strong desire to build upon this initial work
- the new Exeter Board, a Joint Committee of City and County Councillors had replaced the old County Committee and would provide a more joined up and effective way of working to resolve community and housing issues within the city
- previously the council were required by law to operate an 'open register' for people in housing need; people's priority was by their needs and they would then be appropriately banded; local family and work connections were taken into account.

The Housing Operations Manager clarified that the number of people accepted as homeless in the last four years had decreased.

Councillor Sheldon presented the priorities within the Environment and Leisure Portfolio for the forthcoming year. The report is attached to these minutes.

The following responses were given to Members' questions:-

- the system review was being undertaken by Vanguard and staff led
- works had been undertaken on the Heavitree Park paddling pool last year and further works were now required; a consultation with local residents was due to take place shortly on the upgrading of the facilities at St Thomas, it would have to close if it was not refurbished
- the review of the parking enforcement and community patrol teams would provide a more flexible service; a report detailing the changes would come to this Committee in due course, staffing levels were anticipated to remain the same
- the Flowerpot Skate park was greatly used and was showing signs of wear; the wooden ramps would be replaced with harder wearing concrete ramps
- there was no budget to build new parks; although Section 106 monies were used to build play areas on new developments
- Devon County Council as the disposal authority deals with the waste that was collected by the Council, and all such waste including food waste was currently planned to be sent to the new Energy from Waste plant being built in Marsh Barton; so there would be no justification for a separate collection of food waste at present. However, a joint bid for government funding was being prepared with other Local Authorities in Devon, which would propose some separate food waste collection
- would pro-actively manage the Council's fleet this year to reduce its overall carbon footprint
- bi-weekly refuse collections successfully encouraged residents to recycle, and specific partnership work was carried out with others such as the University, in order to encourage residents including students to manage and reduce their waste
- the Council was committed to improving air quality although the management of traffic, which was the main cause of the poor air quality in Exeter, was primarily a county council responsibility
- had seen some changes in the demographic of HMO's since the increase in the availability of purpose built student accommodation
- it was not compulsory for food businesses (cafés/restaurants, etc.) to display their Food Hygiene Rating Scheme score; would publicise the scheme in the next edition of 'the Citizen'
- an example of working with partner agencies and business to reduce alcohol-fuelled anti-social-behaviour would be the newly formed Exeter Night Time Economy Forum
- RAMM was one of only four museums in the UK still in the running to win the Art Fund prize and the prestigious title of 'Museum of the Year'
- the plans for the swimming pool were at the feasibility stage and a full consultation would be undertaken; it was hoped that the Pyramids pool would be able to stay open until a new pool had been completed
- a capital bid for the works to the athletics track had been submitted for 2013/14.

The Assistant Director Environment advised that:

- to encourage taxi proprietors to replace their taxis with vehicles with lower emissions, a policy would be introduced which would link charges to emissions;
- food business proprietors who were not satisfied with their Food Hygiene Rating Scheme score could register their reasons on the national web-site, and request a re-inspection, although very few had done so.

The Committee congratulated the officers at RAMM on reaching the final four for the Art Fund prize and the title of 'Museum of the Year'.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the achievements and priorities presented.

32 **Appointment of Members to Working Groups**

Membership of the following working group was agreed:-

Parkwood Leisure Contract Working Group

Councillor Shiel (Chair), Councillor Mitchell, Councillor Morris and Sheldon.

The Community Toilets Working Group would report its conclusions to the September meeting of this Committee.

33 **Parkwood Leisure Management Contract**

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 Mitchell (the Chair) reported on the progress of the Parkwood Leisure Contract Working Group. He advised that the first meeting had taken place and that the following had been discussed:-

- the background to the contract
- contractual issues
- QUEST and assessing and benchmarking
- improving levels of service to above those specified in the contract
- Four of leisure facilities
- meeting on a monthly basis.

The Scrutiny Committee – Community noted the update.

34 **Statutory Service Plan (Business Compliance) 2012/13**

The Assistant Director Environment presented the report on the proposed adoption of the Statutory Service Plan (Business Compliance) 2012/13. The plan set out the Council's regulatory function in respect of food safety, health and safety and other statutory functions over the forthcoming year.

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

- (1) approve the Statutory Service Plan (Business Compliance) 2012/13; and
- (2) authorise the Assistant Director Environment to change the Statutory Service Plan in light of centrally issued guidance and/or to meet operational needs.

(Report circulated)

35 **Private Sector Housing Policy : Financial Assistance Packages 2012/13**

The Assistant Director Environment presented the report informing Members of the financial assistance awarded to private sector households in 2011/12 and seeking approval for proposed changes to the types and levels of financial assistance that

would be available in 2012/13. 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 2012.

In response to Members' questions, the Assistant Director Environment clarified the following:-

- the Disabled Facilities Grant scheme was for existing dwellings that required adaptations e.g. installation of stair-lifts, replacement of baths with level access showers, so that an occupant with a disability could remain living in their home
- there were 800 licensed HMO within the City which were inspected every five years as part of the licensing process. There was no general proactive inspection programme for other tenanted properties due to available resources, but targeted proactive inspection did take place. However, the Council did respond to a variety of tenants' complaints (e.g. about disrepair) and were able to assess the property condition at this point. It was recognised that tenants were often unaware of where complaints could be reported and were sometimes fearful of the landlord's reaction, hence the need to promote access to the service with this group
- Cosy Devon – offered financial assistance for insulation measures in properties with little loft or cavity wall insulation for those on low income
- a comprehensive risk assessment of the impact that the Welfare Reform could have on the Council was being undertaken and would be presented to Members early next year.

The Strategic Director (KH) advised that new developments require 5% of housing be Disability Discrimination Act compliant.

A Member raised the benefit of a tenant led organisation within the City to help improve the standards in the private rented sector.

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

- (1) approve the financial assistance tools as set out in the report and their respective budget allocation; and
- (2) authorise the Assistant Director Environment, subject to prior consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement, to re-allocate uncommitted parts of the respective budget allocation between financial assistance tools, in order to meet need.

(Report circulated)

36 **2012 Review of Re-cycling Plan 2011/16**

The Assistant Director Environment presented the report updating the Committee on progress with the Recycling Plan since its approval in 2011 and seeking ongoing support from the Committee for re-cycling initiatives.

He advised that whilst Exeter maintained a steady recycling rate, as a consequence of the economic downturn there was less consumption and fewer materials had been produced for collection and processing. However, there had also been a reduction in rubbish produced to around 300kg per head per annum. The garden waste scheme

was undergoing changes with all customers registered annually to enable the collection crew to target their rounds to those registered addresses. A reduction in miles travelled and resources was anticipated as result of forth-coming review to establish new routes.

In response to Members' questions, the Assistant Director Environment clarified the following:-

- Bring banks for small electrical appliances were being introduced to the bring bank sites and the bank areas tidied to enhance their appeal; this would include more uniform colour coding, improved signage and more regular cleaning.
- Ward Members were informed of any changes to rounds a week in advance of letters sent to the public
- the Council would wish to assist community compost schemes within the City although these did have constraints in particular with their siting in proximity to homes, and the need for a community organiser
- work was undertaken with the University to promote recycling and better waste management. This had included attendance at Fresher's Weeks, and providing content within the University's tenant handbook on recycling and waste management
- the proposed door-knocking campaign was a professional targeted survey; would ensure that the survey took into account of the absence of students during the summer break in June
- the benchmarking group was comprised of authorities with similar demographics to Exeter, for which information was made available for comparison, but this did not entail officer meetings at each of those cities across the country.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- (1) noted the progress made by the Council to date in implementing the Re-cycling Plan 2011/16; and
- (2) supported the Re-cycling Improvement Plan 2012/13.

(Report circulated)

37 **Extension of RAMM's Acquisition and Disposal Policy and Statement on Acquisition of Archaeological Archives**

The Museum Manager presented the report updating the current and planned strategy relating to collections development at RAMM and including a timetable for producing a Collections Development Policy by the end of 2013 along with an extension of the existing Acquisitions and Disposals Policy until that date. It also described the current position in relation to the acquisition of new archaeological archives.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report including the timetable in respect of producing a Collections Development Policy for December 2013.

38 **Housing and AIM Property Maintenance Out-Turn Report 2011/12**

The Strategic Director (KH) submitted a report detailing the fourth quarterly/outturn report, covering the period from January to March 2012 (but including updated

figures at 10 May 2012). It included the financial position of the £7.5 million programme of reactive and planned property maintenance and refurbishment at the end of 2011/12 and covered revenue funded housing and non-housing schemes as approved by Council for the financial year 2011/12 and budgets for schemes rolled forward from 2010/11.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the outturn financial position and works in 2011/12, as detailed in the report.

(Report circulated)

39 **AIM Property Maintenance Proposed Programme 2012/13**

The Strategic Director (MP) presented the report detailing the proposed programme of property asset related project work in relation to the budgets set in 2012/13 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 2012/13.

The Housing Operations Manager clarified that the rolling programme for kitchen replacements was every 25 years although when a property became vacant a review of the kitchen was undertaken to determine if a replacement was needed.

A Member raised concerns regarding the current year budget for the Heavitree Park paddling pool refurbishment when funds had been spent in the previous year.

The Assistant Director Environment advised of the position with regard to the paddling pool advising that last year monies had been spent on improving the chlorination dosing of the pool following routine water sampling. Further works were planned to enhance the pool.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the programme of property asset related work for 2012/13, as detailed in the report.

(Report circulated)

40 **Housing Revenue Account - Final Accounts 2011/12**

The Strategic Director (KH) advised Members of the overall financial performance of the Housing Revenue Account for the 2011/12 financial year ended 31 March 2012. He updated Members on the HRA working balance, major repairs reserve and of the settlement payment to implement the HRA self-financing scheme. The Council had borrowed £56,884,000 based on the affordability of the Council's 30-year business plan to make the one-off debt settlement payment to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

In response to Members' questions, the Housing Operations Manager stated that the cost of the quarterly Insight newsletter which was distributed to 5,000 tenants and 900 leaseholders was just under £10,000 per annum.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

41 **Community Services Outturn to 31 March 2012**

The Strategic Director (MP) advised Members of the overall financial performance of the Community and Environment Directorate for the 2011/12 financial year ended 31 March 2012.

In answer to a Member's question, the Assistant Director Environment advised that the income from immigration visits was in respect of foreign countries requesting inspections to ensure that their sponsored citizens were to be housed in suitable accommodation.

The Assistant Director Finance clarified the position with regards to the Preventing Homelessness Grant and that it was not ring-fenced.

The Strategic Director (KH) advised that the grant not being ring-fenced provided the Council with flexibility for accounting purposes.

A Member raised concerns regarding the reduction in the budget from Devon County Council for the Supporting People budget.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.35 pm

Chair