

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

4 September 2012

Present:

Councillor Norman Shiel (Chair)

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

Also present:

Strategic Director (KH), Assistant Director Economy, Assistant Director Environment, Assistant Director Housing and Contracts, Principal Accountant (SR), Museums Manager, 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

42 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2012 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

43 **Declaration of Interests**

Members declared the following personal interests:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillors Choules and Dawson	45 (employees of the University of Exeter)

44 **Parkwood Leisure Management Contract**

The minutes of the meeting of the Parkwood Leisure Services Working Group held on 9 July 2012 were received.

(Minutes circulated)

45 **University of Exeter**

Councillors Choules and Dawson declared personal interests as employees of the University of Exeter.

The Chair welcomed Jilly Court, the University's Director of Operations of Campus Services. She set out in her presentation the achievements and strategic objectives of the University and how it was working together with other partners in the City. She detailed the on-going and proactive work undertaken by the University in the community much of which reflected the Council's aspirations. These included "StreetWise" - a non-emergency call service, student wardens, refuse, sustainability and noise and anti social behaviour initiatives. Rory Cunningham - the Community

Liaison Officer - was particularly active and successful in respect of the latter issues. She detailed future community initiatives such as an increase in disposal of student refuse, joint work with the Exeter Night Time Economy Forum, support of Landlord Accreditation and further Resident Liaison Group meetings. Suggestions for improved joint working were also put forward.

She responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- the University's leisure facilities were open to the public including schools and sporting groups although there was a limitation on capacity especially during term time. Phil Atwell, the University's Director of Sport, was involved in current discussions on the Bus Station site and the proposals for a new swimming pool;
- there was some spare capacity in student accommodation due to there being a slight decrease in Undergraduate numbers in September 2012, primarily due to the University maintaining the quality of students entering with a minimum of two A's and one B grade at A Level. There was also a decrease in the number of students deferring in September 2011 which would come through this year. The University owned or managed 5,500 purpose built student accommodation units and discussions were being held with City Council planning and housing officers with a view to possibly utilising some student units on a short term basis in order to support the Council's housing needs;
- care was taken to ensure the appropriate management of the mix of home, EU and overseas students. The University was obliged to meet targets in respect of "widening participation" to encourage students from different backgrounds and schools. There were also policies in place to offer financial and social support to ensure the effective integration of all students. Of the 2011 intake, 5% were of Exeter and Devon origin which was significantly lower than the metropolitan Universities such as Manchester and Birmingham where there was a greater proportion of female and ethnic students many of whom lived at home within these Cities; and
- liaison with local communities was often achieved through working with groupings of residents, community associations etc. Local Members were welcome to pass on news of the University's initiatives highlighted in the presentation on an individual basis to residents.

Members thanked Ms Court for her presentation. They were particularly appreciative of Rory Cunningham's role and work. The Chair also thanked her and remarked on the very important and longstanding relationship between the University and the City and suggested a further presentation at a future date.

46 **Royal Albert Memorial Museum And Art Gallery Performance Review - 15 December 2011 to 31 July 2012**

The Chair welcomed Camilla Hampshire, the Museums Manager to the meeting.

Her report reviewed the seven month period of service delivery following the re-opening of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery (RAMM) post its capital re-development. It covered the full spectrum of Museum operations in order to provide a whole view of the service, the interconnections between different aspects of its work and to describe how these feed into public outputs. Though starting from a very positive position, it also described some of the constraints, pressures and challenges facing the service in coming years. The presentation itself focussed on people stories, providing a different perspective through which to understand the work carried out at the RAMM.

She responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- the outreach programme during the four year closure period had been very successful with approximately 1.6 million public contacts made. It had attracted national attention. Some aspects of outreach had been maintained since re-opening, this included RAMM representation at the Contemporary Crafts Fair run in conjunction with the Devon Guild of Craftsmen and attendance at the County Show. Partnerships remained central to RAMM's work and examples include over the past seven months "in-reach" with Age UK on "Culture Café" and with the Devon and Cornwall Police and the County Council's Social Services on an Intervention Project to address the needs of Young People at Risk of Offending;
- RAMM had submitted a successful partnership bid with the Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery with the result that the peninsula's two principal Cities had been selected as part of the Arts Council for England's Major Grants Programme. The bid had included a letter of support from the University of Exeter;
- there was active engagement with the City's small ethnic communities, a springboard being provided by RAMM's internationally important World Cultures Collection;
- regional museums, unlike the Victoria and Albert or British Museums, for example, found it difficult to operate shops at a successful profit margin because of high overheads, especially staff costs. In order to minimise risks to the Council, the decision had been taken during the run up to re-opening not to operate a shop at RAMM. Currently there was a sales point with a limited number of souvenirs;
- school sessions in RAMM were teacher led using their own resources or the RAMM's Marketing Research Pack or activity sheets sent to them when they book their visit (also downloadable from the website). Schools could also pay for session at St Nicholas Priory led by an independent school specialist;
- Monday closures were important for maintenance, cleaning and review/re-organisation of displays but also meant that the Museum was closed on the four Bank Holidays. The new Saturday and Sunday pattern of openings had been established in response to public requests. Saturday and Sunday openings were popular and successful, with the latter popular with many families - there were up to 650 visitors on Sundays;
- a post of Building Services Officer had been created with the post-holder able to undertake a specified range of electrical and mechanical maintenance tasks, but with specialist officers from the contracts unit engaged as necessary;
- Dartmoor Kitchen was currently operating the "pop up" café and, although the tendering process had been reviewed, it was anticipated, at present, that an in-house Council operated café would not be viable because of the specialist nature of catering operations which are not currently covered in the range of Council services. This would be re-examined;
- The Debate – Great Exhibition - Great Debate, chaired by John Humphries, had been very successful and it was hoped to hold further events of this nature. Pricing, for any future similar events would be examined, the cost of this event, which had been experimental, having been aligned with classical music events in the City; and
- the Museum was looking to invite talented local artists to display their work. The value of involving talented local artists as well as regional and national ones was recognised and would be allied to an Express and Echo feature between 22 November and 5 December on local art groups.

The Chair thanked the Museums Manger for an excellent presentation and he and other Members congratulated the Museums Service and its staff on the quality of the

outstanding new facility and the early successes. They also offered their congratulations on RAMM winning the Arts Fund's Museum of the Year Prize.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE

47 Kitchen and Bathroom Replacement Programme

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts presented the report seeking approval for increasing the housing capital programme for the next three years to accelerate the programme of kitchen and bathroom replacement in the Council's housing stock.

She undertook to ensure that Members were advised when major replacement works were undertaken in their wards, particularly where the elderly were affected. She also confirmed that suitable monitoring was undertaken where large national contractors used local sub-contractors.

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

- (1) approve an additional £1.775 million allocated to the capital programme in 2012/13 for replacement kitchens, bathrooms, associated works and staff costs; and
- (2) approve an increase in the Housing Capital Programme to £3.7 million in 2013/14 and £3.8 million in 2014/15 for replacement kitchens, bathrooms, associated works and staff costs.

(Report circulated)

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

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts presented the report seeking approval for the Council's amended Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy and Procedures for tackling anti-social behaviour on the Council's housing estates.

Review of the policy was a requirement of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 and the report detailed the actions being taken to tackle anti-social behaviour. Between April 2011 and March 2012, 740 new cases of anti-social behaviour had been reported to the Neighbourhood Housing Team with an average of 146 cases open at any one time

The results of a Home Office consultation had shown that early intervention was vital with disruptive residents but that, in the minority of cases, there was a need for tough action. The results of the consultation had shown that victims wanted their problem to be taken seriously, an efficient service and a quick response and for the problem to stop and not to happen again. The consultation had shown that an overall decrease in satisfaction levels was apparent and that an important element was to respond effectively to initial enquiries and complaints. Effective communication by the housing team would be an important part of this.

Members noted the significant case load currently being experienced by the City Council and referred both to individual problem cases and to the wider issue of accommodating young people amongst the middle age and elderly. Many of the anti-social behaviour problems were caused by the former creating particular problems

for longstanding residents who had no desire to leave their areas. The Assistant Director explained that the demographic mix was the result of most residences being in general needs accommodation although older residents were amongst those encouraged to downsize where possible.

Because of the level of problems being experienced it was suggested that a Member Working Group be set up to look at issues in depth.

The Strategic Director stated that, because of the concerns raised by Members, it would be appropriate for himself, the Assistant Director and senior housing staff to re-examine the procedures. Notwithstanding the level of case load, because of financial constraints, he did not anticipate that it would be possible to increase resources but a review was likely to be able to identify potential areas for improving the current system. Members were supportive of this suggestion of further analysing procedures and felt that, in the meantime, the proposed changes to policies and procedures, as set out in the report, should be recommended to Executive for approval.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report and recommended Executive to adopt the revised Anti-Social Behaviour Statement of Policy and Procedures, with the understanding that an internal review of current practice would be undertaken on detailed procedures and the Assistant Director would report back to a future meeting of this Committee.

(Report circulated)

49 **Succession and Assignment Policy**

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts presented the report setting out proposed changes to the Council's policy on the succession and assignment of tenancies.

Responding to Members, she confirmed the intention of relaxing the policy, as appropriate, to allow under-occupation by one bedroom as elderly residents often appreciated an extra bedroom as a safeguard should they become ill and require over night assistance or to accommodate visiting family members. A Member also suggested that this might assist in cases of adults returning to family homes as a consequence of forthcoming welfare reforms.

She confirmed however that, allowing under occupation would have a detrimental effect on waiting lists as people with higher needs would not be able to access the houses. So a balanced approach was necessary.

Particular care would be taken in approaching a surviving family member in respect of future occupation after a death in the family. This was because, recently, some surviving family members had found it difficult when, in line with the current Succession and Assignment Policy, they had been advised that they would be required to move to different accommodation.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report and recommended Executive to support the revision of the current Succession and Assignment policy to:-

- (1) define properties as more extensive when there is more than one bedroom in excess of requirements;

- (2) define properties which have had disabled adaptations as “substantially different” where the value of the adoption exceeds £1,000; and
- (3) introduce an appeals procedure.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - SCRUTINY

50 Update on the Older Person's Housing Strategy 2010-2015 Action Plan

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts presented the report setting out progress in delivering the Older Persons Housing Strategy 2010-2015 Action Plan.

With regard to the private sector renewal scheme, she confirmed that appropriate publicity would be undertaken to promote the availability of grants and would target areas known to have the poorest housing conditions. A Member referred to the use of the Toronto House communal room and it was noted that the Action Plan included a proposal to re-assess the uses of such communal facilities. An important element of the Plan would be renewed engagement and more joint action with the PCT with involvement in the agenda of the new Health and Well Being Board.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the progress made on the Action Plan for the Older Persons Housing Strategy 2010-2015.

(Report circulated)

51 Community Toilets Working Group - Final Report

The Assistant Director Environment advised Members of the outcomes of the Community Toilet Working Group, highlighting some of the key conclusions regarding public toilet provision.

He reported that the Council was about to embark on two key pieces of work. One was the development of a City Centre Strategy, in which public toilet provision had been identified as an important element in terms of how the quantity and quality of provision could help the visitor experience and in turn assist business. The second piece of work was a systems review of the purpose of ‘keep my city safe and looking good’, and the part that public toilet provision plays in this would be an important element to examine. Both these pieces of work were planned for Autumn 2012 and, it was anticipated that, action plans would be drawn up listing improvements for implementation.

Councillor Mitchell, the Chair of the Working Group, complimented the report and stated that the involvement of Professor Clara Greed of the University of the West of England and various user groups had been of particular value. Toilet provision in Exeter compared favourably with other areas and he hoped that the proposals would improve toilet provision in both the City Centre and outlying areas.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- (1) supported the findings of the Working Group;
- (2) agreed that the forthcoming systems review of the purpose of ‘keep my city feeling safe and looking good’ should strive to achieve improvements in public toilet provision as one of its key issues for a further report on the findings and

recommendations of the working group to be presented to a future meeting of this Committee;

- (3) agreed that the work of the forthcoming City Centre Strategy should encompass public toilet provision as an integral part of the review and should explore the potential to develop a community toilet scheme based on the Oxford City Council model; and
- (4) agreed that, subject to the successful development of a community toilet scheme in the city centre, this experience be built upon with a view to extending the scheme to other parts of the City in order to supplement existing provision in other wards.

(Report circulated)

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

52 Housing Revenue Account - Budget Monitoring to June 2012

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts 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 2012. During this period, the total of the variances indicated that there would be a net surplus of £2,357,550, which would be transferred from the working balance at 31 March 2013. This represented a reduction of £37,280 compared to the budgeted reduction in the working balance of £2,320,270. It was estimated that the working balance would stand at £8,121,973 at 31 March 2013.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

53 Community - Budget Monitoring to June 2012

The Principal Accountant 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 increase from the revised budget by a total of £91,000 which represents a variation of 0.78% from the revised budget.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.10 pm

Chair