

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

5 March 2013

Present:

Councillor Shiel (Chair)

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

Also present:

Strategic Director (MP), Strategic Director (KH), Assistant Director Environment, Assistant Director Housing and Contracts, Assistant Director Public Realm, Principal Accountant (SR), Cleansing Operations Manager, Leisure Support Officer and Member Services Officer (HB)

In attendance:

Inspector Andrew Webber - Devon and Cornwall Constabulary

10 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2013 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

11 **Declaration of Interests**

Members expressed the following interests:-

COUNCILLOR	MINUTE
Councillor Bowkett	12 (partner works for Devon and Cornwall Constabulary)
Councillor Mitchell	13 (Uncle works for the Parks section)

12 **Presentation by Inspector Andrew Webber**

Councillor Bowkett expressed an interest as his partner works for the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary.

The Chair welcomed Inspector Andrew Webber of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary to the meeting. His presentation covered the following:-

- with the support of Superintendent Eastwood, the Police Commander for Exeter, East and Mid Devon, the local policing structure was being re-organised to operate more effectively on a neighbourhood level to be fully implemented from 1 April 2013. PCSOs play a valuable role in neighbourhood policing and their powers are to be enhanced;
- there would be an increased focus on anti-social behaviour, recent graffiti problems in the City, Section 30 enforcement in Wonford and St. Thomas and traffic enforcement, these issues having been highlighted by the public through the Have Your Say public meetings;
- there would be a more aggressive approach to anti social behaviour and a greater emphasis on performance, especially feedback to the public; and

- anti-social behaviour associated with the night time economy remained an area of concern and it was the intention to focus Police resources earlier in the evening, both in the City Centre and the suburbs, as a means of reducing problems. In general terms, Exeter was regarded as a safe City. It would be important to achieve an effective balance between the policing of the City Centre and general community policing to target resources effectively.

He responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- the Police Cadets initiative would seek to improve and increase engagement between Police and young people. The scheme would be promoted to 13-16 year olds in schools commencing at ISCA College. Initially, it was anticipated that 30 youngsters would participate, with a City wide figure of 120 ultimately anticipated. Partnership support for this initiative would be sought;
- domestic violence was a complicated issue and, although there had been an increase in incidents, it was thought that this could be attributed to increased reporting;
- there would be greater emphasis on feedback in response to issues raised at Have Your Say meetings and a re-launch of the process involving local Councillors was planned. Monthly reports would be produced and circulated to the press and ward Councillors;
- a number of policing issues revolved around the University and the large concentration of students in certain areas of the City. In addition to anti-social behaviour issues, the targeting of students by criminals e.g. the sale of drugs was a concern; and
- the policy relating to street lighting switch off would be reviewed, initial fears being mitigated to an extent as switch off disadvantaged criminal activity.

Members thanked Inspector Webber for his presentation.

13 **Presentation on Systems Review - Keep My City Looking Good**

Councillor Mitchell expressed an interest as his Uncle worked for the Parks Section.

The Chair welcomed the Keep My City Looking Good Team to the meeting who gave a presentation on progress with the systems review being undertaken for the Parks, Cleansing and Cemeteries service areas. The City Centre and Heavitree had been identified as pilot areas and, as the re-design progressed, it was the intention to widen the geographical area to improve scope for intervention and to roll in more work systems as and when larger area allows. It was the intention to widen the pilot areas to include the Newtown and Polsloe wards.

The systems thinking approach for a service involved breaking down barriers and greater integration of working. The tradition of silo working in local authorities was being challenged and a 'mixed economy of service provision' was the likely outcome. Frontline staff would be trained to enable them to perform a wider range of tasks and operatives given enforcement powers. They would also be provided with hand held devices on a trial basis allowing demand to reach the frontline as directly as possible.

The team responded as follows to Members' queries:-

- with regard to providing front line staff/operatives with enforcement powers, face to face public contact and any necessary enforcement measures would only be requested of those employees comfortable with such an approach;

- closer working with the Street Homeless Outreach Team where park operatives could advise of the location of rough sleepers was one example of integrated working;
- it was also hoped that there would be greater cohesion between other agencies, including the County Council; and
- 31 May 2013 had been identified as the cut off point after which the results of the pilot would be assessed. Any roll out across the City would be put to Members for approval.

Members thanked the team for the presentation, recognising the importance of greater integration between services.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE

14 Charging protocol for waste receptacles

The Assistant Director Environment presented the report setting out options for applying a charge to cover the provision of refuse containers to domestic premises and, depending on the option taken, the adoption of a charging protocol in response to circumstances where it may be in the public interest to waive or reduce some of these charges.

Some concerns were expressed with the preferred option of introducing charging for occupants of new build properties only, although it was noted that, in some cases, bin provision would be through a managing agent when the larger communal receptacles would be used, as with flats. As Section 106 Agreements may shortly be replaced by the Community Infrastructure Levy, which would function as a Council wide fund, it was noted that it would not be practicable to specify the charge for bin provision to developers of new housing estates. Most of the Section 106 Agreements for estates shortly coming on stream had already been signed off and could not incorporate such a requirement. The proposal would apply to all tenures of build.

Members supported the preferred option.

Scrutiny Community supported the report and requested Executive to introduce charges as set out in Appendix 1, in respect of newly developed or converted dwellings only (Option A) in combination with applying a delivery charge set out in Appendix 2 for all other requests for a range of waste receptacles (Option B).

(Report circulated)

15 Energy Works 2013/14

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts presented the report seeking approval for undertaking energy saving works on the housing stock.

She provided further detail on the costs of the PV panels and, in response to a Member's concern at the £40,000 cost for a retro-fit trial at two properties in Shakespeare Road, it was explained that the intention was to test a range of measures with view to introduction across the stock. It would be funded from within existing budgets and it was likely that some grant funding would be available. A Member welcomed the evidence based approach to these proposals.

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

- (1) the allocated Energy works budget for 2013/14, any under-spend from the 2012/13 budget, Feed In Tariff (FIT) payments and any grant income received from energy efficiency works to the installation of photovoltaic arrays to as many properties in Hawthorn Road as possible, in conjunction with the re-roofing programme;
- (2) £40,000 from a combination of existing budgets to undertake a trial retro-fit to improve thermal efficiency at two properties identified at Shakespeare Road; and
- (3) £31,200 from the Communal Areas budget for upgrading the window glass on 48 flats, in conjunction with the external rendering programme works.

(Report circulated)

16 **Empty Homes Enforcement**

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts presented the report seeking approval for a systematic approach to tackling long term empty homes in the City and the use of enforcement powers, where required, to ensure empty homes are returned back into use.

Members welcomed the proposal, one Member urging caution should any property that was purchased prove difficult to sell. The Assistant Director confirmed that there would be an element of risk with purchase but that great care would be taken to ensure that only properties with a good chance of a subsequent sale would be obtained. Members requested that extra attention be given to identifying empty properties as a result of changes in Council Tax rules and in areas with a large number of multi-room rented properties.

The Strategic Director (MP) undertook to submit a report to a future meeting of this Committee on issues relating to student accommodation.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the Empty Homes Enforcement Policy and requested Executive to:-

- (1) approve the Empty Homes Enforcement Policy;
- (2) authorise the use of New Homes Bonus to fund enforcement action on empty properties in exceptional circumstances where external services are required, to a maximum of £20,000 over the next three years;
- (3) authorise the use of New Homes Bonus in exceptional circumstances to fund the purchase of an empty property to a maximum of £300,000 per property; and
- (4) authorise the Assistant Director Housing and Contracts, subject to prior consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement, to undertake an Enforced Sale, an Empty Dwelling Management Order or a Compulsory Purchase Order as necessary to bring any empty properties back into use.

(Report circulated)

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

17 Housing Services Benchmarking 2011/12

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts presented the report setting out the findings from the 2011/12 benchmarking exercise undertaken by Housemark Core Landlord Services.

Allied to improvements emerging from the system review process, particularly in antisocial behaviour and lettings management, it was considered appropriate to update and freshen the existing performance measures and also to ensure that areas of consistently good performance, such as rent arrears, did not slip as priorities changed from, in that example, collecting rent efficiently to helping understand why residents have not paid and helping them to improve their long term financial and housing outcomes.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the key findings of the Housemark Core Landlord Services Benchmarking report and the future direction of performance management for Housing services.

(Report circulated)

18 Park Homes Forum

The Assistant Director Environment presented the report informing Members of the establishment of a Forum for residents of mobile home sites in the City giving those residents a voice. The Forum would also assist residents to identify key issues of local concern and provide information and advice to them to empower them to develop new initiatives and help foster better relationships with site owners. Contact with similar groups in the region would also help increase residents' capacity to learn from others and strengthen their capability as an association.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the establishment of the Exeter City Council Park Homes Forum.

(Report circulated)

19 Community Grants 2012/13

The Community Involvement and Inclusion Officer presented the report updating Members on the allocation of Ward Grants and City Grants in 2012/13 including a breakdown of the grants made and advising of the proposal to reduce the maximum amount of the City Grant in 2013/14.

For 2012/13, a sum of £36,000 (£2,000 per ward), had been made available for Community Ward Grants from the New Homes Bonus Local Infrastructure fund. Grants of up to £300 were on offer and decisions had been made jointly by the relevant ward councillors. City Grants, awarded to community groups delivering a service/project to residents from a number of wards or to residents from across the City, had been funded in 2012/13 from a £20,000 budget with a maximum of £3,000 on offer per group. They were decided by a city-wide panel which was made up of the Lead Councillor for Community Involvement and a representative from each of the other political groups on the Council.

Members noted the inconsistency across wards in the take up of community grants with three wards having carried forward more than £500 from 2011/12. Although it

was possible to carry forward unspent funds from Ward Grants into 2013/14, Members were opposed to this treatment of surpluses. It was therefore suggested that, in addition to reducing the maximum City Grant from £3,000 to £2,000 any surplus from Ward Grants should be transferred at the end of the financial year to the City Grants pot.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report and requested Executive, via the New Homes Bonus Panel, to support the proposals to:-

- (1) reduce the maximum City Grant from £3,000 to £2,000; and
- (2) agree to the transfer to the City Grant pot of any unspent Ward Grants that were currently being carried forward within these ward pots, the allocation of this enhanced fund to continue to be decided by the City-wide Panel.

(Report circulated)

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

20 Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring to 31 December 2012

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts advised Members of any major differences by management unit to the revised budget.

The total budget variances indicated that there would be a net surplus of £234,000 in 2012/13 which would be transferred to the HRA working balance, compared to a net surplus of £414,200 previously reported. One of the main reasons for the forecast reduction in surplus was due to an additional revenue contribution to capital to finance the acquisition of six flats at the former Royal Navy Store site for social housing.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

21 Community Services Budget Monitoring to 31 December 2012

The Strategic Director advised Members of any major differences by management unit to the outturn forecast for the first six months of the financial year up to 31 December 2012. The current forecast suggested that the net expenditure for this Committee would decrease from the revised budget by a total of £189,840 after transfers to and from reserves, which represented a variation of 1.6% from the revised budget. This included a supplementary budget of £55,200. Capital charges had been deducted from this to provide the total budget for management accounting purposes. The current forecast variance represented a £269,990 decrease in expenditure compared with the variance forecast for quarter 2.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

22 **Parkwood Leisure Management Contract**

The minutes of the meeting of the Parkwood Leisure Services Working Group held on 7 January 2013 were received.

(Minutes circulated)

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.15 pm

Chair