

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY

28 May 2013

### Present:

Councillor Shiel (Chair)

Councillors Mitchell, Bowkett, Branston, Bull, Choules, Clark, Crow, Macdonald and Spackman

### Apologies:

Councillors Morris, Mottram and Payne

### Also present:

Strategic Director (KH), Assistant Director Environment, Assistant Director Housing and Contracts, Corporate Finance Manager, Principal Accountant (SR), Housing Needs Manager, Housing Benefit Manager, Exeter Vision Partnership Support Officer and Democratic Services Officer (Committees) (HB)

### In attendance:

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

### Representing Devon County Council

Dave Black - Head of Planning and Transport  
Tony Matthews - Neighbourhood Highway Group Manager

## **23 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2013 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as correct.

## **24 Declaration of Interests**

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made.

## **25 Welfare Reform**

The Housing Benefit Manager and the Housing Needs Manager provided a comprehensive update on the latest position in respect of Welfare Reform. They set out the position in respect of Council Tax Support, the Benefit Cap, Local Welfare Support and Discretionary Housing Payments and social sector size criteria. Responding to Members' queries. The former confirmed that regular meetings were held with the Department for Work and Pensions and that explanatory leaflets to help claimants to cope had been issued with letters explaining the changes. The Council also maintained a list of support agencies to which claimants could also be referred if necessary and that this list would also be circulated to Councillors for them to advise officers of any additional bodies they were aware of.

The number of downsizing enquiries had doubled with over 90% giving the reason for their enquiry being the changes to housing benefit. 45 Council and Housing Association tenants had downsized in the last 12 months. Virtually all one and two bed properties were advertised as priority for downsizers except adapted ones.

The report is attached to the minutes and will be posted on the Councillors Information Portal. The Welfare Reform Action Plan and the Risk Map will also be posted on the Portal.

A further report on the impact of the changes would be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee on 3 September 2013.

## 26 **Highways and Traffic Management Issues**

The Chair welcomed Dave Black, Devon County Council's Head of Planning and Transport and Tony Matthews, Neighbourhood Highway Group Manager.

The latter detailed the managing of roadwork's covered by the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 and the Traffic Management Act 2004. Over 43,000 works were planned for 2013 by South West Highways and over 24,000 by utility companies. The greater the disruption the longer the notice period required. The co-ordination of works was undertaken at both a regional (Structured Regional Co-ordination Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee) and local meeting level. Enforcement of work included a legal requirement to notice works accurately, fixed penalty notices of £80 and £120 per failure and over-run charges. He highlighted the following up-coming works

- Bridge Road - the addition of an extra lane to increase capacity - mid July 2013 for two years;
- Blackall Road/Howell Road - separation of clean and foul water - mid June to mid July 2013;
- Mount Pleasant Road - gas mains replacement - mid July to early September 2013; and
- High Street - £200,000 of footway works.

Dave Black explained the Transport Strategy for Exeter which set out the current road capacity, the housing and job growth anticipated for Exeter and East Devon which would impact on the network and the planned improvements for pedestrians and cyclists, the roads, rail, bus and Park and Ride facilities.

Exeter's Cycling Strategy included a flagship facility - the new bridge over the M5 - and a hierarchy of cycle routes. Four new railway stations were planned – Marsh Barton, Monkerton, Newcourt and Cranbrook which he suggested was probably unique in the UK and consultations were ongoing with Network Rail to improve the Central Station forecourt. Improvements to the bus service included a City wide smart technology, real time passenger information and personalised travel planning and bus shelter replacements. New Park and Ride sites were planned for Cowley Bridge and Alphington to complete the circle of Park and Ride sites around the City. Other road improvements included Junctions 29 and 30, the Clyst Honiton by-pass and the Tithebarn Lane Link Road

Responding to Members, he explained both the consultation process in respect of the Alphington Park and Ride and the difficulties of increasing the capacity of the Countess Wear roundabout in comparison with the Middlemoor Roundabout.

Referring to the developments to the east of Exeter, he advised why a northern Exeter by-pass had serious logistic difficulties. He reported that special praise had been given by Department of Transport representatives to the overall plans for the Exeter Growth Point area.

The Chair thanked Messrs Black and Matthews for their presentation.

## 27 **Portfolio Holders' priorities for the forthcoming year**

Councillor Hannaford presented the annual report for 2012/13 and the priorities for 2013/14 within the Housing and Community Involvement Portfolio for the forthcoming year. The reports are attached to these minutes.

The following responses were given to Members' questions:-

- consideration was being given to the introduction of a voluntary licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation similar to that operated by Oxford. Ideally, Parliamentary legislation was required to introduce a national scheme and it was hoped that this would be progressed in the same way that the Mobile Homes Act 2013 has been introduced to tighten up the operation of mobile home parks;
- the intention was to introduce 150 extra care bedspaces across the City which would be undertaken in conjunction with Devon County Council, the primary provider. The City Council would assist with facilitation and development;
- a more joined up approach to property management would be developed to increase savings; and
- changes to the housing allocations system would be considered as a result of the flexibility offered by the Localism Act.

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:-

- because of budgetary restraints there is no schedule of improvements for play areas. Works are largely funded by Section 106 Agreements;
- a start date for the replacement of the Arena track will be known after the receipt of tenders. The Council will work further with regional bodies to attract more regional events to the City once refurbishment is completed;
- drainage works are being undertaken to the Higher Cemetery Children's burial area but not a general upgrade at this stage;
- building on the 'looking good' redesign pilot, the potential for place-based service delivery, including partnerships with the County Council to deliver services on their behalf would be explored;
- there will be proactive work with businesses to increase the number engaging with the City Council as their Primary Authority. There will also be work with Trading Standards to enhance the Primary Authority offering to businesses;
- Marsh Barton was chosen for an 'Estates Excellence' initiative focussing on health, safety and welfare of employees as it had a greater critical mass and possessed better economies of scale than smaller estates such as Pinhoe;
- a project, in conjunction with Gas Safe, will be introduced to encourage and ensure regular maintenance of gas appliances using qualified gas engineers as over 46% of catering premises had been found to be lacking in some way following routine food inspections;

- the Taxi Marshall scheme, a pilot funded by the Exeter Community Safety Partnership (Baroness Newlove’s “Alcohol Fund”) had proved a success to date with reported incidents much reduced and with the trade noting an increase in customer use. It was the intention to extend the scheme, potentially through the licensing regime;
- if the City Centre BID is successful, businesses will be further encouraged to opt for a single trade waste collector in order to co-ordinate collections;
- Museum attendance figures have levelled off but are substantially higher than before the re-development. The legal problems and over-run of the project are still being pursued and Members will be kept informed of progress; and
- the review of the Licensing Policy is a programme of work for the Licensing Committee Members, however, it was right to notify this Committee that this was one of the Portfolio Holder’s priorities.

**28 Appointment of Members to Working Groups**

Membership of the following working group was agreed as set out:-

Parkwood Leisure Contract Working Group

Councillor Shiel (Chair), Councillors Mitchell, Sheldon and Spackman.

**MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY EXECUTIVE**

**29 Revision of Environment Enforcement Policy**

The Assistant Director Environment presented the report seeking approval to revise the Enforcement Policy to reflect changes created by Government guidance and the revised structure of the directorate. The proposed revised policy ensured that enforcement actions would be fair, consistent and transparent. In response to Members’ queries, he elaborated on the tools utilised to ensure compliance with the Policy and explained that the regime was separate from that of planning enforcement.

Scrutiny Committee - Community supported the report and requested Executive to approve the Enforcement Policy.

(Report circulated)

**30 Downsizing incentives for Council Tenants**

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts presented the report seeking approval to amend the existing downsizing scheme for tenants to help mitigate the impact of the recent welfare reforms. It was explained that the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement, in conjunction with officers, had considered four options to address what changes were required to the downsizing scheme to mitigate the impact of welfare reform. Of these four options, option one was presented as the most suitable which involved an additional post to be dedicated to downsizing. Members recognised the importance of such a post. A sum of £27,227 would be allocated to fund removals at £500 a time, funding approximately 54 removals.

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

- (1) implement an amended downsizing incentive scheme for Council tenants based on option one set out in the report, the removals fund to be operated at the discretion of the Assistant Director Housing and Contracts; and
- (2) introduce a temporary fixed term Downsizing Officer post for 12 months to assist tenants downsizing by identifying the most appropriate properties and giving them support throughout the move.

(Report circulated)

**31 Commercial and Environment Support Team Statutory Service Plan 2013/14**

The Assistant Director Environment presented the report seeking approval for the adoption of the Commercial and Environment Support Team Statutory Service Plan 2013/14. The Plan set out the Council's regulatory function in respect of food safety, health and safety, licensing, Environmental Permitting and other statutory functions over the forthcoming year.

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

- (1) approve the Statutory Service Plan 2013/14; and
- (2) authorise the Assistant Director Environment to change the Statutory Service Plan in the light of centrally issued guidance and/or to meet operational needs.

(Report circulated)

**MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY**

**32 HRA Business Plan Update**

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts presented the report updating Members on the activity of the Housing Revenue Account for the financial year 2012/13 and summarising the progress being made on the HRA Business Plan (2012 - 2042).

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the progress on the HRA Business Plan 2012 - 2042.

(Report circulated)

**33 2013 Review of Recycling Plan (2011- 2016)**

The Assistant Director Environment presented the report updating Members on progress with the Recycling Plan since its approval in 2011 and seeking ongoing support for recycling initiatives.

Exeter's recycling rate has dropped slightly. This was accounted for by a drop in tonnage collected for recycling of 500 tonnes and an increase in waste sent to landfill of 400 tonnes. The overall quantity of waste collected had not increased despite continued growth in Exeter's population. This indicated that the trend towards reduced waste continued. There were a number of reasons for this, including a reduction in consumer purchasing and an on-going reduction in packaging, however,

the most notable impact on recycling tonnage was the big reduction in newspaper/print purchasing.

In response to a Member, he acknowledged that the incoming student populations were likely to have been brought up with a greater regard for re-cycling and the Council's Green Team initiative worked closely with schools on this issue in order to encourage the next generation of recyclers. The fact that different local authorities had widely varied recycling regimes meant that many students were unfamiliar with what could be recycled in Exeter. Therefore, the Council would be seeking to broaden the Green Team Partnership and explore greater collaborative working with the University.

In response to a Member, he agreed that, when the Exeter Energy from Waste Plant came on stream in 2014, it would be important to discourage residents from thinking that they no longer needed to recycle. The value of the re-cyclates for re-processing was far greater than the energy out-put that would be derived from the plant and the gate fee per tonne of waste would be more than landfill initially.

Scrutiny Committee - Community:-

- (1) noted the Council's progress to date in implementing the Recycling Plan 2011-2016; and
- (2) supported the ongoing actions planned for 2013, as set out in the report.

(Report circulated)

#### 34 **Update on Resident Involvement Strategy - 2012/15**

The Assistant Director Housing and Contracts presented the report updating Members on progress made against the Resident Involvement Strategy 2012/15 Action Plan as requested by the Executive on 20 March 2012.

A Member referred to the importance of increased engagement with the private sector.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

#### 35 **Community Safety Partnership Update**

The Exeter Vision Partnership Support Officer presented the report updating Members on the work of the Exeter Community Safety Partnership (Exeter CSP).

A key element of the CSP work was that of Task and Finish groups with each CSP priority assigned a lead agency that would drive action on behalf of the Partnership and report progress to the CSP Executive Group. It was acknowledged that membership may vary depending on availability and resourcing within agencies. The lead for each current Task and Finish group was as follows:

- Domestic, Family and Sexual Abuse - Devon County Council (in consultation with Against Domestic Violence and Abuse - ADVA);
- Alcohol, Violence and Night Time Economy - Police with possible joint Charing with the City Centre Manager;

- Anti-Social Behaviour - Exeter City Council. The existing ASBAT (Anti Social Behaviour Action Team) will be expanded to include the Fire and Rescue Service; and
- Re-offending - Devon Probation Trust building on the existing work of the "Turnaround" group.

A Member was advised that information on the effectiveness of restorative justice in respect of youth offenders would be obtained from the Youth Offending Team and passed to him. With regard to the Domestic, Family and Sexual Abuse Task Group, this group would cover a wide range of activity and would focus on crime affecting adults as well as child protection. Crimes such as sexual assault would be considered by this group, which Superintendent Chris Eastwood and the CSP regarded as a priority.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

### **PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

#### **36 Housing Revenue Account - Final Accounts 2012/13**

The Corporate Finance Manager advised Members of the overall financial performance of the Housing Revenue Account for the 2012/13 financial year ended 31 March 2013. He updated Members on the HRA working balance, major repairs reserve and of the settlement payment to implement the HRA self-financing scheme.

The total budget variances for 2012/13 had resulted in a net surplus of £525,874 which would be transferred to the HRA working balance. This represented a decrease of £1,794,396 compared to the budgeted net surplus of £2,320,270. However, this was predominantly due to additional revenue contributions towards capital expenditure of £2.084 million in respect of the acquisition of six flats at the former Royal Navy Store site and an increase in the kitchen and bathroom replacement programmes.

Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

#### **37 Community Services Final Accounts 2012/13**

The Principal Accountant advised Members of the overall financial performance of the Community Directorate for the 2012/13 financial year ended 31 March 2013. The total variation for the year showed a deficit of £172,201 against the budget, with a final deficit of £73,494 after accounting for transfers to and from earmarked reserves.

The rateable value for the Royal Albert Memorial Museum set by the Valuation Office was 50% more than was originally estimated, resulting in the National Non Domestic Rates (NDR) for the facility being £81,000 more than was estimated. The Council was appealing against the valuation, which might result in a refund, but it would take some time for this to be agreed. The cost of utilities in the RAMM exceeded the estimates by £72,500 as a result of the very high standards necessary to ensure air quality was at the correct level.

A Member raised concerns regarding staffing reductions in respect of the parks service and the Strategic Director (KH) responded by explaining that this was in line with the on-going work in respect of systems thinking.

The Scrutiny Committee - Community noted the report.

(Report circulated)

**38 Parkwood Leisure Centre Contract**

The minutes of the meeting of the Parkwood Leisure Services Working Group held on 11 March 2013 were received.

(Minutes circulated)

**39 Minutes of the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel**

The minutes of Police and Crime Panel meetings had been circulated after each meeting to Members of this Committee to enable them to raise any issues of concern or interest at these Scrutiny meetings.

Members had no queries on the latest minutes circulated, those of 9 April 2013.

The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 8.52 pm

Chair