

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14th February 2005

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Harrington (Chair), Councillor Bambrick (Vice-Chair) and Councillor Mulgrew.

Conservative Group

Councillors Hood and Lemmon.

APOLOGY

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Mrs. Mead (Labour Group).

CYS/26. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 29th November 2004 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

CYS/27. **PLAY AREAS AND THE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNCIL'S URBAN PARKS**

The Committee received a report outlining the Council's responsibilities for play areas and identifying what progress had been made in modernising the Council's sites and whether any new issues had arisen. It was reported that since July 2002 a completely new play area had been provided at Station Street Recreation Ground, Church Gresley (Section 106 monies) and, from the same source of funding a new skateboard facility had been provided at Woodhouse Sports Ground. A similar facility had also opened formally to the public at Hilton on 18th July 2004 again funded from Section 106 monies. External funding had been attracted to provide a climbing boulder at Swadlincote Woodland Forest Park.

The Committee was advised that in order to address some of the issues referred to in earlier external surveys, play equipment was removed at the Linton and Smisby sites (by the Parish Councils on the Council's recommendation), Cockshut Lane, Melbourne and at Rosliston. It was reported that the absence of capital funding until this current financial year had curtailed the progress that could be made to update the Council's play sites. However, this year's allocation of £60,000 had meant that the Council had been able to make further progress. A contribution of £5,000 had been made towards a new play site at Smisby and new play areas would be created in the spring of this year at Winchester Drive, Linton and Main Street, Hartshorne.

The Committee was advised that a number of other major capital projects anticipated to be delivered in 2005/06 contained the development of new or the upgrading of old play areas. These included:-

- £50K on a new play area, including provision for teenagers at the project to create a new recreation area at Coton Park, Linton.
- The allocation of £50K towards updating existing and providing new provision for teenagers at Eureka Park.
- £25K had been obtained from the Barclay's Spaces for Sport Scheme for teenage provision at Maurice Lea Memorial Park, Church Gresley.
- The majority of funding for the first two projects had also come from external sources.

To summarise the Committee was advised that despite the absence (until this year) of capital funding good progress had been made to improve the quality of the Council's stock. Resources were a problem in carrying out required inspections and completing repairs. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 also had implications for play areas. The challenge of funding and delivering the actions identified in the Youth Needs Survey needed to be overcome. The Committee was advised that PPG17 should provide a much more objective basis for using development money to improve sites.

The Committee also received a progress report on the Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17). Members were advised that PPG17 required local planning authorities to base negotiations with developers for contributions towards recreation, sport and open space provision on an objective study. The basis of this was an up to date assessment of need and an audit of existing provision. Some of the work that would form part of such an assessment had already been undertaken through work on the Derbyshire and South Derbyshire Facilities Strategy. The Company were also undertaking several PPG17 type surveys for other councils including Amber Valley and this added weight to negotiations with developers if assessments were consistent with those of neighbouring authorities. The consultants had been asked to look into green spaces in their widest sense including parks, allotments, cemeteries, disused church yards and other burial grounds, outdoor sports facilities, significant areas of amenity green space and provision for children and young people. Members were advised that the process involved five key stages, namely:-

- Identify local needs through questionnaires and direct consultation.
- Audit local provision through site visits and the creation of a database of provision.
- Set provision standards – could be national criteria such as National Playing Field Association (NPF) standards or an agreed local standard.
- Apply provision standards to the model.
- Draft policies based on the data that emerged.

The Committee was advised that it was anticipated that this study would be at the final report stage for consideration by Members in May 2005. The Committee was advised that whilst the Council was slightly behind schedule good progress had been made in completing this important study and the Council was ahead of its Corporate Plan target.

The Chair asked that documentation be provided on play site agreements so that there was an audit trail for future years' reference. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that a review of parish council funding was being progressed through the Parish Liaison Meeting and this would provide an opportunity to clarify various issues relating to play sites.

CYS/28. **NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDENS - UPDATE**

The Committee was advised that meetings had been held with various Council departments to discuss the potential roles and responsibilities of neighbourhood wardens in South Derbyshire. A Service Development Bid had also been submitted. The next stage of the process was to complete the Feasibility Study having investigated the alternative methods of delivering the scheme. Parish Councils would also be consulted as to what their requirement might be for a warden service and this would be fed into the Study. This work would be completed by the end of March and the recommendations taken through the Committee process.

The Committee was advised that the Service Development Proposal currently progressing through the budget process was for £165,000 Council funding over a three year period, assuming the new Local Area Agreements could provide an additional £85,000. These figures were based upon the initial appointment of up to three wardens but at this point because of the provisional nature of the Local Area Agreement finance did not allow more accurate costings to be provided. Members were advised that the provision of a uniformed patrol service had been identified within the consultation of the Community Plan as a priority for the local community but required much consideration as to the most effective deployment of a service to ensure that the expectations of the community and elected Members were realistic.

The Chair stated that it was important to encompass everyone in this initiative and was advised that the Council would need to concentrate on “hot spots” initially. Wardens would need to work in pairs during the evening. A scheme at Stockton-on-Tees had been visited recently providing an example of good practice. The Committee noted the report.

CYS/29. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received the notes of an informal meeting held on 17th December 2004 to discuss the Work Programme. The items identified for progress had been included on the agenda for this Meeting. The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration advised that a Best Value Inspection on the Repairs and Maintenance Service was to take place in June 2005 and reality checks arising there from might be needed. A Members’ Housing Seminar on the Best Value Review was to be held on 2nd March 2005 and the Committee might need a Special Meeting thereafter to consider the issues arising. It was agreed to hold an informal Meeting on 14th March 2005 at 4.00 p.m. and to invite the Council’s Housing Services Manager and Chair and Vice-Chair of the Housing and Community Services Committee to attend. The Committee might also like to consider an item on rural proofing.

It was agreed that the PPG17 feedback and the feasibility study on the neighbourhood wardens, rural proofing and the issues arising from the Housing Seminar and Best Value Inspection on Repairs and Maintenance Service together would be sufficient for the Work Programme.

CYS/30. REPORTS TO POLICY COMMITTEES

The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration advised of the need for a report to Housing and Community Services Committee on 'Reality Checking' for the Best Value Review. The Chair referred to his previous comments regarding the need for appropriate documentation on agreements for the Council's play areas. It was agreed that this issue along with neighbourhood wardens and the equity of services across the District should also be included in the report.

CYS/31. SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICES

The Committee received a detailed report on the future of the Sheltered Housing Service including the improvements which had been made in terms of service delivery and the standards of accommodation provided. This report had been considered by the Housing and Community Services Committee at its Meeting on 3rd February 2005. The Council's Housing Services Manager outlined the process of declassification. The Chair queried whether threshold levels on door replacements were being looked at and was advised that the level thresholds were part of the adopted standards but this would be checked accordingly. The Chair also referred to an issue which had been considered previously regarding appropriate timescales. The Council's Housing Services Manager advised that such timescales needed to be established in terms of priorities and a sophisticated consultation process on priorities for sheltered housing would be necessary. It was intended to start such a consultation process at the Area Tenants' Meetings during the spring.

Councillor Hood referred to the sheltered housing units at Peartree Court, Etwell. The installation of new kitchens and carpets had been delayed until the new heating system had been installed. The Housing Services Manager advised that approximately £50,000 had been allocated for the installation of the new heating system but this was now going to cost approximately £100,000 to upgrade, this finance not being available in the current financial year. The works needed to be carried out during the summer months when the heating system was not needed and it had not yet been identified where the balance in funding was to come from. However, the Housing and Community Services Committee had undertaken to find the necessary resources.

The Chair stated that there was a need to identify implementation dates for the proposed course of action for improving the sheltered housing service. A table of physical improvements on sheltered housing schemes with communal lounges was circulated and it was advised that the finance was in place to undertake this work. An additional document outlining schemes to be undertaken to upgrade sheltered housing accommodation to the agreed standards was also circulated but the Committee was advised that finance was not available currently to undertake this work. The Chair stated that communication with sheltered housing tenants was essential and was advised that this was ongoing every day but a sophisticated consultation system was to be implemented.

The Chair referred to the Housing Maintenance Best Value Inspection in June 2005 and asked how the Committee could contribute to such a process. The Housing Services Manager advised that an Officer Working Group and a Member Steering Group had been established. An Action Plan was in place and delivering in accordance with this Plan was critical prior to the Inspection process. Currently insufficient staff resources were a problem due to vacant posts. Some temporary measures had been taken but Officers would like to engage Members more within the process. The Committee noted the improvements and further proposals to the Sheltered Housing Service both in terms of service delivery and standards of accommodation provided and asked that their comments thereon be actioned accordingly.

K. HARRINGTON

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 6.00 p.m.