

FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

11th December 2003

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Wilkins (Chair), Councillor Pabla (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Carroll, Lane, Richards, Southerd, Southern and Whyman, M.B.E.

Conservative Group

Councillors Ford (substitute for Councillor Lemmon), Harrison, Mrs. Hood (substitute for Councillor Mrs. Renwick), Nalty and Mrs. Wheeler.

In Attendance

Councillors Bambrick, Bell, Harrington and Stone (Labour Group) and Councillor Hood (Conservative Group).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillors Lemmon and Mrs. Renwick (Conservative Group).

FM/59. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th October 2003 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair

FM/60. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Harrison and Southerd declared a personal interest in the item regarding Derbyshire County Council's Best Value Review of Older People in the Community due to the fact that they were both Members of the County Council.

FM/61. **REPORTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**
Best Value Review of Older People in the Community

It was reported that Derbyshire County Council completed a major Best Value Review of "Older People in the Community" during the summer. A copy of the Executive Summary had been circulated and it had been considered by the Community Scrutiny Committee. The Scrutiny Committee felt that the review might have implications for a number of Council services and that policy committees should be consulted prior to finalising the response to Derbyshire County Council.

The review was citizen based, focusing on four main themes that were originally identified through consultation with older people. The four themes were set out within the report, together with a number of specific issues. Proposals and options for improvement were outlined and a "Strategy for Older People" Action Plan was proposed.

The Committee was asked to consider how the review might impact on its service areas and a number of specific issues were highlighted to aid discussion of this topic. Councillor Harrington presented the report. He sought Members feedback and advised that they were welcome to attend the next Community Scrutiny Committee when this Best Value Review would be considered in further detail.

Councillor Carroll raised the issue of elderly people's gardens and emphasised the need to consider improving the care of such gardens. She also expressed concern regarding safety issues and suggested that assistance be provided to elderly people regarding the layout of their homes (with regard to dangerous rugs etc.) and suggested that Wardens could give basic advice on home safety. Councillor Southern advised that a gardening service was already provided. He also reported that the possibility of the Council decorating one room per dwelling per year in Sheltered Accommodation was to be considered.

Councillor Harrison advised that the views of the Community Scrutiny Committee on the Best Value Review would have been useful when considering this report as the Finance and Management Committee had not had the benefit of the presentation made by Mr. J. Simmons of Derbyshire County Council.

Councillor Whyman referred to Derbyshire County Council being a very important partner organisation to the Authority. He supported the Best Value Review in principle and awaited the financial considerations arising from the review.

Councillor Harrington advised that the Community Scrutiny wished to engage with other agencies on various further topics.

RESOLVED:-

That Members' views be reported to the Community Scrutiny Committee.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

FM/62. **DRAFT SERVICE PLANS 2004/2007**

The Committee gave consideration to draft Service Plans for the period 2004/07 for the Economic Development, Legal & Democratic Services, Financial Services, Revenue Services, Internal Audit, IT and Customer Services Divisions.

Service Plans provided an important part of the Council's Performance Management Framework and details were given of those other elements within this framework. The form and content of Service Plans had been revised with the aim of making them shorter and more focused on key issues. They had also been extended to cover a three-year period, although they would be reviewed and rolled forward annually. Progress reports would continue to be made every six months. Details were provided of the sections contained within each Service Plan. All plans had been developed on the basis that there would be no change in the level of resources devoted to that service area. Proposals for service developments or reductions along with new capital projects would be considered through a separate mechanism and

incorporated into the Service Plans at a later date. Proposals resulting from the new Corporate Plan would also need to be included later.

Economic Development

Councillor Carroll referred to a need to improve on the work already undertaken with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act.

With regard to the 'backlog of maintenance by cost expressed as a percentage', Councillor Harrison asked what additional resources were required to improve this situation. He was advised by the Economic Development Manager that additional resources would be required if Officers were to continue to reduce the backlog further. Councillor Harrison also expressed concern regarding the increasing costs for the total annual manual management cost per square metre for the property portfolio and was advised that these costs had been estimated and the real cost might not be as high.

Legal and Democratic Services

Members referred to the Right to Buy legal work being undertaken in-house in the future and the Chief Executive advised that a Business Plan would be submitted to Members of the Council outlining the potential savings to be gained from this.

With regard to liquor licensing, Councillor Southern advised that Members of East Staffordshire Borough Council had undertaken training on this matter but was advised by the Legal and Democratic Services Manager that this Council was awaiting further guidance before asking Roger Butterworth to train both Officers and Members in liquor licensing.

Councillor Lane suggested that the work undertaken in the Legal and Democratic Services Division on Section 106 Agreements should be included within the Service Plan and was advised by the Deputy Chief Executive that a report was to be submitted to the Environment and Development Committee regarding the adoption of a more strategic approach to undertaking Section 106 Agreements at its Meeting in January. Councillor Whyman asked for more Member involvement in the formulation of Section 106 Agreements.

Councillor Harrison queried whether any information had been received from the Government on the financing of the transfer of liquor licensing to local authorities. The Director of Community Services advised that the Council had estimated that £30,000 would be generated from fees and the associated staffing costs would be approximately £45,000, leaving a shortfall of £15,000 per year to be met by the Authority.

Internal Audit

Councillor Lane queried the level of risk associated with having such a small internal audit team and was advised by the Chief Finance Officer that the Council had not experienced levels of absence in that department therefore no previous problems had arisen.

IT Services

Councillor Lane expressed concern that the Service Plan did not contain a key task for developing Members IT support. Councillor Harrington (as E-Champion) advised that a bid was to be formulated which addressed Members' requirements for IT.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the draft service plans for economic development, legal and democratic services, financial services, revenue services, internal audit, it services and customer services be approved as a basis for service delivery over the period April 2004 to march 2007.***
- (2) That the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee be authorised to agree final versions of the Plans when the new Corporate Plan and the 2004/2005 budget have been approved.***
- (3) That the views of Members on the above-mentioned Service Plans be actioned accordingly.***

FM/63. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR OFFICER

The Committee was advised that following the launch of the Government's Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy, the Home Office was offering Crime and Disorder Partnerships financial assistance to appoint Anti-Social Behaviour Officers to develop, co-ordinate and deliver policy and action to reduce anti-social behaviour. This announcement coincided with the District's work on the CPA Public Open Space Review and the Community Safety Best Value Review which both identified a need for an improved and co-ordinated response to the increasing problem of anti-social behaviour in the District.

Many Crime and Disorder Partnerships were being offered this opportunity to appoint Officers from April and accordingly there would be a significant number of recruitment advertisements published in January offering short-term contracts. The actual number of people who would have the appropriate experience and qualifications for such a post was limited. Consequently, if the Partnership was to be successful in appointing an effective and experienced Officer it was felt that it was crucial that recruitment was undertaken early and an appropriate salary package and contract length offered.

Accordingly, Members were advised that the Partnership had initiated the recruitment process. A Group of Council and Police Officers had agreed an outline Job Description and Person Specification. The Partnership had agreed that the post should be created and would underwrite additional funding to offer a longer contract. A recruitment advertisement had been published and subject to the agreement of the Committee, interviews would take place in December or January. The Officer would be located within the Crime and Disorder support team of the Community and Leisure Development Division. The work of the Officer would concentrate on two main areas which were outlined as follows:-

- To deal with persistent offenders and use of legislative tools such as Anti-Social Behaviour Orders
- The co-ordination of wider initiatives to reduce disorder and nuisance in particular 'hot spot' locations

The Committee was advised that the exact level of Home Office funding had now been confirmed as £25,000 per annum for two years. A further £11,000 had already been confirmed for this year which could be used for the recruitment and other costs associated with setting up the post. The

Partnership had set a salary level of PO2 (£26,640 - £29,067, with on costs rising to approximately £33,500 - £36,500). This would leave a shortfall of between £8,500 and £11,500 in one year and £9,500 and £12,500 in year two. In year three, the shortfall would be the full cost of up to £36,500.

It was reported that a Service Development bid would be submitted to the Council plus bids to other partners such as the Police to cover the cost of the post over and above the Home Office funding for years one and two plus the full cost of year three. The Partnership would give some support to these costs should the bids not cover the total funding required.

Councillor Whyman expressed concern regarding this matter being considered outside of the usual financial bidding process.

RESOLVED:-

That the Council, on behalf of the South Derbyshire Crime and Disorder Partnership agrees in principle to recruit an Anti-Social Behaviour Officer on a three-year contract at a salary level of PO2 subject to there being funding for 3 years.

FM/64. **HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT**

Members received a report advising of the contents of some of the documentation submitted to the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate as part of the Corporate Performance Assessment process and bringing to their attention the Benefit Business Plan for 2003/04 and the service standards adopted. Copies of such documents had previously been circulated to Members.

RESOLVED:-

That the contents of the report and the associated documents be noted.

FM/65. **COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS AND EXEMPTIONS**

The Committee was advised that Section 75 of the Local Government Act 2003 inserted a new section 11A into the Local Government Finance Act 1992 which allowed a billing authority to change the level of council tax discount for classes of dwellings defined by the Secretary of State.

The second homes class excluded a pitch occupied by a caravan or a mooring occupied by a boat and dwellings owned by people who were required to live in tied accommodation elsewhere because of their work. The billing authority might reduce but not remove the discount on second homes to no less than 10%. The billing authority might reduce or remove the discount on long term empty homes. In either case, the billing authority might determine to change the discount in all or part of its area.

Members were advised that the Authority must make a determination before the start of the financial year and publish the information in newspapers circulating locally. This section and the regulations would be in effect in time for the financial year 2004/05.

Section 76 inserted a new section 13A into the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to give billing authorities in England and Wales discretion to reduce the amount of council tax payable for situations that were not covered by

national discounts and exemptions. The powers could be used in individual cases (e.g. individual hardship in cases where the tax payer was not eligible for Council Tax Benefit, for example where the dwelling was not their sole or main residence). Or, they could determine classes of case in which liability was to be reduced could be determined (e.g. the equivalent of authorities determining exempt dwelling classes, or reductions in circumstances other than those prescribed in regulations under section 13 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992). This power could be used by billing authorities from 18th November 2003.

RESOLVED:-

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That no changes be made at this stage in respect of Council Tax discounts and exemptions for the financial year 2004/2005.

FM/66. **DRAFT RACE EQUALITY SCHEME**

The Committee received a detailed report outlining the background and process which had led to the submission of the draft scheme (circulated to Members), outlined the consultation process undertaken and invited the Committee to approve and adopt the draft scheme.

Councillor Harrison asked whether training for Members on the Race Equality Scheme would be provided and was advised by the Deputy Chief Executive that Members, Officers and partners were all to receive a comprehensive training package.

RESOLVED:-

That the draft Race Equality Scheme be approved and adopted.

FM/67. **CUSTOMER FIRST PROJECT**

The Committee was advised that in September of this year, the Customer First concept was introduced at a seminar for all members. This seminar sought views on how better customer services could be delivered and put forward a range of ideas as to how this could be achieved.

A Customer First Working Group was established to look at the options for developing the Council's Customer Services to meet the changing needs. Two meetings had been held to date. In addition, the group had also visited High Peak Borough Council which had recently re-organised the way it delivered customer services.

The Committee received a detailed report on where the Council was currently and where the Council wanted to be. The group felt that the Council needed to benchmark its customer service standard by surveying its customer groups. Accordingly, in February 2004, questionnaires would be sent out to Members, staff and the Citizens Panel. The benefits of introducing a contact centre for South Derbyshire were considered. Ultimately, this centre would be able to answer the vast majority of customer queries at the first point of contact.

The Committee was advised that the group also recognised that many of the Council's customers still visited the offices and of particular concern was the number of reception areas was of particular concern. The group had also looked at the reception area from the viewpoint of customers and identified concerns in terms of confusion with more than one reception point, poor lighting and poor arrangements for confidential meeting rooms. The group considered therefore that it would be difficult to move forward without making changes to the layout of the reception area to provide a more welcoming environment with a single reception point.

Members were aware that all Councils were facing the challenging E-Government targets for all services to be delivered electronically by December 2005.

The Committee received detailed information on how the customer services could be improved. It was noted that the Council was a member of the Derbyshire Partnership. This partnership had received Government funding of £2 million to be spent on a range of E-Government projects. The most significant project was a common Customer Relationship management (CRM) computer system. At least six councils including South Derbyshire were part of the CRM Project being funded by the Derbyshire Partnership. The Partnership was currently evaluating tenders for a system to be used across all the partner councils with implementation envisaged before the end of March 2004. This would provide the cornerstone of a contact centre as it would allow for the details of every customer call to be recorded and monitored to ensure that the query was answered.

With regard to answering customer calls the Committee was advised that it was essential that Officers answering customer calls had all the information they needed to hand. This would be a very time consuming but essential task. It involved developing scripts that provided contact centre staff with prompts when dealing with a customer enquiry. Over 400 tasks had been identified for a Council similar to that of South Derbyshire. Each one of these would need to be documented and scripted before they could be dealt with within a contact centre. Documenting the Council's processes would also enable the Council to produce service standards that set out clearly to customers what level of service could be expected. The Council's website would also be an important tool for contact centre staff to answer general queries and needed to be kept up to date.

The Committee was advised that the Customer Relationship Management Computer System was the backbone of a contact centre. In order to progress this management system it was necessary to identify two posts to undertake the work and act as Team Leaders for call centre staff in the future. A revised staffing structure envisaged that the roles of the two Team Leaders would be split between managing the Central Reception Area/Information and Fact-to-Face customer contact and managing Contact Centre staff answering telephones. Initially, it was proposed that these posts be advertised internally.

The Committee was advised that the following enquiries could be dealt with ultimately within the Customer Contact Centre:-

- Environmental Health e.g. pest control enquiries
- Revenues & Benefits
- Planning & Building Control

- Direct Services e.g. Refuse Collection enquiries
- Housing
- Elections

At this stage, the group considered that there might be some benefit in adopting an incremental approach commencing with Environmental Health as this department's general queries were currently answered by the Customer Services Team.

A feasibility study to look at options for reorganising the reception area had already been commissioned and this would identify options and costs involved with making this area more customer focused.

It was reported that the group considered that continuing to take cash payments at the very least presented certain security risks for the Council. Officers had been asked to look at alternative ways for Council residents to make cash payments in addition to the facility of using Post Offices. The financial implications of all the proposals were outlined in detail.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Customer First Project, as outlined and the associated work programme be approved.***
- (2) That a feasibility study be commissioned to look at options to redesign the Council's reception area to create a more customer friendly environment.***
- (3) That the implementation of a new Customer Relationship Management system using funding from the Derbyshire Partnership be approved.***
- (4) That the vacant post within the division be utilized to prepare for the new system.***
- (5) That an investigation of alternative payment options to replace the existing cash office be approved.***

FM/68. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT [ACCESS TO INFORMATION] ACT 1985)**

RESOLVED:-

That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the Meeting as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that there would be disclosed exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Act indicated in brackets after each item.

MINUTES

The Exempt Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th October 2003 were received.

BANK HOUSE (Paragraph 9)

The Committee agreed to grant a lease for Bank House on the terms outlined.

LAND TO THE SIDE OF NO. 19 WALTON CLOSE, SWADLINCOTE (Paragraph 9)

The Committee agreed to sell the land in question.

LAND TO THE REAR OF NO. 4 MONKS CLOSE, STENSON FIELDS (Paragraph 9)

The Committee agreed to sell the land in question.

HOUSING SERVICES STAFF STRUCTURE (Paragraphs 8 and 11)

The Committee approved personnel changes and Housing Revenue Account expenditure for the Housing Services Department.

CAR USER ALLOWANCES (Paragraph 11)

The Committee agreed an annual review process for the car user allowance entitlements for employees.

AGENCY WORKERS (Paragraph 11)

The Committee received a report relating to temporary employees and agency workers and agreed to receive a further report on this matter to a future meeting.

REGRADING APPLICATIONS 2003/2004 (Paragraph 11)

The Committee agreed to the proposed increases in grades as submitted and authorised that any unresolved applications be reported to a future Committee should this be required.

P.J. WILKINS

CHAIR