

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17th June 2002

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Harrington (Chair), Councillor Bambrick (Vice-Chair),
Councillors Evens and Sherratt.

Conservative Group

Councillor Mrs. Robbins (arrived at 5.40 p.m.).

In Attendance

Councillor Bell.

CYS/1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillor Rose (Labour Group) and Councillor Harrison (Conservative Group).

CYS/2. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 22nd April 2002 were received.

CYS/3. **ARRANGEMENTS FOR MEETINGS**

The Committee agreed to commence future Meetings at 4.30 p.m.

CYS/4. **LEISURE FACILITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Council's Policy and Best Value Manager advised that the aim of this particular Meeting was to look at the general issue of leisure, planning policies for leisure and recreational facilities and the Council's cultural strategy etc. The Committee needed to examine what were the issues, where were the gaps in provision and consider options for the future. The Facilities and Development Manager outlined background information and current issues regarding the provision of play equipment. The District Council inspected/maintained approximately 250 items of equipment throughout the District at 45 sites. Only 8 of these sites were managed directly by the Council. At the other sites, the arrangements could be somewhat confusing. From the Council's viewpoint the equipment on parish council sites belonged to the parish council and they had responsibility for the day to day management of the site. Use of the play equipment by the public should be covered by parish council public liability insurance and parish councils had been made aware of this on a number of occasions. Some confusion arose however because there were parishes who took the view that the equipment was installed by the District Council in the distant past and was therefore the District Council's responsibility.

The Council's commitment at village based sites was to inspect and maintain the play equipment on behalf of parish councils. This work was funded through the concurrent functions budget. Twice yearly inspections were undertaken by the Council's insurance company and other inspections were

undertaken by the Council's staff. The inspections undertaken by the Council's insurance company were engineering rather than risk assessments.

Members were advised that the majority of the Council's equipment stock was over 30 years old. The Council's overall strategy was to replace/renovate whole sites rather than safety surface or try and update old equipment. For village sites the Council was reliant on partnership arrangements with parish councils based on a 50/50 split of costs. Depending on the size of the village the cost of a new site was between £20,000 and £30,000. The Council had enjoyed some success with parish councils but others were reluctant to enter into such a partnership agreement. No real external grant funding was available to fund this type of work. The Committee was advised that a capital allocation had not been provided for replacing/renovating play equipment but a bid had been resubmitted as part of the current budgetary process.

It was reported that in 1998/99 the Council commissioned a detailed survey by an external consultant into the quality of its play areas. This survey identified priorities for work to be undertaken within the next few years. The Council had probably undertaken approximately 80% of the work identified as Priority 1 and where work had not been carried out it was due to a lack of response from the relevant parish councils. It was noted however that the Council still had large amounts of play equipment that did not conform to the latest safety standards. Under existing health and safety legislation risk assessments of play equipment should be carried out. New safety standards were not retrospective or a legal requirement but represented good practice in the event of an accident claim.

(At 4.45 p.m. Councillor Evens arrived.)

The Facilities and Development Manager advised that the Division was currently in the process of a mini Best Value Review on this particular service. The Chair emphasised a need to be clear about how the Council was going to deal with parish councils on the issues raised. Councillor Sherratt advised that Hartshorne Parish Council had notified the District Council that it no longer wished to manage one of its recreation grounds from March 2003 however the Facilities and Development Manager was not aware of this. The Chair asked the Facilities and Development Manager to provide a further report to a future Meeting outlining some of the issues raised in more detail but also with a view to examining the issue of the costs involved for the provision of the BMX/skateboarding facility. The Council's Community and Leisure Development Manager advised that the Crime and Disorder Partnership were organising a seminar to take place in Autumn and were inviting parish councils to discuss the issue of youth shelters etc. because funding was forthcoming for teenagers provision as opposed to play equipment. Councillor Sherratt indicated that he felt that the Committee should be recommending that finance be provided for replacing/repairing poor safety equipment.

The Facilities and Development Manager emphasised the current issues for his Division which involved problems in delivering commitments to parish councils. The Council was in the process of clearing the backlog of repair work to play equipment but it was questioned whether the Council should continue to offer this service. Problems had been experienced in completing

actions identified in the insurance inspector's report within timescales identified and there was need to update/review the consultant's original report. There was a traditional resource problem in completing repairs by DSO staff which were undertaken secondary to grass cutting. A service development proposal for dedicated officer support to carry out repairs was not approved last year. The provision of safety surfacing meant that the cost of carrying out repairs far exceeded the budget available. In 2002/03 work at parish council sites totalled £5,100. Safety surfacing repair work required currently totalled a value of approximately £6,000. Other factors such as the age of the equipment and increased vandalism were all exacerbating the problem. The Facilities and Development Manager also outlined that the Council did not have a qualified risk assessor for play equipment and even if it did so the resource issue would require consideration. In light of the information referred to above the Council was recommending that equipment be removed at some parish council sites.

CYS/5. **SERVICE PLANS**

Community and Leisure Development

A copy of the above Service Plan was circulated for information. The Council's Community and Leisure Development Manager advised that work on the Service Plan had progressed well. A Community Drugs Officer had recently been appointed and it was intended to appoint an Analyst to carry out crime mapping. A "Walking the Way to Health" co-ordinator had also been appointed. It was outlined that the Division were currently behind on developing Service Level Agreements but it was intended to submit a report on this matter to the Community Services Committee in September 2002. There was also a need to review the community partnership work area. Considerable work had been carried out at the Rosliston Forestry Centre car park and there was now a need to look at the issue of pay and display at that site. The Community and Leisure Development Manager outlined that the focus of his division's work was in the area of crime and disorder, regeneration, supporting voluntary sector projects, getting people involved in culture and health improvement and promotion.

Councillor Sherratt expressed concern regarding the wide remit of the work involved within the Community and Leisure Development Division. The Community and Leisure Development Manager advised that community partnership work would be undertaken by Malcolm Roseburgh once the SRB Scheme had been "wound up". Currently it was unclear how much Stuart Batchelor and Malcolm Roseburgh would be involved in local strategic partnerships. There was no longer a capital amount available to assist the project in obtaining further monies and there was also a lack of staff resources. The Deputy Chief Executive referred to the restructuring exercise undertaken in the last two years and advised that the 42 posts erased from the establishment were mainly in discretionary service areas rather than statutory service areas and departments such as Leisure and Development had lost valuable resources. The Community and Leisure Development Manager advised that work was being undertaken to attract further funding but this was not in the traditional areas where funding had been achieved in the past.

Technical Services (Leisure)

The Facilities and Development Manager outlined that the Council was currently installing new play equipment at Newhall Park as a result of successful partnership working with the “Friends of Newhall Park” group. The bid for work to be undertaken to the Maurice Lea Memorial Park was being submitted by March 2003. It was reported that there was no immediate prospect of the Etwall Leisure Centre project progressing. Much work had been undertaken at Swadlincote Woodlands and approval had been received for obtaining Doorstep Green Money for the Coton Park project. Work was continuing with the “Friends of Eureka Park” group with the view to upgrading the Park site but limited progress had been made. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that in the past the Council had followed the focus of Government spending expectations and in the early days the Government had supported “bricks and mortar projects”. This had raised expectations for further such projects but money was now available in other service areas (such as community and leisure development) but not so much in the facilities service area.

CYS/6. **CULTURAL STRATEGY**

The Community and Leisure Development Manager introduced a Time-line document outlining progress made to date with regard to the Derbyshire Cultural Strategy. The Derbyshire Local Government Association was to consider and approve the Derbyshire Cultural Strategy in August 2002 and the South Derbyshire Cultural Strategy Writing Team would then complete local action plans. In September 2002 the Community Services Committee would adopt the Derbyshire Cultural Strategy with local action plans and in October 2002 the Strategy would be approved and launched.

(At 5.40 p.m. Councillor Mrs. Robbins arrived.)

Examples of good practice supporting cultural activity in South Derbyshire were circulated. It was noted that 1,000 questionnaires had been sent to the South Derbyshire Citizens Panel and 739 responses had been received. A general summary of the responses received were circulated for information. It was noted that it was intended to approach members of the Citizens Panel for their views approximately four times a year.

CYS/7. **LOCAL PLAN – POLICIES FOR LEISURE AND RECREATION**

This item was deferred to the next Meeting.

CYS/8. **COMMUNITY STRATEGY**

Members were advised that the Local Government Act 2000 gave Council’s new powers to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of their area. This was linked to a duty to prepare community strategies with local strategic partnerships and to fully involve local people in the process.

According to Government guidance, the Community Strategy must:-

- Allow communities to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities.

- Co-ordinate the actions of the Council, and of the public, private, voluntary and community organisations that operate locally.
- Focus and shape the existing and future activities of these organisations so that they effectively meet community needs and aspirations.
- Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development both locally and more widely, with local goals and priorities relating, where appropriate, to regional, national and even global goals.

The guidance stated that the process by which the Strategy was produced was as important as the Strategy itself. The Government considered that the most effective way of ensuring the commitment of organisations would be for local authorities to work with other bodies through a Local Strategic Partnership. According to the guidance, a Local Strategic Partnership was a single body that:-

- Brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors so that different initiatives and services support each other and work together.
- Is a non-statutory, non-executive organisation.
- Operates at a level which enables strategic decisions to be taken and is close enough to individual neighbourhoods to allow actions to be determined at community level.
- Should be aligned with local authority boundaries.

Circulated to Members was a copy of the progress report submitted to Council in January 2002. It reported the outcome of an assessment by District Audit of the Council's arrangements for preparing the Strategy. Seminars had been held on this subject and facilitated by Dr. Steve Rogers of INLOGOV. Arrangements were currently being made for a first meeting between the Council and a small group of key stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors who were likely to form the core of the Local Strategic Partnership. This meeting was planned for 16th September 2002 and would be facilitated by Dr. Rogers. Plans were also being developed for an inter-service officer working group to support the development of the Strategy and the work of the Local Strategic Partnership. It was envisaged that this group would be able to complete some preliminary work (e.g. mapping existing partnerships) prior to the September meeting.

CYS/9. **FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The 2003/03 Work Programme for the Community Scrutiny Committee was circulated. The Policy and Best Value Manager asked whether the Committee wished to continue with "themed" meetings. It was suggested that the next Meeting could look at Housing Part 1 and also Health (Sally Knight offered to liaise with Derbyshire County Council regarding the scrutiny of social services). It was agreed that the next Meeting should also consider the Leisure related items arising from today's discussions. The Committee would examine Best Value Reviews as and when required. The Council's Policy and Best Value Manager agreed to provide a further amended work programme for Members' information.

(The Chair suggested that as there were currently new Members serving on the Community Scrutiny Committee then some internal based training might

be appropriate. It was agreed to circulate the self assessment form produced by Personnel and Development and also to repeat the Best Value training focusing on “challenge”.)

K. HARRINGTON

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 6.10 p.m.