

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

18th July 2002

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Southern (Chair), Councillor Lauro (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Pabla (substitute for Councillor Dunn), Mrs. Rose, Routledge, Stone, Taylor and Whyman.

Conservative Group

Councillors Hood and Lemmon.

In Attendance

Councillor Harrington (Labour Group) and Councillors Shaw and Mrs. Wheeler (Conservative Group).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillors Carroll, Dunn and Mrs. Mead (Labour Group).

CS/19. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 6th June 2002 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

CS/20. **MEMBERS QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

The Chair referred to the recent Derbyshire Youth Games and he paid tribute to the representatives of South Derbyshire who had competed in the games. The Girls' Cricket Team had won its competition and he made a presentation to representatives of the Team. Members applauded the Team's success.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

CS/21. **PRESENTATION FROM AURORA COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTS**

A tour of the Forestry Centre had taken place prior to the Meeting and the Committee received a presentation from Debbie Chesterman of Aurora Country Developments. She explained the partnership approach to managing the Forestry Centre, spoke of community involvement and recognised the contribution of groups involved in projects such as the "Sensory Garden". An outline was given of the services delivered through the Centre including the "Rascals" after school club, school visits, work with Special Needs students and those with mental ill-health. Over recent years, there had been a shift in emphasis in the services provided at the Centre.

Recently, improvements had been made to the Centre's car park and a cycle route had been established. Future development plans included construction of log cabins on the Site to provide overnight accommodation. The Centre's cafeteria had recently undergone a change of management and

comments were made on the improvements to date and further services proposed for the cafeteria.

Members sought further information about the Centre's opening times and the public carriage rides provided. There were no perceived security problems on the Site, but a further development proposal, subject to the availability of resources, was to install lighting on the car park and possibly closed circuit television. The Chair voiced his thanks to Debbie and Wayne Chesterman for the development work undertaken and for the presentation made.

RESOLVED:-

That the presentation be received.

CS/22. **PRESENTATION FROM TACT**

The Committee received a presentation from Kevin Cockayne and Sandra Smith of the Tenants Advisory and Consultation Team (TACT). They informed Members of the progress made by the Group to July 2002. TACT operated as a formal link between the eight area-based tenant groups and the Community Services Committee. It allowed for consultation between representatives of Area Tenant Groups, tenant's associations, tenant's voices and the District Council.

Details were given of TACT's membership, its Terms of Reference and the areas covered by each of the tenant groups. There were two tenants associations for the Melbourne/North-east and Linton Areas and a number of tenants' voices - people who represented tenants in their respective areas. In March 2002, a Tenants' Resource Centre had been opened in Castle Gresley and this provided a meeting room, training venue, library and office. Details were given of the equipment provided at the Centre and how the Centre was managed. Information was provided on the work undertaken by TACT, the consultation and participation work in which TACT was involved. The presentation concluded with TACT's vision for the future and an announcement of the launch of its website, which was understood to be the first in Derbyshire.

Members asked whether there were plans to extend this forum to include home owners and this was proposed for the future. Further information was sought on tenant consultation arrangements and the proportions of tenants sampled. The Chair praised TACT and the Council's participation Officer for the work undertaken and he thanked their representatives for the presentation.

RESOLVED:-

That the presentation be received.

CS/23. **BRETBY CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

RESOLVED:-

(1) That the Open Minutes of Brethby Crematorium Joint Committee Meeting held on 28th November 2001 be received.

(2) That the Open Minutes of the Bretby Crematorium Scrutiny Panel Meeting held on 10th April 2002 be received.

CS/24. ROSLISTON FORESTRY CENTRE – CAR PARK

Members were reminded that the Rosliston Forestry Centre Executive was established to consider options for its future management. The Executive was responsible for the appointment of Aurora Country Developments to manage the Centre and details were given of the attractions established by Aurora over the last four years. Visitor numbers were reported for the period 1998-2001 and it was clear that development of the facilities had increased visitor numbers and associated site maintenance costs. These costs were now in excess of £18,000 per year. Additionally, there was the need to fund the management contract which had to date been funded mainly by external grant aid. Options had been investigated to generate additional sources of income and the introduction of charges onto the newly expanded car park was proposed.

The original car park was constructed in 1995 and catered for a maximum of 39 cars. The partner organisations had decided to improve car parking facilities and at the same time construct a network of four cycle trails around the Site. The new car park would cater for up to 180 cars and had been designed to resemble an informal forestry car park. The project had cost over £100,000 and was funded through grant assistance and partner contributions.

The Forestry Commission had estimated the likely income that would be generated from 'Pay and Display' car parking charges and comparisons were made with other Forestry Commission sites within the West Midlands. The Executive proposed a charge of 50p for up to 1 hour and £1 for a whole day. It believed that a two-tier pricing policy would not discourage short visits and would be recognised as value for money to those staying for a longer period. A reduced rate would also be available for people using the Centre on a regular basis in the form of an Annual Pass costing £10. Disabled Badge Holders would be exempt from the charges. The Executive would be responsible for setting the annual car park charges. The estimated income for the first year from the car parking fees was £7,150 excluding VAT. The purchase and installation of meters would be undertaken by the Forestry Commission. Management of the machines and policing of payment would be undertaken by site managers. The cost of operating the machines was approximately £500 per year.

Members noted that the decision to implement car parking charges was a matter for all partner organisations involved in the Centre rather than the District Council in isolation. Members discussed the pricing policy and wished to ensure that the imposition of charges would not have a detrimental effect on visitor numbers. Officers confirmed the local consultation that had been undertaken and recent feedback following a press article about the proposal. Clarification was given on the capital costs of installing the parking meters.

RESOLVED:-

That Members approve the introduction of car parking charges and the making of an application for the necessary Orders, as detailed in the report.

CS/25. **ETWALL LEISURE CENTRE JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

At its Meeting on 11th April 2002, the Committee received an update on the provision of new leisure facilities on the John Port School site. The same report had been submitted to a recent meeting of the Community Group. Whilst it was obviously met with disappointment, the Group reaffirmed its commitment to the project. An area which the Group felt could be improved was communication with partners involved in the project. Members of the Group had invested time and effort in raising money. They felt excluded from the decisions taken about the Centre, both its existing operation and the delivery of the project to provide new facilities.

It was proposed that two representatives of the Group be co-opted onto the Joint Management Committee on a non-voting basis. In terms of procedure, the 1974 Joint Agreement covering management of the facility made no provision for co-option. However, local Government legislation permitted the appointment of non-voting co-opted Members to joint committees. The power to agree such co-option lay with appointing authorities, which in this case were the County and District Councils. If agreed, the actual appointments could be made by the Joint Management Committee.

The Chair advised that this report had been considered by the Joint Management Committee at its Meeting on 15th July 2002. He spoke of the need to keep the Community Group involved and the desire to co-opt two representatives onto the Joint Management Committee. Councillor Whyman declared a personal interest and enquired why the School had not been a party to the decision to co-opt the Community Group representatives. It was explained that the original 1974 Agreement was made between the County and District Councils. A number of Members spoke in support of the proposal and it was questioned whether Derbyshire County Council would resume its representation on the Joint Management Committee.

RESOLVED:-

That, subject to the agreement of Derbyshire County Council, two Members of the Community Group be co-opted, in a non-voting capacity, onto the Etwall Leisure Centre Joint Management Committee.

CS/26. **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION**

(Note: At 7.00 p.m. Councillor Shaw arrived and Councillor Routledge left the Meeting).

The Committee received a report which set out a proposed structure for performance monitoring and reporting in the Housing Service. Local authorities were required to publish details of their performance. National performance indicators were issued annually by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and local authorities were encouraged to set and monitor local performance indicators in areas of interest to their council. Regular

monitoring enabled Councils to take responsive action where appropriate rather than merely receiving year-end performance information. The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Working Group had established a list of objectives for the landlord business, which had influenced local performance indicators chosen for the Service.

Consideration was given to the recommended performance indicator framework. There were a series of indicators crucial to managing and understanding the landlord business. These related in the main to income and expenditure and to Government requirements. The Government set particular importance to performance in a number of areas which were detailed in the report. Information would be collected periodically and performance compared year-on-year to top quartile performance nationally and against national and service targets. It would enable managers to understand performance and to respond appropriately.

The approach was a significant change from previous practice and it would take time to establish the systems to capture all of the information required. Details were given of the information systems already in place and progress on the establishment of others.

The Service was required to set targets for national best value performance indicators and had already done this for indicators which formed part of the Council's Best Value Performance Plan. Councils were expected to achieve a level of performance equivalent to the upper quartile of performing authorities by 2005 in those areas where it had set national targets. Government also required councils to meet the Decent Homes standard by 2010 and to achieve interim targets in 2004. Targets would be set in all areas once information on past performance had been gathered. These targets should "stretch" those involved in service delivery, whilst being attainable. The targets would be included in this year's Business Plan where available, in future years' plans and be cascaded to managers and staff so that all involved were clear how they contributed to the overall service improvements required.

The Service was investigating the benefits and costs associated with membership of a benchmarking facility for Housing Services. This would provide comparable information to assess the Council's performance and give access to good practice information and briefings. In considering the performance information framework, it was acknowledged that the Council did not have an integrated IT system capable of producing the required reports. A specification was being prepared for a new system to provide integrated information and it was anticipated that it could be in place in the next financial year, subject to the availability of resources. In the meantime, a stand alone database was to be established and staff training provided. Key performance information would be reported to Members, staff and tenants representatives and the first briefing was appended to the report as a basis for discussion.

Members reviewed the Housing Briefing Note. The position on Contract 10 of the Planned Maintenance and Improvement Programme was clarified. A question was submitted about research into the numbers of people with learning difficulties that were living with elderly relatives. It was agreed to investigate this matter and to respond to the Member concerned. Members suggested reviewing the format of the Briefing Note to present the

information in a more simplistic way. Clarification was given on the time taken to deal with homelessness applications and on the rent arrears statistics provided.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee notes the report and that performance information be developed over the next six month period.***
- (2) That Members' comments on the proposed Housing Briefing document be noted.***

CS/27. **CUSTOMER CARE CHARTER**

It was reported that the Customer Care Charter had been produced to improve the standard of customer care in Housing Services. A team comprising members of TACT, Officers from Housing Services and a representative from Pennington Consultants had prepared a draft charter which was appended to the report. All Housing staff would be consulted and their comments taken into account before the final document was produced. The document would then be launched in September 2002 and promoted through various mechanisms. The Charter would be monitored on a regular basis and full annual review undertaken.

Members welcomed the Charter and referred particularly to the phone call protocol and arrangements for home visits. The involvement of local Ward Members was also discussed and it was agreed to revisit this aspect.

RESOLVED:-

That Members note the details of the draft Customer Care Charter and the timetable for implementation.

CS/28. **SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICES**

Members were reminded of the Best Value inspections of the Sheltered Housing Service in June 2001 and February 2002, together with the rating received and the subsequent restructuring of the Sheltered Housing Service. The Best Value inspections had prompted a wider examination of the Housing Service and Pennington Consultancy Services were commissioned to undertake diagnostic work. A Change and Improvement Programme was formulated, approved by the Committee and funding allocated to support this programme. Additional capital expenditure of £85,000 was also proposed for the Sheltered Housing Service.

Members reaffirmed their commitment to the programme and noted the key achievements to date. To secure an improved rating from the Audit Commission, there were a number of key areas remaining to be addressed and examples were provided. Appended to the report were details of progress made against the interim challenge recommendations and proposed additional improvement actions for which Members' approval was sought. Members discussed the progress made to date, commenting particularly on establishment of a cleaning contract and proposals to remodel a Sheltered Housing Scheme.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That Members note the improvement actions undertaken in relation to the Sheltered Housing Service.***
- (2) That Members approve the further proposed improvement actions detailed in the report.***

CS/29. PROGRESS WITH THE CHANGE AND IMPROVEMENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME FOR HOUSING

It was reported that significant changes had been made to working practices in the Housing Service over the last two months. The changes had included a more team-based approach, working closely with the Head of Community Services and Pennington Consultancy. Monitoring arrangements had been put into place to ensure Member enquiries and complaints were addressed and to provide valuable feedback. A residents' panel had been established and sample reality checks were underway. The imminent stock condition survey results would provide a wealth of information, enabling a programme of works, to bring properties up to "Decent Homes" standards. Work was continuing to address longer-term issues such as the new integrated IT system and how to provide wider access to services for tenants.

The Housing Service embarked on a twelve month improvement programme in May 2002. This was based around the recommendations to deliver service improvements for the future, feedback from the Housing Inspectorate and internal Housing Service reviews. The improvement plan identified actions required within one, three, six and twelve months. A table showed the actions identified for the first six months of the programme and the progress made during the first two months of the programme. Members asked questions and sought clarification on particular aspects of the progress report. It was reiterated that the Council had taken an open and transparent approach to addressing the problems identified. Congratulations were again voiced for the staff and to Pennington Consultants for their contribution in delivering the progress made to date.

RESOLVED:-

That progress with the Change and Improvement Management Programme for Housing be noted.

CS/30. INCENTIVE TO MOVE SCHEME

It was reported that the sale of Council houses through the Right to Buy Scheme had reduced the level of the housing stock to 3,601 properties. A third of properties were classed as sheltered accommodation and of these, 42 had been unoccupied for more than four weeks. There were 403 applications currently registered for two, three and four bedroom accommodation in the District.

The 2001 Business Plan stated the intent to reduce the number of empty units in sheltered accommodation and address the issue of under-occupation in the general housing stock. The Incentive to Move Scheme was intended to augment current policy and increase the amount of family accommodation available for re-let. It would give priority to elderly Council tenants under-

occupying two, three or four bedroom properties, who were prepared to transfer to smaller, more appropriate, sheltered accommodation. Those tenants in this category would be awarded an additional 25 points under the allocations policy. Where there was more than one applicant for a particular property, priority would be afforded to the applicant with the most points under the Council's points scheme. The scheme would provide financial assistance up to a maximum of £400 towards specified moving costs. Organisational assistance would also be provided through the Voids Team.

Members commented on the reduced housing stock due to the Right to Buy Scheme and the lack of affordable rented properties available. No pressure would be placed on tenants to participate in the scheme. An approach would be made to those tenants who had previously expressed an interest in moving into sheltered accommodation. Clarification was sought on how the scheme would work and clear publicity would be needed for tenants. Members were mindful of the sensitivity of this subject and the difficult balance between the needs of current elderly tenants and those of other people seeking affordable accommodation.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee approves the pilot Incentive to Move scheme for a trial period and the allocation of £2,000 to fund the pilot scheme.***
- (2) That a further report be submitted to a future Meeting of the Committee detailing the family accommodation released and the associated costs, to enable the extension of the scheme to be considered once the pilot project has been completed and the funding allocation committed.***

(Note: At 7.45 p.m. Councillor Harrington left the Meeting).

CS/31. **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 6th June 2002 were received.

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS (Paragraph 8)
Nos. 14-16 Wellwood Road, Newhall

The Committee agreed to the disposal of a Unit of first floor flat accommodation.

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - RENT RESTRUCTURING PROPOSALS
(Paragraph 8)

The Committee was informed of Government proposals for restructuring housing rents of local authorities.

LAND TO THE REAR OF LEEDHAMS CROFT, BELLS END ROAD, WALTON-ON-TRENT (Paragraph 8)

The Committee agreed a course of action for the future use of an area of Council-owned land.

R.W. SOUTHERN

CHAIR