

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15th October 2001

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Richards (Chair) and Councillors Evens and Sherratt (arrived at 5.15 p.m.).

Conservative Group

Councillors Harrison (arrived at 5.25 p.m.) and Mrs. Robbins.

In Attendance

Councillor Bell (Labour Group).

CYS/7. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 6th September 2001 were received.

CYS/8. **BEST VALUE REVIEWS**

Sheltered Housing

Members received a detailed report outlining progress being made to implement the recommendations of the Best Value Housing Inspectors following their final report issued in June 2001 and gave detailed consideration to the progress made against the authority's own Action Plan to improve the sheltered housing service.

One of the items contained within the Action Plan was to investigate tenants' concerns over allocations of sheltered housing accommodation to younger tenants. Arising out of the action taken in this regard Councillor Evens queried whether homeless people were ever re-housed into sheltered accommodation and was advised that single parent families or homeless families were never re-housed into such accommodation.

With the permission of the Chair, Councillor Bell queried the timescales involved in actioning the recommendations arising out of the Best Value Inspection and was advised that all the dates were to be reprogrammed and it was anticipated that the reviewed service would be effective by 1st April 2002, following which the service would be "bedded in". The technical equipment required for the upgraded service was to be in place before any operational changes were made.

The Head of Community Services advised that all tenants would be advised of the changes to be made to the service following the Committee call-in period.

Development Control

Members received a detailed report advising them of progress being made to implement the recommendations arising from the Best Value Review of the Development Control Service.

One of the actions outlined was the employment of an additional Building Control Officer to improve access, security, energy consumption and waste recycling in buildings. The Planning Services Manager outlined the problems in recruiting such a multi-skilled Building Control Officer (B.C.O.) and suggested that the salary level of PO2 and above was required in this regard. He stated that the appointment of such an officer could encourage the sustainable use of resources for any new build properties/conversions and felt that the Council could exceed the targets arising from the Best Value Review. Councillor Harrison queried whether external funding for this particular B.C.O. post could be attained considering the conservation element of the job and it was agreed that this matter should be pursued.

As part of the Action Plan officers were to develop the Council's web page/internet access and advertise it and Councillor Harrison suggested writing to all parish councils and the local media advertising the Council's web site. The Policy and Best Value Manager agreed to include details of the web site when publishing the Council's Performance Indicators and the Planning Services Manager agreed to look at the number of "hits" to the Council's web page to ascertain its effectiveness.

The Planning Services Manager talked about low staffing levels within the Development Control Unit and the associated Administration Unit and highlighted that improved IT could compensate partly for this and assist with performance monitoring. Improved IT would also help in the areas of Land Charges and consultation with the Environmental Health Department on planning applications. The Deputy Chief Executive suggested that Members of the Committee take part in a tour of the Development Control Department prior to the next meeting of the Committee and it was agreed that this should be arranged.

Car Parking

The Policy and Best Value Manager outlined that the Best Value Review on Car Parking was to be carried out by the same team who had recently completed the Cleansing the Environment Best Value Review. Accordingly, it was suggested that the Car Parking Review be reprogrammed to commence in January 2002. A more detailed report on the timescales for this Review would be submitted to the next Meeting of the Committee. Councillor Evens queried how this delay would impact upon the yearly investigation by the District Auditor as to whether the Council had considered imposing a charge for car parking and was advised that this Council was currently awaiting the results of a North West Leicestershire District Council survey completed on the same topic.

CYS/9. **SOUTH DERBYSHIRE COMMUNITY STRATEGY**

The Deputy Chief Executive circulated a document introducing a Community Strategy for South Derbyshire. It was noted that such a strategy must have the long term vision for the area, an action plan of shorter priorities, shared commitment to the action plan with firm proposals and arrangements for monitoring, review and reporting progress on the strategy and the plan.

Each strategy would engage and involve the community and councillors, be prepared and implemented by a "local strategic partnership" and be based on an assessment of needs and the availability of resources.

The Deputy Chief Executive outlined that the process by which the community strategy was produced was as important as the strategy itself and that a strategy must contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom. He outlined that by working in partnership with other organisations the Council could achieve things which it would not achieve operating independently. By the end of 2001 the Council needed to advise the Government how it intended to produce such a plan. A seminar for all Members was planned for late November. A sub-group of Members could then be established to draft a local strategic partnership and the Council's "plan to have a plan".

CYS/10. **MEMBERS' TRAINING**

The Council's Employee Development Officer outlined that following the success of last year's Developing the Role of Members in Overview and Scrutiny course, the Council was now to host the advance level Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government Course on Tuesday 20th November 2001.

The objectives of the course were:-

- (1) To further provide for Councillors the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge required for the effective Overview and Scrutiny of Local Government activity.
- (2) To gain further understanding of good practice.
- (3) To provide an opportunity for Councillors to reflect on their experiences of Overview and Scrutiny and to discover different ideas and solutions to take back to their respective authorities.
- (4) To identify skills, knowledge and attitudes which would enable Councillors to be more effective scrutineers.

The course was to be led by Councillor Geoff Williams who was the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny of the Planning Function in the City of Worcester where he was a leading Member.

CYS/11. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee gave consideration to its current workplan and agreed minor revisions to it in light of previous discussions. It was noted that the Overview Committee felt that it already had a sufficient workload without taking on further special projects and Members of the Community Scrutiny Committee echoed these thoughts. A revised work programme for the Community Scrutiny Committee would be circulated in due course to reflect the inclusion of training events and the review of the start date of the Car Parking Best Value Review.

K. J. RICHARDS

CHAIR

The meeting terminated at 6.35 p.m.

