

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

6th June 2002

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Southern (Chair), Councillor Lauro (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Carroll, Dunn, Mrs. Mead, Mrs. Rose, Routledge, Stone, Taylor and Whyman.

Conservative Group

Councillors Hood and Lemmon.

In Attendance

Councillors Bell, Richards and Rose (Labour Group) and Councillor Mrs. Wheeler (Conservative Group).

CS/1. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 11th April 2002 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

CS/2. **MEMBERS QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

The Chair made a presentation to representatives of the Pingle Panthers Basketball Team. He congratulated the team and its manager on their recent achievements and presented certificates to the team representatives.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

CS/3. **GREEN BANK LEISURE CENTRE – PRESENTATION BY SLM**

It was reported that SLM was currently in year 4 of a 10-year contract to manage the Green Bank Leisure Centre on behalf of the Council. A presentation was made by Jon Senior, Group Community and Leisure Manager, Charlie Crane, General Manager and Dominic Bentley, Health and Fitness Manager. Mr. Senior outlined the presentation content, the Company's structure, its current position and development proposals. Mr. Crane explained the special events organised at the Centre, the programme of activities for the swimming pool and dry leisure facilities. Current issues of concern were maintenance and redecoration of the Centre. The Company's customer focus and approach to quality assurance was explained together with staff development initiatives. Dominic Bentley gave an overview of the "Banana" fitness and health facilities provided at the Leisure Centre. Dedicated schemes were provided for GP referral, the over 50's, a junior programme and a saver card scheme. He outlined recent developments to the fitness and health services provided.

Members took the opportunity to ask questions about the operation of the Leisure Centre. Problems had been experienced with the toilet facilities on a number of occasions and this had been highlighted recently with adverse press publicity after an evening wedding function. An explanation was given of recent measures taken to improve the toilet facilities adjacent to the reception area.

Details were sought of the contract monitoring arrangements and the visits undertaken by the Council's Client Officer. A Member asked about the half-term activities provided and the qualifications held by play workers supervising these sessions. A proposal had been submitted by SLM to restructure the food and beverage services. This included the closure of the cafeteria and it was explained that there was reducing demand for the cafeteria and bar services and competition from other outlets in the Town Centre. The representatives of SLM were invited to explain their achievements and the problems experienced in operating the Leisure Centre Management Contract to date together with their vision for the remainder of the contract period. The Chair welcomed the opportunity for more frequent feedback in the future and he thanked the representatives of SLM for the presentation.

RESOLVED:-

That the presentation be noted.

Note: At 7.00 p.m. Councillor Lemmon left the Meeting.

CS/4. **SERVICE PLANS – MONITORING REPORTS**

It was reported that Service Plans provided an important part of the Council's performance management framework. In November 2001, the Committee approved Service Plans as a basis for service delivery over the next twelve to eighteen month period. Monitoring reports were submitted to identify the progress that had been made in the six months before and after the plans were approved. Each report contained sections on:-

- a description of the service
- achievements (especially from a service user perspective)
- areas for improvement (along with explanations)
- service developments (agreed as part of the last budget round)
- budget reductions (and the implications for service users)
- new/emerging issues (which might affect the way the service is delivered over the next 6 months)
- progress on Best Value Reviews
- progress on corporate, departmental and service key tasks
- performance in respect of Best Value and Local Performance Indicators and Targets

A second round of monitoring reports would be submitted to the Committee in October 2002.

Members considered the Service Plan for the Community and Leisure Development Division and questioned the role undertaken in supporting

community and voluntary organisations making bids for external funding. Under the Housing Service Plan, Members discussed the Review of sheltered housing services and implementation of an action plan. The Chair commented on the loss of community and social activities for some schemes. An outline was given of the partnership approach being pursued, linking sheltered housing to social and health services. A meeting had been held recently with Derbyshire County Council to specify particular concerns and ensure a 'seamless' and consistent service. Future Best Value inspections and funding issues were also discussed.

It was noted that the Environmental Health and Technical Services reports included matters which were the responsibility of the Environmental Services Committee. For information, an update was given on the revised regulations governing the removal of abandoned vehicles. Progress on the composting scheme, the retention of civic amenity facilities at Bretby and the possible transfer of liquor licensing to local authorities were also discussed. A request was submitted for assistance to the "Friends of Eureka Park" group. Comment was made about the relatively low budget provision for the maintenance of memorials and it was explained that a development proposal was to be submitted during the forthcoming budget review process.

RESOLVED:-

That Members approve the Service Plan monitoring reports submitted for the Community and Leisure Development and Housing Services Divisions and the reports for the Environmental Health and Technical Services Divisions in relation to the responsibilities of the Committee.

CS/5. **BEST VALUE REVIEW - HOUSING SERVICES**

It was reported that at previous Meetings, the Committee had agreed the scope for this Best Value Review and the key issues for improvement. Since that time, the Review Team had met to challenge how the allocations and housing register, homelessness and housing advice services were currently provided. Four key issues for improvement had been identified on which the remainder of the Review would focus:-

- The provision of accessible and appropriate service information to customers.
- The requirement for short and longer term improvements in the storage, retrieval and management of information on the housing register and homelessness.
- Joint working arrangements between housing staff and other agencies.
- Improved working environment and information/support to enable staff to provide effective services.

The updated action plan for the remainder of the Review was appended to the report.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That progress on the Housing Best Value Review be noted.***
- (2) That the key issues identified for improvement in relation to allocations and the housing register, homelessness and housing advice be approved as submitted.***

CS/6. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN**

It was reported that in November 2001, a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Planning Group was established. An update was provided on the work of the Group which had met six times, prepared objectives for the housing service and researched a range of housing options. Appended to the report were the agreed objectives for the Service and these objectives would be incorporated into the HRA Business Plan. In addition, members of the group, staff, tenants and Committee Members had received presentations from other authorities which were delivering their housing service using Private Finance Initiatives or Arms Length Management. A visit had been undertaken to South Staffordshire to see the delivery of its housing service following a stock transfer, through a housing association.

The Group was reviewing how the range of housing options met each objective from a service perspective. At its next meeting, the Group would consider the results of the stock condition survey and the financial implications of the survey on the agreed objectives. A report would then be produced for the Committee to summarise the objectives, how the options available met these objectives, an indication of the financial consequences and a recommendation on how to proceed with the option appraisal process. The Group would also consider the draft HRA Business Plan in advance of its submission to the Government Office as part of the 2002 Housing Investment Programme. The Group had agreed a communication strategy which included regular feedback to the Committee and other specified mechanisms.

Members discussed the restructuring of social rent levels. There was some confusion over the likely impact for Council tenants of the rent restructuring exercise and clarification was provided. It was perceived that 'Right to Buy' applications would increase and Members considered the situation in the private rented sector. The objective to move to a more open lettings policy and to reduce reletting times was welcomed. The Chair commented that a Special Meeting of the Committee would be convened to consider the final Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee notes the progress and future Work Plans of the Housing Revenue Account Business Planning Group.

CS/7. **REVIEW OF TENANT PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT AND ACTION PLAN**

Members were reminded that the Tenant Participation Agreement and Action Plan was signed on 22nd March 2001, prior to the Council Meeting. To ensure the document's effectiveness, it was reviewed and monitored constantly and a full annual review was undertaken. The annual review had commenced in January, being undertaken by a team of three TACT members

and the Tenant Participation Officer. Each section of the document had been reviewed and amendments made to reflect changes agreed by the Committee. Two new sections on how tenants were involved and a complaints procedure had been included. A copy of the new agreement had been circulated.

The Action Plan had been updated to identify those completed actions and a list of new actions had been prepared which allocated responsibilities and timescales. The Chair had attended the final Review Team Meeting and concurred with the proposed amendments and new actions identified. The revised documents would be distributed to specific locations throughout the District and tenants would be informed of major changes through the Tenants Extra newsletter. TACT members were compiling a report of their achievements to date.

The Chair paid tribute to TACT members and Officers involved, understanding that the Council was at the forefront of tenant participation thanks to their efforts. These sentiments were echoed by the Leader of the Council and other Committee Members who endorsed the excellent progress made.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the revised Tenant Participation Agreement and Action Plan be approved.***
- (2) That members of TACT be invited to present their report on achievements at the next Meeting of the Committee.***

CS/8. **SALE OF LAND OFF PENISTON RISE, MELBOURNE**

The Committee's approval was sought to grant an easement over land in its ownership at Peniston Rise, Melbourne or to consider the sale of this land. For a number of years, problems had been experienced with a private sewer which had caused a smell nuisance for Council tenants on Peniston Rise. The Environmental Health Department had requested the adjacent landowner to disconnect the private sewer serving his property and to arrange for a connection into the public sewer in Peniston Rise.

As a consequence, the landowner submitted an application to purchase a small area of Council land between nos. 15 and 17 Peniston Rise. It was noted that the landowner had an existing right of vehicular access across this route. The sale of the land was not required for the new sewer connection to be constructed as this could be achieved through granting an easement.

In considering the application, Members felt the land could be considered as a ransom strip, should subsequent development of the privately-owned land be pursued. Resolving the smell nuisance problems was the principal objective.

RESOLVED:-

That an easement be granted, free of charge to allow the sewer construction to take place.

CS/9. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT [ACCESS TO INFORMATION] ACT 1985)**

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 11th April 2002 were received.

HOUSING CHANGE AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (Paragraph 9)

The Committee was informed of the results of the Best Value Inspectors' review of the Sheltered Housing Service, the recent diagnostic work commissioned from Pennington and the proposed Change and Improvement Programme for Housing.

APPOINTMENT OF LANDSCAPE CONSULTANTS – MAURICE LEA MEMORIAL PARK (Paragraph 9)

The Committee approved an ad-hoc list of consultants to tender for further development work at the Maurice Lea Memorial Park.

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

The Committee considered options for the future use of an area of land at Leedhams Croft, Walton-on-Trent.

R.W. SOUTHERN

CHAIR