

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SPECIAL)

25th September 2006

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Lane (Chair) and Councillor Mrs. Mead.

Conservative Group

Councillors Atkin and Bladen.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillor Bambrick (Vice-Chair) and Councillor Lauro (Labour Group) and Councillor Lemmon (Conservative Group).

CYS/21. **SPECIAL PROJECT – ACHIEVING TARGETS 2006/09 - PLANNING**

The Committee considered a report on Achieving Targets 2006/09 – Planning. The purpose of the report was to enable the Committee to scrutinise proposals by the Head of Planning Services on changes necessary to improve the performance of the Planning Service with regard to the determination of planning applications in the context of a sustainable department structure.

On 13th July 2006, the Environmental and Development Services Committee resolved to ask this Scrutiny Committee to examine the issues around the achievement of the Best Value Performance Indicator targets for the processing of planning applications, BVPI 109[a]-[c] (time taken to determine planning applications) was expected to be in the second quartile by March 2009 and the background to Members' scrutiny of this issue was as follows:-

- 31st July 2006 – Community Scrutiny Committee to consider the request from Environmental and Development Services Committee.
- 10th August 2006 – presentation by consultants on business re-engineering exercise undertaken.
- 14th August 2006 – informal Meeting of Members to consider a briefing note prepared by the Head of Planning Services.
- 11th September 2006 – Community Scrutiny Committee to consider a progress report.
- 25th September 2006 – Special Meeting of Committee arranged to consider the proposals outlined in the report of Head of Planning Services.

Having considered the report submitted and discussed the matter in detail, the findings of the Community Scrutiny Committee were as follows:-

- The planning service had undertaken a review of the 2003 Customer Satisfaction survey and had consulted staff regarding user requirements.
- The experience of other local authorities had been investigated and similar processes had been undertaken by other exemplar authorities.
- There had been an exhaustive staff appraisal of the system which Members had been able to challenge.

- A comparison had been made with other local authorities, which concluded that this Council offered a good service, giving Value For Money in the Best Value Review inspection in 2001.
- The planning service was currently meeting its planned performance targets.
- The planning service review had revealed the need to obtain the skills of a qualified urban designer to support the attainment of BVPIs 109a-c.
- BVPI 205 (Quality of Planning Service checklist) was a priority indicator where top quartile would not be achieved without the proposals in the report of the Head of Planning Services being met.

It was agreed:-

That the Committee endorses the proposals set out below which will be included in a report being prepared by the Head of Planning Services to be considered by the Environmental and Development Services Committee on 5th October 2006:-

- **Streamlining existing processes.**
- **Introducing measurable milestones to enhance performance management and improve the delivery of the service via the website.**
- **Enabling fast tracking of certain planning applications.**
- **Making better use of Customer First.**
- **Strengthening the approach to urban design.**
- **Maximising the use of existing resources.**
- **That a post implementation review of the planning service be undertaken in April 2008 to ensure that the stated outcomes for the service are being delivered.**

CYS/22. **SPECIAL PROJECT – ACHIEVING TARGETS 2006/09 – WASTE MANAGEMENT**

The Committee considered a report which examined the issues around the achievement of Best Value Performance Indicator targets for the Council's waste management service, as requested by the Environmental and Development Services Committee at its Meeting on 13th July 2006. The background to Members' scrutiny of this issue was as follows:

- Community Scrutiny Committee on 31st July 2006 to consider the request from Environmental and Development Services Committee. The Committee at this Meeting requested that BVPI 86d (cost per head of waste collection) be included on the list of waste management performance targets to be scrutinised.
- Informal Meeting on 14th August 2006 to consider a briefing report prepared by the Head of Environmental Services.
- Site visits on 30th August and 8th September 2006 to Rushcliffe Borough Council, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council and Blaby District Council to visit waste management sites.
- Community Scrutiny Committee on 11th September 2006 to consider two reports:-
 1. Progress report on identification of issues arising from the briefing report.
 2. The Council's current plan to develop the Council's waste management service.

- 18th September 2006 – informal Meeting with the Director of Community Services and the Head of Environmental Services to clarify a number of issues around the waste management service.
- Informal Meeting on 19th September 2006 with Head of Planning Services regarding planning guidance in respect of waste management issues.

The Committee requested that all the background reports which had been used to prepare the current report be made available.

The following main issues were identified by the Committee during its consideration of the Council's waste management service:-

- How are recycling centre sites determined?
- How are the types of materials for collection from recycling centres determined?
- The provision of additional Civic Amenity Sites.
- More detailed financial information regarding the provision of various waste management services, e.g. green box, blue bag, composting schemes, collection costs from recycling centres etc.
- Details of the Council's waste management contract arrangements.
- The performance targets set by the Council in respect of waste management issues.
- The targets set in the Waste Minimisation and Recycling Plan (2005-2009) lack robustness.
- Publicity, education and awareness raising issues, in particular within schools.
- The implications of the National Waste Strategy.
- The implications of the County Council's Waste Strategy.

The findings of the Scrutiny Committee were summarised within six themes. These were as follows:-

Recycling

- Currently, householders were provided with a green box for additional recyclable materials. The scheme had expanded recently to 33,000 households in the District. The plan was to extend the scheme over the next three years to the remaining 4,000 households. In addition the Council had 81 'bring sites' across the District.
- This Committee considered that the existing plans to implement the green box scheme to the remaining households was too slow and it should be possible to accelerate this process, which would help the authority meet the top quartile performance targets. However, this may affect the viability of existing 'bring sites'. In the main, the 'bring sites' adequately served the District except for two possible rural sites.

Composting

- The Council's brown bin compost scheme had been expanded to 18,000 households in the District. The plan was to extend the scheme over the next four years to the remaining 19,000 households.
- The existing brown bin collection scheme operated for 40 weeks per year.

- The Committee considered that the existing plans to implement the brown bin compost scheme to the remaining households was too slow and it should be possible to accelerate this process, which would help the authority maintain top quartile performance and deliver the country-wide waste strategy.
- By extending the compost collection period, the Committee considered that the amount of household waste would be reduced, as more waste would be composted.

Waste Minimisation (Education/Publicity)

- At present, there was a side waste collection service, and arbitrary restrictions were applied to wheeled bins with lids not closed fully.
- The Committee considered that there were health and safety issues regarding side waste collections and wheeled bins that had partially open lids. The implementation of the recommendations would help minimise waste.
- Currently, there were no kerbside collections of plastics. Plastics were collected with residual household waste.
- Residents had indicated strongly that they would like the Council to offer a plastic waste collection service.
- The current Waste Minimisation Plan needed to be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Targeted. [SMART].
- The Committee noted that over the last two years, 24 schools in the District had been made aware of the benefits of recycling and waste minimisation.
- The Committee considered that the Council should adopt a more innovative and proactive approach to publicising and promoting its waste management services and its successes. A higher profile school education programme should be adopted.

Improving the quality of our service to our customers

- It was noted that a wheeled bin cleaning service was not provided.
- To address the issue of wheeled bin hygiene criticisms from residents, a cleaning service could be offered in partnership with other private contractors.
- The waste management section of the Council's website was well presented, informative, structured logically and easy to use. However, some pages were out of date and not all application forms could be completed on-line.
- During the site visits, it was noted that other authorities had very strong 'branding' and advertised and promoted their services extensively. It was considered that a similar approach should be adopted by this Council.

Improving Efficiency

- Currently, the Council covered the capital costs for the provision of new wheeled bins/green boxes. The District was one of the fastest growing areas in Derbyshire and the Council should investigate the scope for securing developer contributions.

Strategic Approach to Waste Management

- It was noted that the new National Waste Strategy and the likely County response was being developed. There were fundamental implications on the possible impact for the Council's waste management services.
- Currently, the County Council provided only one civic amenity site in the District and this was the lowest provision for any District in Derbyshire.
- A strategic review of the whole of the waste management service needed to be undertaken.

The Committee expressed its thanks to all the Officers and Members who had helped prepare the reports and provide information and advice which had assisted the scrutiny of this issue.

It was agreed:-

That the Environmental and Development Services Committee be recommended to approve the following proposals:-

Recycling

- **Accelerate the implementation of the 'green box' scheme across the District.**
- **Review the number of 'bring site' locations in order to ensure Value For Money.**

Composting

- **Accelerate the implementation of the 'brown bin' compost scheme across the District.**
- **The extension of the 'brown bin' (compost) collection service throughout the year, except two weeks over the Christmas period.**

Waste Minimisation (Education/Publicity)

- **Review the existing side waste collection facility.**
- **Review a 'closed lid' wheeled bin policy.**
- **Consider options for the kerbside collection of plastics.**
- **Ensure that the Waste Minimisation Plan is SMART.**
- **A more innovative and proactive approach in publicising and promoting the Council's waste management services and its successes.**
- **The adoption of a higher profile and more proactive school education programme.**

Improving the quality of our service to our customers

- **In partnership with other contractors, the offer of a wheeled bin cleaning service.**
- **Ensuring that the Council's website is updated regularly.**
- **Ensuring that the website application forms can be completed on-line.**
- **Consideration of the 'branding' of the Council's waste management service.**

- **Advertise/promotion of all waste services to all households.**

Improving Efficiency

- **Investigation of the scope for securing developer contributions for development for the purpose of improving waste management provision.**

Strategic Approach to Waste Management

- **Development of the Council's strategy and performance using the existing 'building capacity' initiative as its next project, and the concentration of shifting resources savings into the performance delivery of the service.**
- **The urgent review of the financial implications of the Council's current waste management service in relation to the National Waste Strategy and the County response.**
- **Request for additional civic amenity sites in order to serve the rural community.**

CYS/23. HOUSING PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: HOMELESSNESS BVPI 183A AND BVPI 183B

The Committee considered a report on the arrangements for improving services in respect of BVPI 183[a] (Length of stay in temporary accommodation [bed & breakfast]) and BVPI 183[b] – (Length of stay in temporary accommodation [hostel]). The report also considered the approach adopted in respect of homelessness issues.

BVPI 183[a] and BVPI 183[b] had been identified as priority indicators for the Council. The Best Value Performance Plan 2006 had indicated that the outturn performance for BVPI 183[a] in 2004/05 had been bottom quartile and this trend had continued into 2005/06. It was noted, however, that during the same period, BVPI 183[b] was top quartile and trends indicated continuing improvement during 2005/06. It was noted that plans to achieve top quartile performance for BVPI 183[a] by March 2009 were not being addressed, although continuous improvement had been identified in the target setting process.

The Committee requested that all the background reports which had been used in the preparation of the current report be made available.

Community Scrutiny Committee's Findings

The Committee's findings were summarised as follows:-

- A Housing Service Performance report to the Committee on 31st August 2006 indicated that performance of three weeks was currently being achieved in respect of BVPI 183[a]. This performance was better than the published target of four weeks. BVPI 183[b] performance was still top quartile.
- There appeared to be some positive aspects to the performance level quoted above as the service was now moving its focus from being 'reactive' to one that aspired to prevention. In response to customer

requirements, housing staff had been trained to mediate and counsel potential homeless people by offering a more flexible advisory service.

- Housing Officers were able to adopt a more flexible approach to prevent homelessness by supporting or stabilising difficult circumstances.
- Housing Officers had indicated that they were confident that the homelessness service they provided would meet the needs of the community, but due to the relative low levels of need, one difficult case had the potential to distort the underlying performance.
- The Committee had been reassured that the Council's Homelessness Strategy document was currently being reviewed.

The Committee was satisfied that the Council was providing a good level of service but recommended that the service investigate how other similar local authorities approached homelessness and how they could achieve top quartile performance in respect of BVPI 183[a].

The Committee expressed its thanks to all Officers and Members who had helped prepare the report and who had provided information and advice which has assisted in the scrutiny of this matter.

It was agreed that the Housing and Community Services Committee be recommended to investigate how other similar local authorities approach homelessness issues and how they achieve top quartile performance for BVPI 183[a] (Length of stay in temporary accommodation [bed & breakfast]).

CYS/24. AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION OF THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICE

The Committee considered a report on the progress made by the Housing Services Division in completing the recommendations made by the Audit Commission following its inspection of the Council's Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service in June 2005.

The Audit Commission inspection covered the following areas:-

- Access, customer care and user focus.
- Diversity.
- Capital improvement, planned and cyclical maintenance and major repairs to the Council's 3,235 homes.
- Responsive and void repairs.
- Gas servicing.
- Aids and adaptations for people with disabilities.
- Resident involvement and value for money.

The Audit Commission report setting out its findings was published in October 2005 and the Commission's overall judgement was that the Council provided a 'fair' one star service with 'promising' prospects for improvement. The Inspectors identified a number of positive aspects about the repairs and maintenance service but also found a number of service areas that needed improving. The Inspectors stated that the Council's prospects for improvement were promising but they also identified a number of 'barriers' to improvement which included:-

- Some actions identified in previous inspections had not been implemented and progress had been slow on some issues.
- Best Value principles had not been effectively and comprehensively applied to the service.
- Information Technology systems were not yet sufficiently developed.

The Audit Commission went on to make a number of recommendations designed to help the service to continue to improve. The findings of the Community Scrutiny Committee were based on a detailed assessment of the Audit Commission's recommendations and the progress made to date in implementing them.

The findings of the Scrutiny Committee were as follows:-

- The report now submitted had been prepared to clarify the progress made by the Council's Housing Services in fulfilling the recommendations by the Audit Commission inspection of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service in June 2005.
- The findings revealed that the Housing Services Division was making significant progress in achieving the recommendations made by the Audit Commission.
- Both this Scrutiny Committee and the Housing Services Division were concerned that the Audit Commission had no plans in place to re-inspect the Council's Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service in the immediate future.
- The lack of any formal recognition by an external organisation that improvements to service delivery had been made may have a demotivational effect on staff, who had made progress on the Audit Commission's recommendations, where possible.
- Providing that the Housing Services Division continued to maintain its focus and build on its current progress, it was possible that some elements of the Housing Service could achieve 'Beacon' status.
- If a re-inspection of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service was undertaken in twelve months time, a significant improvement to the re-rating of the service would be realised.

It was confirmed that an independent Value For Money assessment for repairs and maintenance had been agreed by the external auditor as a reasonable course of action. A separate report to the Scrutiny Committee in late October 2006 would comment on whether it might be necessary to place the repairs and maintenance works out to tender. The procurement process was likely to cost in the region of £50,000 to the Council. In the absence of a planned Audit Commission re-inspection of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service, the commissioning of an independent assessment in eighteen months time was likely to cost in the region of £7,000 to £8,000.

The Committee expressed its thanks to all the Officers and Members who had helped to prepare the reports and had contributed to the discussion and scrutiny of this area.

It was agreed to make the following recommendations to the Housing and Community Services Committee in respect of the Audit Commission's inspection of the Council's Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service:-

- **That the tenants’ obligations with respect to ‘dealing with asbestos’ should be included in the lettings agreement (see Audit Commission Ref: R3).**
- **That a separate report advising on the implications of the slippages in the Sheltered Housing ‘Vision and Standards’ Plan be prepared for the Housing and Community Services Committee (see Audit Commission Ref: R4)**
- **That the need for a frequency of post inspections be reduced (see Audit Commission Ref: R5).**
- **That a discount system be investigated for retrospective annual review of repetitive work in the proposed contract arrangements (see Audit Commission Ref: R6).**
- **That, as there appears to be scope for improvements in the delivery of Disabled Facility Grants (DFGs), arrangements with the Council’s partners be reviewed as a matter of urgency (see Audit Commission Ref: R7).**
- **That the extension of reporting times to include Saturday mornings be reviewed (see Audit Commission Ref: R9).**
- **That a ‘capacity building’ exercise be undertaken to develop the housing maintenance and repair service/Disabled Facilities Grants with a view to improving performance, quality and Value For Money (see Audit Commission Ref: R12).**
- **That, in the absence of a planned Audit Commission re-inspection of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service, the commissioning of an independent assessment of the service be made within eighteen months time to allow for the completion of the Implementation Plan and to collect six months performance data.**

R. LANE

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 2.40 p.m.