

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21st March 2012

PRESENT:-

Conservative Group

Councillor Mrs. Plenderleith (Chairman), Councillor Atkin (Vice-Chairman) and Councillors Mrs. Hood and Mrs. Patten,

Labour Group

Councillors Bambrick, Bell and Mrs. Mead.

OS/32. **APOLOGY**

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Pearson (Labour Group).

OS/33. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meetings held on 18th January and 8th February 2012 were taken as read, approved as true records and signed by the Chairman.

OS/34. **NON-REIMBURSEMENT OF HOUSING BENEFIT SUBSIDY**

Under Minute No. OS/13 of 26th October 2011, the Committee considered a report on this review area. One of the issues identified was that housing benefit costs relating to accommodating homeless applicants in temporary accommodation were not reimbursed in full by the Government. The question was raised whether these costs could be reduced, whilst maintaining an effective service.

The detail of the report explained the previous subsidy arrangements, before setting out the costs incurred in 2010/11 and those anticipated for 2011/12. The net cost to the Council was in the region of £20,000 to £25,000 per annum. Housing Benefit was payable at different rates, dependent upon the nature of the accommodation. This was detailed within the report and the key financial issue was whether the cost of providing an alternative type of accommodation was less than £25,000 per annum. Some councils had dedicated units of accommodation, but in smaller authorities this tended not to be the norm, as the demand was less predictable and the capital cost prohibitive. The case for review was not limited to the financial aspects, as bed and breakfast accommodation was not ideal for anything other than short-term stays. The implications for homeless applicants living in such accommodation could compound an already stressful situation. Currently, the Council tended to use chain hotel provision, which was not necessarily well located in terms of ease of access and proximity to community facilities. The

main providers were Travelodge on the A38 and Etap on the A50. The reasons for using such chain hotels were also set out within the report.

Next, options were considered for the future and a table was included within the report showing the capital and revenue costs, together with the advantages and disadvantages of either building new units of accommodation, dedicating current accommodation, entering into a formal agreement with a provider of B+B accommodation or through negotiating better rates with the current hotel chains, based on a guaranteed minimum number of clients. The recommendation was for the latter option and this was considered by the Committee.

In response to Members questions, it was confirmed that this funding related to the General Fund rather than the Housing Revenue Account. It was noted that the average length of stay in such accommodation was typically 1.7 weeks, although there had been some longer-term cases this year, skewing statistics and the officer offered to confirm this year's position (subsequently confirmed as 2.9 weeks). Members recognised the implications for families in such accommodation, in terms of the lack of facilities and remote location of some of the chain hotels. There was discussion about the number of families located in such accommodation at any time and this was difficult to predict. Another option discussed was hostel accommodation and the extensive management this required. The Welfare Reform agenda was changing and it would be better to await the outcome of this before commencing a large-scale project. Other areas explored included a partnering arrangement with a bed and breakfast provider. A Member had suggested using facilities in a neighbouring authority's area and this was discussed. It was noted that there would always be some residual costs related to temporary accommodation for homeless persons.

Note: At 6.25 p.m., Councillor Atkin left the Meeting.

There was a consensus amongst Members about seeking to negotiate a reduced rate for the current accommodation used. It was also felt that a report should be submitted to a future Meeting of the Committee on the partnering options available, once the position on the Welfare Reform agenda was clearer.

It was agreed:

- (1) That Officers seek to negotiate a reduced bed and breakfast rate for accommodating homeless applicants, utilising the threshold of a guaranteed number of clients.**
- (2) That Officers explore further the option of partnering with a local bed and breakfast organisation, which may incur some capital costs, but would potentially reduce ongoing revenue costs and that a further report on this aspect be submitted to the Committee's Meeting in October.**

OS/35. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2011/12

The Committee was asked to give initial consideration to the Draft Annual Report. The document would need to be updated to include decisions made on future work programming and with regard to the Crime and Disorder scrutiny work, due to take place immediately prior to the Meeting on 2nd May 2012. Delegated authority would be sought for Officers to finalise the document in consultation with the Chairman, to enable it to be submitted to the Annual Council Meeting.

It was agreed to receive the Draft Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2011/12.

OS/36. WORK PROGRAMME

It was reported that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed an annual work programme, which was reviewed at each Meeting. A copy of the current programme had been circulated. A verbal report was also provided on the 2012/13 work programming session that had taken place immediately prior to this Committee. It was confirmed that the refreshed programme would include the following review areas:-

- Review of Cemetery Provision in South Derbyshire.
- Leisure Services Update (October Meeting – to be held at Rosliston), to cover:
 - The new joint leisure contract for Green Bank and Etwall Leisure Centres.
 - Rosliston Forestry Centre (including Environmental Education aspects).
 - Seeking a presentation from the group managing Melbourne Leisure Centre on its plans.
 - A review looking at use of the Town Hall and Delph Area of Town Centre (June Meeting).
- A presentation on the Elections function.
- The Localism Act:
 - Register of Assets of Community Value.
 - The joint Area Forums/Safer Neighbourhoods trial.
 - Parish Councils and the planning process – effective consultation.
 - Wider consultation with Parish Councils and Members (possibly linked to the circulated LGIU paper).
- Prescribed Scrutiny areas: Crime and Disorder, Budget Scrutiny and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers.
- Swadlincote Woodlands Update (December Meeting).
- Housing Benefit Review Update (October Meeting).
- Grounds Maintenance (Task Group).
- Early Years Provision (to be discussed with the Lead Member for this review).

It was requested that an update from the Grounds Maintenance Task Group be provided to the next Committee Meeting. A verbal update was provided on

the Localism Act and the Secretary of State was due to publish regulations shortly. Once these had been received, a further report would be provided to Members. An update was also given on the move to a Police and Crime Commissioner and the related Police and Crime Panel. A series of regulations were anticipated over the coming months and an outline was provided to Members.

The Committee noted the report and agreed the proposals set out above for the initial work programme for 2012/13.

MRS. A. PLENDERLEITH

CHAIRMAN

The Meeting terminated at 6.40 p.m.