

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13th February 2008

**PRESENT:-**

**Conservative Group**

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

**Labour Group**

Councillors Bambrick and Lane.

**In Attendance**

Councillors Grant, Harrison, Hewlett, Lemmon, Mrs. Patten, Roberts, Timms, Mrs. Wheeler and Wheeler (Conservative Group) and Councillors Richards and Southerd (Labour Group).

OS/40. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held 5th December 2007 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

OS/41. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Mrs. Wheeler declared a personal interest in respect of the discussion on broadband with British Telecom, as a relative was an employee of the Company.

OS/42. **BROADBAND – DISCUSSION WITH BRITISH TELECOM**

The Chairman introduced Tom Hamilton, British Telecom's Regional Manager for the East Midlands. Members were advised that a number of discussion topics and questions had been forwarded to Mr. Hamilton prior to the Meeting. He gave a presentation to respond to these issues. Initially, he spoke about British Telecom as an organisation and its different divisions. He provided some community information on the Company and then gave further detail on each of its divisions. He responded to a question from Councillor Wheeler about the Company's 21st century network programme and particularly how this would improve the resilience of the service.

Mr. Hamilton then spoke about on the network in South Derbyshire and confirmed that nearly all properties within the District could receive a broadband service. He spoke about issues affecting broadband, the difficulties for those unable to receive a service, slower connection speeds and possible solutions.

Councillor Mrs. Wheeler sought further information about the upgrade of exchanges in South Derbyshire. She spoke about the take up of broadband and the rapid growth of this area, questioning when services would be upgraded. Mr. Hamilton replied that the headline broadband speed would increase from 8 to 24 megabytes, but in practical terms the likely maximum broadband speed would be 18 megabytes. He then confirmed that 99.8% of premises within South Derbyshire should be able to receive a broadband

service. Members questioned this, giving examples in Hilton where people could either not receive a broadband service or it was intermittent. Mr. Hamilton gave further background about the infrastructure and the means to check compatibility of a telephone line for broadband. He explained how residents should proceed where problems were experienced. Engineers could check the sufficiency of the phone line and problems within the resident's property. There was also a discussion on the relationship between Internet Service Providers (ISP's) and British Telecom. Councillor Grant referred to people working from home and he gave a personal example to demonstrate the problems experienced in his area. He compared two broadband services to his property, which were operating at significantly different speeds. Mr. Hamilton offered to speak to Members outside the Meeting, to address such individual concerns.

The presentation then covered competition in the broadband market, factors affecting performance and a comparison was made between ADSL and the new ADSL2+. Mr. Hamilton spoke about the costs incurred by businesses to guarantee faster connection speeds and the typical internet service prices paid by residents. He referred to alternative delivery technologies and spoke briefly about the 21st century network programme. Further information was provided on the access network, the next generation of access drivers and the cost benefits from adopting information and communications technology.

Further questions were invited. Councillor Wheeler explained the difficulties experienced by consumers, where British Telecom or the ISP seemed not to address concerns over broadband speeds sufficiently. He questioned whether ISP's were charged for service requests to BT. Mr. Hamilton confirmed that ISP's were only charged for abortive service requests. Councillor Mrs. Wheeler suggested writing to BT for further information about the roll-out of the 21st century network to the eight sub-stations in South Derbyshire. She explained that broadband speed was a significant issue for this District and reiterated the problems experienced in certain areas. Mr. Hamilton was thanked for his presentation and the information provided.

OS/43. **FLOODING – DISCUSSION WITH SEVERN TRENT WATER**

The Chairman welcomed Tony Smith of Severn Trent Water. Mr. Smith had been provided with a list of proposed discussion topics and questions and he made a presentation to Members. Initially, information was provided on the sewerage services, including a variety of statistics on the number of customers, the amount of sewers and other facilities. Mr. Smith confirmed Severn Trent's areas of responsibility and those issues that it was not responsible for. He referred to inland flooding, causes, effects and impacts. The presentation included a number of photographs showing why sewers flooded, through obstruction or hydraulic overload.

In response to a question from the Chairman, Mr. Smith explained how sewers became damaged through the installation of other pipework, using a "thrust boring" technique. He confirmed Severn Trent's enforcement powers and ability to secure reimbursement for the costs of such repairs.

The Severe Flooding Procedure was reported, together with the Emergency Customer Contact Number. Mitigation measures were then discussed and further slides showed the measures that could be used underground and

those to limit the impact of flooding through floodgates, boundary treatments and raising thresholds/air bricks. Finally, the presentation touched on climate change.

Mr. Smith then responded to the specific questions and topics that had been pre-circulated. Further questions were invited. Councillor Lane questioned responsibility for approving new sewers and Mr. Smith confirmed this was a duty of Severn Trent Water. He replied to a related question about how sewer installations were checked. The Chairman asked about bespoke flood boards and Mr. Smith confirmed these were provided in cases of sewer flooding. Severn Trent also offered advice, where possible on other land drainage issues. Mr. Smith gave examples of the capital schemes undertaken in South Derbyshire to alleviate known flooding problems. There was also a discussion about the adoption of sewers, with particular reference made to Shady Grove at Hilton. Councillor Roberts asked about the Hatton Pumping Station, referring to the flooding in 2000 when this Station had to be switched off. Mr. Smith agreed to speak to Councillor Roberts outside the Meeting.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Smith for his attendance and contribution. He confirmed that a draft report on this Scrutiny review would be prepared for the next Meeting.

OS/44. **CONSULTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET**

A copy of the unconfirmed Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23rd January 2008 had been circulated. Additionally the Head of Finance and Property Services presented a report submitted to the Housing and Community Services Committee on 7th February 2008. This concerned the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget, financial projection and proposed rent increase for 2008/09. The report included aspects on rent convergence, the situation following consultation and National funding issues. The detail of the report looked at the basis of the 2008/09 base budget, housing subsidy, the Major Repairs Allowance and Management and Maintenance Allowances. There were sections on guideline rents and further information on the overall position. The report then looked at rent restructuring and the proposed rent increase for 2008/09 and gave an overview of the HRA financial forecast to 2018.

Councillor Lemmon spoke to this item as Chairman of the Housing and Community Services Committee. He referred particularly to the HRA financial forecast. He stated the need for care and the Council could not make assumptions on Government policies that might benefit the HRA for the future. He informed the Committee that it should be mindful of this worsening situation and there was nothing to give confidence that it would change in the future. Councillor Harrison, Chairman of the Finance and Management Committee also spoke to this item. He referred to Government policies, issues such as rent convergence and the reduced numbers of council houses. The Finance and Management Committee would look closely at the increased projections and this issue would need to be kept under constant review. He encouraged the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to take a similar approach on this issue for the future.

The Chairman noted the points raised, which he proposed to incorporate in the response to the Finance and Management Committee, as part of the

Budget Scrutiny process. He also reminded those present of the issues raised at the previous Meeting. **It was agreed that the comments made above, be included in the Budget Scrutiny response to the Finance and Management Committee.**

OS/45. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received a report and was asked to review its Work Programme. In particular, it would be necessary to prepare an Annual Report for consideration at the Annual Council Meeting on 22nd May 2008. An update was provided on the transport review and particularly the efforts to organise a Meeting with rail franchise operators and other local authorities, to discuss the Willington Station. As part of this item, a report was circulated that had been considered by the Environmental and Development Services Committee at its Meeting on 23rd August 2007. This concerned the South East Derbyshire Accessibility and Community Rail Partnership.

The Director of Corporate Services referred to the Use of Resources Assessment and particularly undertaking a review of scrutiny. It was suggested that this be included on the Committee's Work Programme.

Councillor Lane referred to the Minutes of the Meeting held on 5th December 2007. He sought an update about Willington Station, particularly the Parish Council's survey to identify usage of the current services operated from that Station. **It was agreed that this be pursued.**

Under Minute No. OS/35 (c) the Committee had received information from the Environment Agency. Councillor Lane had requested further information on how the Agency prioritised its Capital Expenditure schemes. Despite further endeavours, this information had still not been received. **Following discussion, it was agreed that notice be served under the Freedom of Information Act, to request the Environment Agency, to provide this information.**

The Chairman referred to Minute No. OS/36 (4). It had been agreed to invite Councillor Jones, Chairman of the County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee to attend the Meeting on 26th March 2008. The Chairman suggested delaying this invitation. He commented that Officers would be attending a joint Meeting at Derbyshire County Council on the revised Scrutiny arrangements. With regard to the timing of future Meetings, it was agreed that these revert to 5.00 p.m.

N. ATKIN

CHAIRMAN

The Meeting terminated at 4.30 p.m.