

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

13th March 2003

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

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

Conservative Group

Councillors Hood, Lemmon and Shaw (substitute for Councillor Douglas).

In Attendance

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

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillors Mrs. Mead and Whyman M.B.E. (Labour Group) and Councillor Douglas (Conservative Group).

HCS/103.**MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Special Meeting held on 9th January and of the Meeting held on 6th February 2003 were taken as read, approved as true records and signed by the Chair.

HCS/104.**MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

The Chair advised that a letter of thanks had been received following the Community Partnership grant of £2,000 towards disabled access works for the Church Gresley Methodist Church.

He reported that Sandra Whiles, Head of Community Services would shortly be leaving the Authority. He paid tribute to the terrific improvements she had helped deliver in Housing Services and thanked her for her support to him personally.

This would be the last Meeting of the Committee before the District and Parish Council elections in May. The Chair noted that Councillor Mrs. Rose would not be seeking re-election and he thanked her for her services to the Committee and particularly as the former Vice-Chair of the Committee.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE**HCS/105. PRESENTATION – UPDATE ON THE DERBYSHIRE AND PEAK PARK SPORT AND RECREATION FORUM**

The Vice-Chair introduced Suzie Longland of the Derbyshire and Peak Park Sport and Recreation Forum. She gave a presentation on the work of the Forum and the services provided to benefit residents of South Derbyshire. This included coach education, teacher training and organising competitions, including the Derbyshire Youth Games. The Forum assisted the development of focus groups and provided Officer support for the Active Sport initiative. In 2003, Active Sport funding of £28,000 would be provided and there was new Officer support for a range of initiatives. An outline was given of the partnership arrangement with the Council and the contributions that the Council made in terms of finances, Officer time and Member support.

Members' questions were invited and the first concerned the development plans for tennis. Child protection issues were discussed together with the ratio of staff to children participating in schemes. An explanation was provided of the publicity arrangements for schemes. A Member voiced his thanks to the Sports Forum for its assistance to a local Cricket Club.

The Vice-Chair supplied further information on the New Opportunities funding available and he felt that South Derbyshire received a terrific return for its £10,000 investment. Another Member commented that South Derbyshire was one of the first authorities to support and participate in this Forum and it should be proud of this. Suzie Longland was thanked for the presentation.

HCS/106. ACTIVE SPORTS YEAR 3

Following the presentation, the Committee received an update on progress with the Active Sport Programme and Members' approval was sought for the addition of new sports to the Programme. Last year, the former Community Services Committee approved the selection of swimming and girls' football as active sports for Year 2 of the Scheme. For Year 3 it was proposed to add tennis and rugby to the active sports programme. The selection process remained the same as previous years, with an analysis of the "readiness factors" for a sports liaison with clubs and then an application to the Sports Forum. The approval of these sports would mean that South Derbyshire received funding for the delivery of tennis, hockey and rugby union. Athletics and netball would also receive support in the form of club and coach development, with them becoming active sports in Year 4.

The Sports Forum had decided to appoint two further Active Sports Officers to assist Districts in the delivery of the Active Sports Programme. This would mean that South Derbyshire would share an Officer with one other District not two others, as at present. If the proposal was accepted, it would result in over £28,000 of work being delivered in the District. The Council's contribution to the Sports Forum for 2002/03 was £10,311.

A Member asked about providing facilities for motor sports. It was noted that motor sports were not eligible for Lottery funding. However, this issue

was being considered by the Crime and Disorder Partnership and it was hoped to submit a report to a future Meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee approves an application to the Derbyshire and Peak Park Sports Forum for tennis, rugby union and hockey to join swimming, girls football, cricket and basketball as Active Sports in South Derbyshire.

HCS/107. **ALLOTMENT RENTS**

The Committee was asked to consider an increase in the level of allotment rents. For 2003/04, it was proposed to increase allotment rents by 2.7%, giving a new annual rental of £13.00 per plot. Details were provided of current occupancy levels and in particular, the Thorntree Lane allotments, which would become operational again following the installation of a sewer across the site.

Members were reluctant to increase allotment rents, noting that it would only generate additional income of £50 per annum.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee does not increase the price of allotment rents.

HCS/108. **LOCAL CULTURAL STRATEGY**

At its Meeting on 29th August 2002, the former Community Services Committee considered the draft Derbyshire Cultural Strategy and authorised the completion of the South Derbyshire Cultural Action Plan. A copy of the earlier report had been circulated and this gave the background to the completion of cultural strategies and the process undertaken.

The Derbyshire LGA had now adopted the Derbyshire Cultural Strategy and the local multi-agency Officer Group had completed the Local Action Plan. Copies of both documents had been circulated with the Agenda. Once adopted by the Council, the documents would be placed on the Council's website and a "Culture in South Derbyshire" leaflet would be produced. A more formal launch of the strategy might be included as part of the establishment of a local cultural forum.

In terms of future delivery and monitoring of the Local Cultural Strategy, the Government Department had indicated that it wished Local Strategic Partnerships to take on the role of "champion" for culture in each area. This champion role was vitally important if key strategic projects were to secure the required external funding they needed to be successful.

Members considered the Derbyshire Strategy and the Local Action Plan. The Vice-Chair felt the Action Plan had a number of omissions and needed to be more ambitious. There was no mention of music in the document despite the area's rich musical heritage. He spoke of the need for a local concert venue and current opportunities within the Swadlincote Town Centre. The document seemed to be focused on the urban area with little mention of needs in other parts of the District. The Member commented on

use of the Town Hall, the lack of reference to private sector involvement, the growing population of the area, the lack of investment in culture and the need for increased staffing levels.

The Chief Executive responded echoing the need for a partnership approach to deliver initiatives. Use would be made of the Local Strategic Partnership to engage the Council's partners in a meaningful way.

Following the Vice-Chair's comments, other Members suggested possible locations for a concert venue. These included the Bretby Conference Centre and the Aston Hall Hospital site. It was felt that the Council did not publicise successful initiatives adequately. Within the cultural analysis of South Derbyshire, reference had been made to the provision of museums. It had been shown that the Council could work in partnership with others to achieve such projects. Comment was made on the merits of investment in the Melbourne Leisure Centre, the need for a suitable concert venue for organisations like the Melbourne Operatic Society and the difficulty for groups like East Midlands Arts in securing suitable venues. It was felt that the Cultural Strategy would be enhanced if reference was made to such key groups. Officers intended to produce a public leaflet to give an insight into culture and they explained the proposed publicity arrangements for the Action Plan and the County Strategy. Consultation on the draft strategy had received little public response.

RESOLVED:-

That the South Derbyshire Cultural Action Plan be amended in line with Members' comments and then submitted to the Council for approval along with the Derbyshire Cultural Strategy.

HCS/109. **HOME SECURITY PROJECT**

The Committee was informed of a prospective partnership between the Council and the South Derbyshire CVS, to develop a home security project. A number of community safety projects had been running in recent years, including "Home 2000", a burglary reduction project and a lock replacement scheme. The proposal was to combine these elements into one home security project under the management of the CVS. A person would be employed directly to this project, to undertake an audit of properties and then carry out appropriate works to secure the building or reduce the chance of injury to family members. The project would be operated as a pilot for at least one year and ideally for a period of eighteen months.

The cost of the scheme was anticipated to be in excess of £100,000 and the Council's contribution would be made from existing budgets for the Burglary Prevention Scheme, Lock Replacement Programme and an Environmental Health Safety Scheme. The Police had contributed £10,000. Funding applications would be made to cover the shortfall and to add further capacity to the Scheme. The project would deliver a significant increase in outputs than would have been achieved if the schemes were undertaken separately.

The Chair requested that where the installation of smoke alarms was proposed, consideration be given to installing combined alarms which

monitored carbon monoxide emissions also. Members welcomed the proposals and suggested other possible funding sources.

RESOLVED:-

That a partnership be established between the Council and the South Derbyshire CVS to develop a Home Security Project, which incorporates the lock replacement, burglary reduction and Home 2000 programmes.

HCS/110. **PLAYSCHEME REVIEW**

Under Minute No. HCS/63 of 10th October 2002, the Committee requested a review of summer playscheme provision. It was reported that the review had been undertaken and it had involved consultation with partners, an analysis of evaluation returns from parish councils, comparisons with other providers and options appraisal for future provision.

A summary of the review findings was provided. The majority of playschemes were delivered directly by local councils, using community facilities and they included registration procedures. Many playschemes were registered with OFSTED and operated within specific child protection procedures. The core provision was for 8-12 year olds with sports and arts being the activities provided mainly. In reviewing the role of playschemes it had been clear that there was a need for direct provision and that it should be safe and manageable. It should be targeted at specific communities where there was either no play provision or issues of deprivation.

The proposal was to promote two venues in the urban core using community facilities, through the Old Post Regeneration Association building in Newhall and the Woodville Community Centre. Each would hold a twice daily, two hour playscheme over a two week period in the summer, with a probable maximum of 25 children, aged 8-12 years. Exact limitations would be determined following discussions with OFSTED. The provision would be free, and registration would be necessary. In terms of rural provision, it was intended to continue the "Sportsmobile" which was booked by parish councils and visited recreation grounds for a two hour session.

By reducing the length and quantity of urban playschemes, there should be some spare capacity to appoint a part-time co-ordinator to implement the administrative changes and provide cover for the playschemes. To improve the quality of the service to young people, a change in staffing ratios was proposed. The length of training given to staff would be increased and it would include more practical elements. In terms of activities for older children, the Youth Service had agreed to provide activities during the late afternoons, following a successful trial of this service last year.

The Tenants Advisory and Consultation Team had identified the need for litter to be collected following playscheme sessions. Comment was made on previously reported child protection problems elsewhere in the Country and issues associated with cameras being used in swimming pools. The Findern Ward Member spoke of the successful playscheme operated in that Village and he sought details of the revised arrangements. The partnership approach to deliver playscheme provision in Melbourne was also discussed.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee approves the proposed changes to the Council's Playscheme provision, with effect from this summer.

Note: At 7.05 p.m., Councillor Lemmon left the Meeting.

HCS/111. STRATEGIC HOUSING – HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME (HIP)

The Committee received feedback from the Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) on the 2002 Housing Strategy. In recent years, the Council's performance in delivering strategic housing had been assessed as "below average". As a consequence of the changes and improvements made during 2002, the assessment had been increased to "average" and the recent GOEM feedback was appended to the report.

The Housing Policy Statement "The Way Forward for Housing" stressed the importance of an authority's strategic housing role. The statement provided that Councils should have clear and separate objectives for their strategic and landlord functions. This was reflected by the separate feedback for the Housing Strategy and the Business Plan. The report identified those key areas for action for the Housing Strategy and the Business Plan, together with the progress made to date. This year's Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan would need to be submitted by 30th July and the arrangements for the 2003 submission were provided.

A question was submitted on developing cross-boundary links and Officers explained the links in place with East Staffordshire and North-West Leicestershire Councils, the Derbyshire-wide Officer Group and a cross-border Landlords Forum. Further progress reports would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee notes the feedback from the Government Office for the East Midlands on the 2002 Housing Strategy and the HRA Business Plan arrangements for the 2003 submission.

HCS/112. HOUSING STOCK OPTIONS

It was reported that the Council's Housing Strategy included a clear priority to bring all social housing up to the Decent Homes standard by 2010. This included agreeing a way forward on the future management arrangements for Council housing. The HRA Business Plan Group had been established to develop objectives for the Housing Service and to examine and appraise the options available to the Council to meet these objectives. The Group comprised Members and tenant representatives. It had met regularly and an outline was given of the work undertaken.

An option appraisal report had been produced by Pennington Consulting. The document was circulated and a presentation was made by Mark Seabourne of Pennington. He outlined the work undertaken by the Business Plan Working Group and explained the range of options available for future housing management. The issues faced by the Council were

achieving the Decent Homes standard, splitting the landlord and strategic functions, rent re-structuring, Supporting People and Best Value/CPA. The process undertaken was to set objectives in service areas, visit other organisations, consider each option and score objectives for each option. The review report could then be considered and a recommendation made on the preferred way forward.

To date, the private finance initiative, part transfer and trickle transfer options had been discounted. Retaining the housing stock without taking further action was a high risk strategy and not a feasible option. It was considered unlikely that funding would be received to establish an 'Arms Length' Management Organisation (ALMO). This meant that the remaining options were to retain the housing stock with suitable investment, to transfer the housing stock or to create an 'ALMO' without external funding.

Each of these options was considered in greater detail. For the stock retention option, there had been a change in the assumptions made, to establish the underlying position. Details were given of those assumptions made for inflation, rental levels, major repairs and the reduction in the housing stock through the Right to Buy scheme. The cost of remodelling sheltered housing services, loss in rent income and investment in the service were also reported. On this basis, the cashflow showed a surplus in years 1-5, a significant deficit in years 6-10 and a cumulative deficit, over a 30 year period of some £44.8 million.

Consideration was given to the Arms Length Management option. Applications for financial support were likely to exceed available resources and it was understood that priority would be given to achieving "Decent Homes" standards. It had been concluded that South Derbyshire was unlikely to receive resources towards the establishment of an ALMO.

Detailed consideration was then given to the stock transfer model. Mr. Seabourne explained the assumptions taken into account and the housing stock was presently valued at £32 million. Allowing for the costs of stock transfer, a net receipt of £25.5 million could be anticipated. Further information was supplied on the financial impacts of stock transfer and the other consequences. The views of the Business Plan Working Group were reported together with the issues for Members to consider and a suggested way forward to determine the future of housing management in South Derbyshire.

Note: At 7.40 p.m., Councillor Routledge left the Meeting and at 7.50 p.m., Councillor Hood left the Meeting.

The HRA Business Plan Group had recommended that the options be explored further with tenants and Members before any final recommendation on future management arrangements was made. A suggested work programme had been prepared for the Committee's consideration.

Members' questions were invited. Mr. Seabourne responded to a question from the Chair about the likely initial costs associated with the stock transfer option. A comparison was made between the requirement to ballot tenants where stock transfer was proposed and the need for consultation with tenants where other housing management arrangements were

preferred. The Vice-Chair referred to the stock retention model. He questioned why the cashflow position deteriorated over time and it was explained that planned works following the stock condition survey would require increasing investment in later years. This, coupled to the anticipated loss in housing stock through the Right to Buy scheme, caused the deficit in cashflow.

Mr. Seabourne responded to a question from the Chief Executive and confirmed that the Council's housing stock was in better condition than that of many other authorities. The Council was well placed to give thorough consideration to the options available, to consult with tenants and establish a clear view on the best option for South Derbyshire.

With the Chair's consent, Councillor Richards spoke to this item and asked a number of questions regarding registered social landlords, particularly relating to the difference in rent levels charged to tenants. Mr. Seabourne confirmed that by 2012, rent restructuring would mean that all social rent levels would merge.

A Member questioned whether the Council could seek to transfer part of the housing stock, for example that requiring significant expenditure to meet "Decent Homes" standards. Mr. Seabourne explained that another authority had transferred its non-traditional housing stock through a private finance initiative. He felt that such an option might be difficult for South Derbyshire in terms of the management costs. There had not yet been the opportunity to examine in detail the stock condition survey results, to see whether a discreet element of the housing stock could be transferred in such a way. Traditionally, partial transfers were more feasible for larger local authorities.

The Chair suggested that Members consider the information presented to enable an informed discussion at a future Meeting of the Committee on housing stock options.

RESOLVED:-

That further work be undertaken as detailed in the report, prior to a decision being taken on the future management arrangements for Council housing.

HCS/113. **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL POLICY**

It was reported that the Government's Regulatory Reform Order on Housing Renewal came into force on 18th July 2002. It had important implications for local authorities, as it repealed much of the existing prescriptive legislation governing the provision of renewal grants for private sector housing. This was replaced by a new wide-ranging power to provide assistance for housing renewal, although disabled facility grants remained as a mandatory entitlement. In future, this meant that the Council would have greater flexibility to offer alternatives to direct grant aid to homeowners for repairs or improvements. The changes were being implemented as part of the Government's commitment to improve housing quality. The principal limitation was that the new powers must be used in accordance with a policy that had been adopted and publicised. It was necessary to publish the Council's private sector housing policy before 18th

July 2003, when the existing legislative framework was repealed. The review must be carried out in consultation with a range of stakeholders.

The Council's current Private Sector Renewal Strategy formed an integral part of the wider housing strategy. The Strategy had been developed over a number of years. The existing private sector housing strategy would be reviewed following adaptation of the Council's policy. Consideration was given to the draft policy and the Chair praised this report.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee approves the proposed private sector housing renewal policy.***
- (2) That authority be given to the Environmental Health Manager to make minor amendments as a result of formal consultation with interested parties.***

Note: At 8.05 p.m., Councillor Dunn left the Meeting.

HCS/114. **PROPOSED POLICY CHANGE – EXTERNAL DOORS**

Under Minute No. HCS/102(8) of 6th February 2003, the Committee requested a review of the Council's policy on replacing external doors. It was reported that external doors were currently replaced on an ad-hoc basis as part of planned or responsive maintenance contracts. Timber doors were provided, at an average cost of £200 and these had an average lifespan of 5 years. It was proposed to install new PVC composite doors and frames, complete with low level access thresholds at an average cost of £400 per door. These doors had an anticipated lifespan of 15 years and would provide an overall cost efficiency. Other advantages of installing these doors were reported. Members welcomed the report and asked that the use of wooden doors be ceased immediately.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That in future, external doors requiring replacement be renewed with PVC composite doors and frames, with low level access thresholds.***
- (2) That PVC composite doors and frames be installed on an ad-hoc basis on both the responsive and planned maintenance contracts, until funding becomes available to undertake a door replacement programme.***

HCS/115. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT [ACCESS TO INFORMATION] ACT 1985)**

RESOLVED:-

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 6th February 2003 were received.

REPORT OF MEMBER – SALE OF LAND (Paragraph 8)

A Member submitted a question regarding the sale of an area of Council owned land.

SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICES (Paragraph 9)

The Committee received an update and considered options for the future use of a Sheltered Housing Scheme.

R.W. SOUTHERN

CHAIR