

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

17th November 2005

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Southern (Chair), Councillor Richards (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Carroll, Dunn, Mulgrew, Stone, Whyman M.B.E and Wilkins.

Conservative Group

Councillor Atkin (substitute for Councillor Harrison), Hood and Mrs. Littlejohn.

Independent Member

Councillor Mrs. Walton.

APOLOGY

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Harrison (Conservative Group).

HCS/50. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 6th October 2005 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

HCS/51. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

The Chair reported on a recent press article about flooding problems at a property on Appleton Close, Newhall. He confirmed that whilst the Council was responsible for the structure of the building, tenants were responsible for their contents and could take out appropriate insurance to protect against such risks.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

HCS/52. **ETWALL LEISURE CENTRE JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

RESOLVED:-

That the Open Minutes of the Etwall Leisure Centre Joint Management Committee Meetings held on 11th April and 11th July 2005 be received.

HCS/53. **LOCAL SPORTS NETWORK**

It was reported that in recent years, the role of sports development had changed. The Government recognised the importance of sport as a key driver to achieve targets for a healthy and active population. South Derbyshire benefited from the additional funding targeted into a number of partnership

schemes. Consequently, the role of Sports Development Officer had also evolved. The report explained the previous approach to sports development and the strategic work undertaken more recently. A School Sport Partnership was working to develop the club/school links and it gave the opportunity to formalise and develop the local sports network. This concept was supported by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, together with Sport England and funding would be received from the County Sports Partnership. The report included an illustration to show the way in which the Local Sports Network was being developed. The key to the success of the sports network was the working of the Strategic Sports Group. Details were provided of the representative groups and it was chaired by the Vice-Chair of the Housing and Community Services Committee. Once constituted it would be able to draw down funding from the County Sports Partnership. In terms of delivery, an accountable Officer would be allocated the role of being responsible for each of the six reported themes. The initial allocation of duties would be taken on by Officers from the Community and Leisure Division, the School Sport Partnership Manager and the PCT.

Councillor Carroll welcomed this report and asked how young people would be engaged in the northern parishes, who attended schools outside the District. She also commented on the Primary Care Trust (PCT) issues for this area of South Derbyshire. The Head of Leisure and Community Development replied that meetings had been held with the PCT about joint funding of the post and planned activities. Even if the Greater Derbyshire PCT was not involved, the whole of the District would be covered. Further information was also provided on the approach being taken by the schools involved, including that for neighbouring districts. Councillor Atkin referred to the funding secured to assist in developing a new sports facility within his Ward and he hoped that Officers could work with the group involved to progress this scheme.

The Leader of the Council referred to the changing role of Sports Development Officers and he wished to ensure that the service was provided throughout the District. Previously, the majority of activity was focussed on the urban core. Officers gave further information on the proposed arrangements to ensure delivery throughout the District.

The Vice-Chair welcomed the initiative, the proposals for networking and he spoke of the funding opportunities available. The Council was well placed compared to its neighbours and it should support this initiative. Councillor Mrs. Walton gave her congratulations for the works undertaken in Hilton Village through the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership and Officers at the Council. This was a good example of how sports development was working in a rural area.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee supports the development of the Local Sports Network.

HCS/54. **LONDON 2012 OLYMPICS**

A report was submitted to outline the opportunities for the Council and its partners, to benefit from the staging of the 2012 Olympics in London. The momentum for organising the Games would grow over the coming years and

the benefit of the Games would be most available to authorities that prepared early.

Preparations for the Games would be co-ordinated by the 2012 Organising Committee, with the support of the Government and sports partners. Some larger local authorities were already developing proposals and it was proposed that South Derbyshire should do the same. It should also seek the support of the South Derbyshire Strategic Sports Group, to develop and co-ordinate Olympic preparations. Examples were provided of the types of work that could be undertaken, particularly with regard to training venues, sports participation, sporting excellence, sports facilities and e government.

Most of the potential projects were appropriate for initial consideration and they were either already included in Service, Corporate or Community Plans. Other ideas would develop over the coming years and would gain momentum as 2012 approached. The Strategic Sports Group had held discussions about the potential for the 2012 Olympics and the partnership members were very enthusiastic about the opportunities that would arise.

Councillor Dunn welcomed the report and felt there was a great opportunity, but he was mindful of the lack of hotel accommodation within the District. Many local authorities would be competing to host Olympic teams and there was a need to prepare early. The Leader spoke of the need to pursue this initiative and the excellent sporting facilities available at the Repton School.

RESOLVED:-

That the South Derbyshire Strategic Sports Group be authorised to develop a range of opportunities linked to the London 2012 Olympics, to benefit the local community.

HCS/55. **2005/2008 SERVICE PLANS – HALF-YEAR MONITORING REPORTS**

It was reported that Service Plans were an important part of the Council's Performance Management Framework. Earlier in the year, the Committee approved Service Plans for the Housing Services, Leisure and Community Development and Environmental Services Divisions. Reports were submitted to review progress from 1st April to 30th September 2005. Members were also reminded of the form and content of each Service Plan.

With regard to the Housing Service Plan, Members congratulated the positive report. Further information was sought on the homelessness statistics and details were provided. Councillor Dunn referred to the number of private sector void properties and the action that the District Council could take to bring them into use. There was an Empty Property Strategy for private sector housing. The Government planned legislation to give further powers to local authorities to take on such properties. Officers also explained the challenge for the local authority and the potential areas in which it could assist. One example was to secure nomination rights for such private sector properties. There was the potential for Section 106 Planning Gain Agreements to require low cost housing provision. The Chair noted the financial problems caused for individuals taking on large mortgages at an initial discounted rate, when this reverted to the standard borrowing rate.

The Leader felt that the Monitoring Report was encouraging. He highlighted the Gypsy Site at Church Broughton and felt there was a need to seek recognition for the provision of this facility. He noted the interaction with tenants and levels of satisfaction with the services delivered. He repeated the intention for the Council to retain its housing stock and also touched upon the improvements in void property performance, with an associated impact on rent income. Finally, the Leader spoke of the Performance Monitoring successes. Councillor Stone referred to the percentage statistics provided within the report and it was requested that these be supplemented by figures in the future, to make the report easier to understand. Officers explained that the Performance Report to be considered later in the Meeting would include such information.

With regard to the Environmental Health Division Service Plan, the Chair felt that the performance on Disabled Facilities Grants was not acceptable. He expressed the view that if Derbyshire County Council could not meet the required timescales, this Council might need to re-visit the way in which this Service was delivered. There was a need to get facilities provided in a timely manner and this point was endorsed by the Leader of the Council. Councillor Hood had pursued these issues with Derbyshire County Council. A further issue was confusion over the term 'affordable' housing and it would be preferable to see low cost housing provided within prescribed financial limits.

RESOLVED:-

That the Half-Year Service Plan Monitoring Reports for Housing Services, Leisure and Community Development and Environmental Services be received and approved.

HCS/56. **'TOWARDS AN EXCELLENT SERVICE' PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**

It was reported that the desire to improve performance was having a major impact on all public services. Local government was challenged through Best Value, Performance Indicators, Inspection and most recently the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

Some public services, such as housing and environmental health had long been influenced by the performance management approach. The importance applied to these key services was significantly higher than that applied to sport and recreation. As an example, in the first round of CPA assessment certain services were weighted more heavily than leisure. Where these services were labelled as poor or failing, there was evidence of resources of being redirected, away from sport and recreation. The report also touched on new performance frameworks for education and social services. The "Towards An Excellence Service" framework for sport and recreation would provide a similar approach. Through its policy and strategy theme it could evaluate the degree to which any national strategies, priorities and/or performance indicators were being delivered effectively. The model was likely to be included within the 'Culture Block' in the next CPA Assessment and with this in mind, Officers had embarked upon the process to give a year on year improvement for the Leisure Service. Specific objectives from this process were detailed within the report.

The framework could be adapted to other Leisure and Cultural functions and there were eight reported key factors that would influence the quality of sport and recreation services delivered to users. A self assessment workshop had been held in July, involving staff and representatives from partner organisations. A self assessment exercise had been completed and a table within the report showed the overall “fair” rating of the service. The report identified areas of weakness and strengths. The next stage of the process was to produce an Improvement Plan with the aim of moving the service to a ‘good’ score. The report highlighted the main areas of the Improvement Plan.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee approves implementation of the “Towards an Excellent Service” Improvement Plan.***
- (2) That the self-assessment is repeated in July 2006 and that progress be reported to the Committee.***

HCS/57. **ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR STRATEGY**

It was reported that the Leisure and Community Development Department’s Service Plan for 2004/07 included plans to publish an anti-social behaviour strategy for South Derbyshire. The Strategy provided a structure for the work of the Council that needed to be undertaken at a local level to tackle this issue. The actions within it would contribute to the work of the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership in reducing anti-social behaviour across the District.

The Strategy provided a definition and outlined the types of behaviour that could be classed as anti-social. It included a series of targets that would provide a means of performance managing the work planned, based around five key areas. The Action Plan had been developed to deliver the Council’s Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy in accordance with each of the key areas and it had a nominated lead Officer and timescale for completion. Progress on these actions would be monitored and reported via the Members’ Bulletin. Details were also provided of the consultation undertaken before producing the Draft Strategy.

Councillor Wilkins gave strong support to this document. He referred to a current problem with the sale of motor vehicles from areas of public land, which was a cause of persistent complaint. Whilst he realised it was difficult to undertake enforcement action, he requested Officers to look at the issue. The Chair questioned whether the Council could place wheel clamps on such vehicles and impose a fine for their release. Officers tried to ascertain the ownership of vehicles displayed for sale in this way, so that action could be taken.

RESOLVED:-

That the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy for the period 2005-2008 be adopted.

HCS/58. **ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

It was reported that anti-social behaviour was a key concern for the community of South Derbyshire. The Council was committed to tackling such behaviour by responding firmly and effectively to complaints. However, responsibility did not rest with one Council department.

Section 12 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 placed a requirement on all social landlords to prepare and publish statements and summaries of their policies and procedures, in relation to anti-social behaviour. This had already been completed. However, there was no legal requirement for such procedures in relation to owner/occupiers or private tenants. To provide an equitable service to all residents of South Derbyshire a draft policy and procedures had been prepared for the Committee's consideration. This area of work was the responsibility of the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership's Support Team. The establishment of a new policy and procedural document would ensure that all complaints were dealt with in a fair and consistent manner. The policy set out the Support Team's principles, objectives and approach to anti-social behaviour, categorising types of such behaviour and outlining the options for tackling it.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee approves and adopts the Leisure and Community Development Department's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedures.

HCS/59. **MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE**

A report was submitted regarding open space management and policy over the playing of ball games. A definition was given, together with the current policy and approach taken by the Council in dealing with complaints about the playing of ball games on areas of public open space. Numbers of complaints had increased in proportion to the development of new housing estates. Such complaints were time consuming and difficult to resolve. The main reason was that not all residents would be in favour of the erection of 'No Ball Games' signs, often dependent on whether the families involved had children or not. There was often no legal basis to enforce signs prohibiting the playing of ball games or the resources to undertake enforcement action.

As part of the Crime and Disorder Strategy, the multi-agency Anti-Social Behaviour Action Team, established a working group to look at this issue. Following the appointment of a Community Safety Officer and the development of the Community Safety Team, a resource became available with the skills and time to deal more pragmatically with this type of complaint. Working with local Beat Officers, the Council had dealt with a number of longstanding complaints, through getting neighbours together, discussing problems and agreeing compromises. To move things forward, it was proposed for a two year trial to set aside the current criteria for the erection of signs prohibiting the playing of ball games on public open space and that the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Team continue the policy of managing complaints through mediation.

In receiving the report, Members found some difficulties in discontinuing the policy of erecting such signs on areas of public open space. There were many

circumstances where it was not appropriate for ball games to be played on such areas of land and Members also disagreed that the signage was not always effective. It was felt that it would be a retrograde step to implement some of the proposals, as mediation would not always work and therefore it was suggested that the proposal to set aside the current criteria for the erection of signs should not be approved.

In response, Officers used a particular example of an open plan development linked to an area of public open space. Constant complaints had been received, but following mediation between the conflicting groups, a compromise had been agreed. With regard to enforcement, it was questioned whether a by-law could be created to prohibit playing ball games on certain areas of public open space. Councillor Wilkins felt this was a tremendous example of the work being undertaken behind the scenes and this was a success story to be congratulated. However, where there were smaller areas of public open space, particularly with trees planted upon them, this was not suitable for the playing of ball games and there was a need to retain the option to erect signage.

Councillor Mrs. Walton commented that prohibiting the use of areas of public open space might result in children playing on the highway, which posed other risks. In response to a comment from Councillor Atkin about planning issues, Officers explained the improvements made to policies in recent years. Councillor Dunn sought to widen the debate, referring to underused garage sites, particularly within the urban core. Officers agreed to supply further information to Councillor Dunn and explained a recent review undertaken.

The Leader reflected on Officers' comments about the success of the mediation process. He noted the time required to undertake mediation and if this was used in every case, delays could be experienced. He applauded the efforts and hoped they would continue, but wished to retain the option of erecting signage.

RESOLVED:-

That Members' comments be taken on board in revising the policy for the management of complaints about the playing of ball games on public open spaces.

HCS/60. **URBAN PARK SECURITY**

It was reported that historically incidents of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage in the summer months had resulted in damage to the play area at Swadlincote Woodlands. Details were provided of specific problems and the cost of repairing such damage. This had had a negative effect on local residents relating to their perception of crime, how attractive these areas were viewed and the detrimental effect on the moral of park keepers and wardens. To overcome some of these problems, an urban park security pilot was initiated by the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership. A security firm provided a dog and handler to patrol the four parks on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings. The company employed, Security Alert UK, erected signs at all four parks to raise awareness of their presence and a number of press releases were issued by the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership. In conjunction with this, there was increased data collection to enable a clearer understanding of actual events on the parks. Each security patrol reported

incidents to Careline and notified issues requiring urgent attention, as a result of criminal damage or littering. A weekly patrol report was also provided to the Community Safety Officer. To gather further data, park keepers and wardens kept detailed log sheets to record incidents and reports were provided to the Police. The report then provided detail on the incidents experienced at the Newhall Park, Eureka Park, Maurice Lea Memorial Park and at Swadlincote Woodlands. An evaluation was provided of the security pilot in terms of anti-social behaviour, recorded crimes and feedback from the community.

The security pilot had demonstrated that the Council would respond to concerns and address the perceived fear of crime. In addition, the security pilot had made a contribution to reducing damage to the parks over the summer months. Due to the increased information collated about actual events, the Council was better prepared to produce park specific action plans, to address issues of anti-social behaviour, criminal damage and grounds maintenance in general.

The financial implications were reported and the cost of the security service was £175.50 per week. To provide effective cover for the following year there was a need to evaluate the crime statistics and at least to repeat the cover over the summer months. This was likely to cost approximately £1,600 and funding would be sought.

Councillor Wilkins commended this initiative. He referred to the closure of the Swadlincote Woodlands play area and the feedback he had received from disappointed young people over the vandalism of this facility. The Leader of the Council supported this view and referred to the relatively low financial implications of the initiative. The project had focussed on the urban core and he noted that in the rural parishes there were other areas like parks where similar problems were experienced. He wondered whether funding could be attracted to extend this initiative across the District. The Chair suggested that costings be sought for the next Committee Meeting. The Head of Leisure and Community Development reminded of the loss of funding for the Crime and Disorder Partnership. There might be a need to look at other funding sources for this initiative. The Leader suggested that this issue be raised at the Parish Forum also.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee approves a policy to provide security cover in District Council owned parks within the urban core, to increase protection from acts of criminal damage and vandalism.***
- (2) That Officers consider funding possibilities for an appropriate level of cover.***

HCS/61. **PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Note: At 7.40 p.m. Councillor Dunn left the Meeting.

The Committee received the Housing Services Performance Report for quarter 2 of the current financial year. 72% of all measurable Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's) were within top quartile performance and the Council was striving corporately to have 70% of all BVPI's within this top

quartile. Significant improvements had been made in the current quarter in the responsive area of repairs, with emergency, urgent and routine repairs all seeing an increase in performance. There were still issues remaining with the ability to record the amount of appointments made and kept for repairs. From customer satisfaction surveys, tenants reported that appointments were kept in 60% of cases. However, these appointments were made direct by trades people, after the initial report by the tenant. Following discussion of the last Performance Report, an additional appendix had been included to summarise the areas where targets were not presently being achieved. The format of the report was likely to be subject to further amendment, as a result of a corporate review of performance monitoring.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee receives the Performance Report for the Housing Service as at the 2nd quarter of 2005/06.

HCS/62. **AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION OF THE REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICE**

It was reported that the inspection of the Repairs and Maintenance Service commenced in April 2005, with the submission of a self assessment pro-forma and attached documents. The on-site inspection was undertaken in the week beginning 6th June 2005. The first draft report was produced in mid-July and the final report was published on 13th October 2005.

It was a requirement that the findings of this report be circulated to Members, tenants and leaseholders. This had been provided to tenants via the 'Tenants Extra' newsletter. The overall assessment of the Repairs and Maintenance Service was fair and the prospects of improvement were assessed as promising. The consistent theme from the inspection was the significant improvements made to the Service and the report explained the investment and restructuring undertaken. The assessment of a fair service did not describe fully the scale of achievement made. Extracts of the Auditor's report were quoted to demonstrate this. The promising prospects for further improvement showed the Department's plans for continued improvement were sound. The fact that the Auditor's recommendations did not identify any new concerns was further evidence of this. The intention was to be an excellent housing service within the resources available. The summary of recommendations of the report were submitted and a copy of the full report was available for Members.

RESOLVED:-

That the findings of the Audit Commission inspection of Housing's Repairs and Maintenance Service be accepted and actioned by the Housing Service.

Note: At 7.50 p.m. Councillor Whyman M.B.E. left the Meeting.

HCS/63. **SHELTERED HOUSING**

Members were reminded that the Careline service offered a lifeline monitoring and response service to people across the District. These services provided support to help potentially vulnerable people maintain their independence in

the community. Customers were primarily older people, most of whom resided within sheltered housing accommodation. However, there was a growing number of people of all ages, with varying health issues in the private sector.

The service had been accredited by the Telecare Services Association (TSA). It encouraged the provision of good quality customer service by officially recognising service providers that met its demanding criteria. The criteria covered over 600 areas and details were provided within the report. Work had been undertaken over the last eight months to achieve compliance with this code. Data had been gathered and formal procedures covering every aspect of Careline's functions had been formulated in line with the TSA's requirements. Independent audits were carried out by the Security Systems and Alarms Inspection Board on behalf of the TSA and this confirmed Careline's compliance with the code of practice. Careline was now a member of this prestigious group of community alarm centres and was one of only 14 such centres to achieve accreditation to both Parts I and II.

The Chair commented on the number of positive reports from the Housing Division received at the Committee. He wished to record praise for all teams within the Division and spoke particularly about Dawn Dawson who would shortly be leaving the Council. He praised the Officer's achievements and wished to record the thanks of the Committee for the work undertaken. He also asked that a letter of thanks be sent to all staff within the Housing Division.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee notes the achievement of the Quality Mark by the Careline Service.

HCS/64. **FORMER TENANT ARREARS**

It was reported that the Council had outstanding former tenant arrears of £145,549. These debts had accrued between April 2000 and March 2004. To provide a context, the current rent turnover was £8.5 m per annum and the outstanding debt represented 0.45 %. However, it was lost income and whilst it would never be possible to fully recoup this debt, a change to processes might improve collection rates.

Members were reminded of the current collection arrangements and a proposal to employ a debt collection agency. Wescot Credit Solutions worked for a number of housing associations and local councils. The Company had different collection criteria for different agencies and a flow chart was appended to the report showing the proposed terms for South Derbyshire. Debts would only be pursued in excess of £100, where the debtor was between 18 and 65 years of age. For people over 65, debts would be pursued through a letter system and then progressed straight to court, where applicable. The Company's charges were related to the amount of debt collected with a commission of 25% on all monies received, once the debt had been passed to them.

The financial implications were reported and included the potential income to the Housing Revenue Account from this initiative. Councillor Richards was aware of this Company and understood that it worked to correct standards.

Councillor Carroll linked this item to the Performance Report and felt that this was a positive outcome for the recovery of monies owed to the Council.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That Wescot Credit Solutions be appointed to collect the outstanding former tenants' debt for one year.***
- (2) That the Committee notes that collection parameters will be set by the Council, as outlined in the appendix to the report.***
- (3) That a review of effectiveness of this change in practice takes place in one year.***

HCS/65. **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.

ETWALL LEISURE CENTRE JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
(Paragraph 7)

The Committee received the Exempt Minutes of the Etwall Leisure Centre Joint Management Committee Meetings held on 11th April and 11th July 2005.

SPORTS AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT MANAGER ***(Paragraph 11)***

The Committee approved the re-structuring of the Sports Development Service to support the development of sport in the District.

DELIVERY OF NEW LEISURE FACILITIES IN HILTON ***(Paragraph 9)***

The Committee appointed contractors for the delivery of new leisure facilities in Hilton and the future management of leisure provision in that area.

R.W. SOUTHERN

CHAIR