

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

25th August 2005

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Southern (Chair), Councillors Bell (substitute for Councillor Stone), Carroll, Mulgrew, Shepherd (substitute for Councillor Richards), Whyman MBE.

Conservative Group

Councillor Ford (substitute for Councillor Harrison), Mrs Hall (substitute for Councillor Shaw), Hood and Mrs Littlejohn.

Independent Member

Councillor Mrs. Walton.

In Attendance

Councillor Atkin (Conservative Group).

HCS/35. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 14th July 2005 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

HCS/36. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

(a) Report of the Chair

Gypsy and Traveller Sites

Councillor Southern advised that an application the Council had made in conjunction with the County Council to the Government had been successful for refurbishment works at both gypsy traveller sites in the District located at Woodyard Lane, Foston and Lullington Crossroads. The grant monies totalled £656,250 and as site owners the County Council were contributing £218,750. Members were reminded that Housing Services managed the Woodyard Lane site and the Environmental Health Service managed the Lullington Crossroads site. The works concentrated on improving existing conditions at the site. Councillor Whyman referred to the site at Woodyard Lane, Foston being an excellent example of such a site and congratulated the Council staff involved with the operation of the site accordingly. He advised that the South Derbyshire LSP had recently undertaken a consultation exercise with hard to reach groups and some residents of the Foston site had requested a gated fence to the boundary of the site as a safety measure for young children there. The Head of Housing advised that the grant monies would cover the provision of such a gated fence to the boundary.

Cavity Wall and Loft Insulation Programme

Councillor Southern advised that the Housing Services Department had secured funding of £886,000 from Scottish Power plc to provide cavity wall

insulation and/or loft insulation to its housing stock at no cost to the Council. A local specialist company, Rockwarm Insulation Limited, who were a family run company from Nuneaton would carry out the work. They had already commenced with a detailed survey of the stock to ensure that all properties were considered for these measures. The installation work would commence in September and would be completed by December 2006. All savings to the Council's budget would be monitored and included in the Council's Annual Efficiency Statement. The Committee agreed to send a letter of thanks to Gary Clarkson, the Senior Quantity Surveyor for his efforts in securing such funding.

Britain in Bloom

Councillor Southern advised that Rosliston Parish Council had recently been successful in the Britain in Bloom competition. It was agreed to send a letter of congratulations to Rosliston Parish Council accordingly.

(b) Report of Councillor Atkin

Councillor Atkin advised that the Aston on Trent Memorial Hall project had received £25,000 from the District Council, £50,000 from WREN, £190,000 from the National Lottery Fund, leaving a shortfall of £7,500 for the project which was to be financed in the village by a "Pledge a Brick" scheme. Councillor Atkin advised that building work was to start thanks to the District Council. Councillor Whyman reported that this was a remarkable achievement and it was agreed to write to the Aston on Trent Memorial Hall Committee to congratulate them accordingly.

Councillor Atkin also advised that Aston Parish Council had been successful in winning two categories of the Derbyshire Rural Community Council's Derbyshire Village Competition. He advised that the Aston on Trent Village Plan had now been completed and the Parish Council would like to present the Plan to a future meeting of the Council. It was agreed to write to Aston on Trent Parish Council congratulating them on the production of the Village Plan.

(c) Process for the Resolution of Problems with Trees

Councillor Shepherd advised that he wished to seek the agreement of the Housing and Community Services Committee regarding the principle of the establishment of an ad-hoc meeting of interested parties to resolve problems with trees. It was suggested that meetings comprised the Chair of Housing and Community Services Committee, the Council's Facilities and Development Manager and local Members. The results of the deliberations would be reported to the Committee for ratification. This process would not include the problem of high hedges (covered by the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003) and trees having a Tree Preservation Order would remain the responsibility of the Development Control Committee.

The suggested protocol for the resolution of problems with trees was outlined as follows:-

- Determine the ownership of the tree (District or County Council, Developers etc.) If the tree was the responsibility of the District Council, the process could be pursued.

- Local Members to have initial discussions with the Council's Facilities and Development Manager:-
 - ❑ Agree that a problem exists. If no agreement is reached a formal request for a meeting of the interested parties be lodged by the Local Member with the Chair of the Housing and Community Services Committee.
 - ❑ If the existence of a problem is recognised, agreement on action and timescale to resolve the problem be reached (prune, pollard, fell)
 - ❑ If a meeting of the interested parties is convened all aspects of the subject be discussed including representation from residents, evidence from the tree specialist etc.
- The interested parties to consider:-
 - ❑ Condition of the tree.
 - ❑ Amenity value of the tree.
 - ❑ Damage caused by roots or branches.
 - ❑ Loss of amenity due to overbearing branches.
- Decide on a course of action to be recommended to the Housing and Community Services Committee. (No action, prune or fell).

Councillor Shepherd suggested that the Council should ensure that sufficient finance was allocated to enable any pruning, felling etc. required to be undertaken.

Councillor Shepherd also circulated a photograph of two trees which were causing a problem within the ward of Stenson Fields. He advised that this had been a long-standing problem to which a satisfactory resolution had not yet been made.

The Director of Community Services expressed concern that 30 to 50 tree complaints were received every year and the Council employed two trained officers who could give a professional opinion on tree matters. He stated that his preferred approach would be for officers to deal with complaints and that the remit of how officers dealt with tree complaints could be widened. He referred to the intention for Members to be more strategic and stated that potentially this protocol could lead to 50 meetings involving Members per year on tree matters alone. Councillor Shepherd advised that it was not his intention to tie down officers but suspected these meetings were being held anyway. Councillor Whyman stated that Members clearly understood their remit and understood that they could not interfere with operational detail but felt that this report was addressing a strategy on dealing with problem trees.

(At 6.25 pm Councillor Atkin left the meeting).

The Chair expressed concern that occasionally Members reported tree complaints expecting that officers would deal with them but sometimes this had not been the case. Councillor Ford stated that an Officer had been out to

inspect particular trees within his ward but had not produced a formal report following the meeting which would have assisted him as a Member to give advice to his constituents. The Director of Community Services stated that he sensed a clear dissatisfaction with the service received to date on tree matters and asked the Committee to allow him to rectify this matter.

Councillor Shepherd moved that the Committee authorised the felling of the trees pictured in the photograph circulated. Councillor Carroll asked that suitable replacement trees be planted accordingly. Councillor Ford requested that an environmental study of the wildlife within the trees be undertaken before felling.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the protocol for the resolution of problems with trees, as submitted be agreed.***
- (2) That the two trees located at Stenson Fields, referred to at the meeting, be felled, subject to the approval of the most relevant Committee.***

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

HCS/37. **GROUNDWORK EREWASH**

The Committee was reminded that Members had previously approved the establishment of a Groundwork Erewash expansion into the District Council's area. This amounted to £30,000 per annum.

The National Forest Company were committing an additional £4,000 per annum, a total of £34,000 per annum being immediately match funded by ODPM core funding to help launch the South Derbyshire Area. This finance would cover the Groundwork Officer's time to work on projects and the match funding by ODPM meant that £68,000 of support time was available.

It was reported that a working group consisting of the Director of Community Services, Groundwork staff, Clive Keble of the National Forest Company and Groundwork Erewash's independent consultant, Graham Barrow had met several times to identify a short-term work programme. Heads of Service from the District Council had been involved in expanding on the initial areas of work. The working group had identified a short-term work programme for the South Derbyshire Area, which was detailed to the Committee in full. These were the projects that would launch the work of the Trust in South Derbyshire in the 2006/2008 period. This would be additional to the £1.5 m per annum of groundwork activity already taking place in Amber Valley in Erewash. The operational area would be called Erewash Valley and South Derbyshire.

Councillor Carroll advised that the Environmental and Development Services Committee had agreed that Councillor S Taylor be approved as the Board Member for this project at its Meeting held on 18th August 2005.

RESOLVED:-

That the ODPM bid document for work within South Derbyshire District Council's area be approved.

HCS/38. REVIEW OF SUPPORT TO THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR - REVIEW TEAM MEMBERSHIP

The Committee was reminded that in June 2005 it had approved a working group for the review of Council grant aid and related support to the Voluntary and Community Sector comprising the Director of Community Services, the Head of Leisure and Community Development, the Partnership Development Officer, a Finance Officer, one representative from the opportunities for all SDLSP Theme Group and three Members of the Council. Under Minute No CL/37 of the Council meeting held on 30th June 2005 this decision was revisited to increase the number of Members of the Council to sit on the review team to 5 (3 Labour and 2 Conservative Members).

It was further acknowledged within the report that when first convened the working group would consider its membership and make adjustments as deemed necessary.

It was reported that the initial working group met for the first time on 20th July 2005 and agreed that its membership should be expanded to include four additional members from the voluntary and community sector. The reason for the increase was that as the rationale for undertaking the review included the need for the services to be fair, open and transparent and in consultation with stakeholders, that the voluntary and community sector representation should be equal to that of the Council. It was agreed that the sector would self-select its representation in a similar fashion to that utilised for the Local Strategic Partnership Board and that Jo Smith, Chief Executive of the South Derbyshire CVS as the original voluntary and community sector member and Chair of the Opportunities for All Community Strategy Theme Group would lead this matter.

Councillor Whyman advised the Committee that he was very conscious of the enormous input received from the voluntary and community sector but expressed concern that some individuals representing the VCS might be placed in a position of having a prejudicial interest when sitting on meetings of the Review Team. He supported the recommendation made before the Committee but suggested that the four additional VCS members did not have voting rights.

RESOLVED:

That four additional voluntary and community sector representatives be appointed to the review team, with voting rights.

HCS/39. PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee received a detailed monthly performance report for the Housing Service. It was stated that this new method of performance reporting would be used for all performance reports and Members comments on the format and content of the report were welcomed.

The Committee was advised that 60% of all housing indicators were within targets. 72% of all measurable BVPI's were within top quartile performance for 2003/04. The Council was striving corporately to have 70% of all their BVPI's to be within top quartile performance.

It was reported that overall performance within homelessness was good, but there remained a concern on the amount of preventative work that the Council was able to do currently within the given resources. New BVPI's had been introduced this year and focussed particularly on preventing homelessness. Members were advised that currently the service had one Homelessness Officer for approximately 85,000 households and it therefore followed that this Officer could not carry out quality investigations and homelessness decisions, as well as undertaking case work to prevent homelessness before it happened. Whilst the current Homelessness Officer focussed on those people in priority need the new BVPI's placed a requirement on the Council to look at both those cases where the applicant was in priority need, as well as those cases who might not be in priority need.

(At 7.05 pm Councillor Shepherd left the meeting).

It was reported that the ODPM was keen to point out that in terms of the housing arena, performance in relation to homelessness would carry as much weight in forthcoming CPA assessments as performance in relation to decent homes.

The Committee was advised that BV212 "average time taken to re-let Local Authority housing" was below target with the first quarter out-turn of 87 days against a target of 31 days. This was due to the letting of some long-term voids, particularly one that had been empty in excess of 100 days. The way that the indicator was calculated meant that whilst the Council pursued the process of bringing long-term void properties back into management the indicator would fluctuate. However it had been estimated, and would be reported in the 2005 HRA Business Plan, that improved performance on voids was likely to realise additional income of £1 million over the next ten-year planning period.

Finally, the Committee was advised that there were issues remaining regarding the ability to record the amount of appointments made and kept for conducting repairs. These issues would be resolved before Quarter Two's report was published.

Various Members of the Committee took the opportunity to ask questions on the monthly performance report which were duly answered. Councillor Whyman M.B.E. praised the excellent work of the Performance Manager but stated that he was unsure about the presentation of the information. He stated he had been overwhelmed by the information and requested that in future it be produced in a more simplistic "easy to read" format which included informed suggestions on proposed courses of action to remedy areas of concern. Councillor Bell stated that he would like to see the "red areas" of concern presented together to allow Members to make comparisons. Councillor Ford welcomed the introduction of the pie charts and the recommendations within the report.

(Councillor Walton referred to some sections of the report being produced in colour and asked that any future reports be printed on double sided paper).

RESOLVED:-

(1) That the performance as at the first quarter be noted.

- (2) That future performance reports be presented in a more easy to read format to include informed suggestions on proposed courses of action to remedy areas of concern.**
- (3) That the increase in BVPI's with new indicators introduced in the areas of homelessness, re-let times, rents and maintenance be noted.**

HCS/40. **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 14th July 2005 were received.

R.W. SOUTHERN

CHAIR