

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

29th August 2002

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

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

Conservative Group

Councillors Douglas, Hood and Lemmon.

In Attendance

Councillors Bell, Harrington and Rose (Labour Group) and Councillor Mrs. Wheeler (Conservative Group).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillors Stone and Whyman (Labour Group).

CS/36. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Special Meeting held on 10th July 2002 and of the Meeting held on 18th July 2002 were taken as read, approved as true records and signed by the Chair.

CS/37. **MEMBERS QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

(a) Press Article

The Chair referred to a press article which had reported inaccurately on an item included on the Committee's agenda. The Chief Executive outlined the active publicity sought and the desire to consult with tenants on proposed improvements to the Sheltered Housing Service. A meeting had been held with the Editor of the Burton Mail to seek the newspaper's co-operation in publicising this important issue. It was hoped that positive steps had been made with the Newspaper and there was disappointment at the misleading information given in the article.

(b) SLM Seminar

The Chair advised that a half day Seminar had been organised with the Green Bank Leisure Centre contractor, SLM. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Community Services Committee, together with the Chair of the Community Scrutiny Committee would attend the Seminar and two representatives of the Conservative Group were sought. The Conservative Group Leader agreed to appoint representatives.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE**CS/38. REPORTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES – PLAY EQUIPMENT**

It was reported that the Community Scrutiny Committee had considered issues relating to leisure facilities for young people and more recently, play equipment and the provision of a BMX/skateboarding facility. Contributions had been received from appropriate District Council officers and Maureen Evans, a Youth Team Leader with Derbyshire County Council.

By way of background, details were given of the play equipment provided throughout South Derbyshire. Some of the equipment was over thirty years old and some did not conform to latest standards for design and installation. Strategies were in place to replace or renovate sites and a Service Development proposal had been approved to undertake risk assessments. There were a number of factors placing increasing demands on the Service. Recent Best Value indicators relating to play equipment showed that only 14% of the play areas conformed to the Locally Equipped Areas for Play (LEAP) standards. It was stressed that this did not mean the remaining play areas were unsafe.

Consideration had been given to facilities for young people. There was a growing, unsatisfied demand for specific provision for teenagers. Requests were being made to a variety of agencies and individuals and this was a major issue for strategic partnerships and particularly the Crime and Disorder Partnership. The demand was predominantly for BMX, skateboarding and roller blading facilities. A number of sites in the Council's ownership had been considered and, subject to legal conditions, the Woodhouse Street Car Park adjacent to Swadlincote Ski Centre would be most suitable as a location for such a facility.

The key issues arising from the study were:-

- Confusion over responsibilities with parish councils and whether the District Council should continue to offer an inspection and maintenance service for facilities on land in parish councils' ownership.
- Problems in completing actions identified from previous inspection reports (lack of resources and non co-operation from parish councils).
- Need to update and review previous consultants' report in the light of higher standards.
- A traditional resource problem in carrying out the required inspections and completing repairs by the DSO.
- Service Development proposals for increased budgets to carry out repairs more efficiently and to undertake essential repair work to safety surfacing had not been approved by Members.
- Risk assessments to be undertaken this year are likely to identify a large amount of work to be undertaken and/or removal of play equipment.
- Increasing requests for new facilities, especially for teenagers, at a time when the existing stock of equipment is in such a poor state. There is a specific demand for a BMX/skateboarding facility.
- Need for consultation with young people about the provision and design of facilities.

The Chair thanked the Community Scrutiny Committee for its report. The Vice-Chair felt that it provided an excellent summary of the current position, which was similar to that faced by many local authorities. Due to a lack of available resources, partnership arrangements often gave the opportunity to improve existing facilities or to make new provision. A Member commented on the efforts to provide facilities for young people and to identify a suitable site for a BMX/skateboarding facility. She was supportive of the proposals and spoke of the demand from young people in South Derbyshire and East Staffordshire, the potential for crime and disorder reductions and links to tourism from using the proposed site. She hoped that any funds would not simply be used to update or maintain play equipment and asked to be involved in any future discussions on this subject.

RESOLVED:-

That the report from the Community Scrutiny Committee be received and the recommendations adopted as the basis of a way forward for the management, maintenance and provision of play equipment in the District and the provision of facilities for young people.

CS/39. **BRETBY CREMATORIUM ANNUAL REPORT AND JOINT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Bretby Crematorium Joint Committee Annual Report, a copy of which is incorporated in the Signed Minute Book at Annexe 'SMB1', be received.***
- (2) That the Open Minutes of the Bretby Crematorium Joint Committee Meeting held on 19th June 2002, a copy of which is attached at Annexe 'A', be received.***

CS/40. **ETWALL LEISURE CENTRE JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

RESOLVED:-

That the Open Minutes of the Etwall Leisure Centre Joint Management Committee Meeting held on 15th April 2002, a copy of which is attached at Annexe 'B', be received.

CS/41. **RESTORATION OF MAURICE LEA MEMORIAL PARK**

Under Minute No. CS/12 of 6th June 2002, the Committee approved an ad-hoc list of landscape consultants to tender for restoration works at the Maurice Lea Memorial Park. Authority was also given to award the work to the lowest tenderer and following the competitive process the work had been appointed to Faulks Perry Culley and Rech. The timetable for completion of the work was appended to the report.

Key issues identified were option appraisal for distinct project elements and community involvement in the general development of the project. To date there had been limited community involvement, mainly because of the lengthy timescale of the application process. The involvement of local Members was also sought. It was proposed to establish a small Project Team

to work with the landscape consultants. Its role would include prioritising and shaping options prior to consideration by the Committee, which would receive further reports at key stages. A presentation would be made to the October Swadlincote Area Meeting to outline progress with the project. This would form part of the process of trying to establish a “Friends of Group” for this site. A Member spoke of the community group involvement in the project to provide new facilities at Etwall Leisure Centre. An enquiry was made about progress with establishing the “Friends of Group” for this project and consideration was given to the appointment of a local Member to the Project Team.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee approves the process outlined in the report to progress the Maurice Lea Memorial Park restoration project.***
- (2) That Councillor Rose be nominated to serve as the local Member on the Project Team.***

CS/42. **IMPROVEMENT WORK – NEWHALL PARK**

Members were reminded that the ‘Friends of Newhall Park’ partnership had obtained £67,500 of external grant funding. This would be used to provide two new play areas, create a “quiet area” and new footpaths linking the Park’s facilities.

To date, the new play areas had been completed and competitive tenders obtained for the creation of the quiet area, with work due to start in the second week of September 2002. In order to deliver a quality project, it had been necessary to allocate additional funding for both the new play areas and the quiet area. Details of the initial estimates and the additional costs were appended to the report. This had resulted in a budget shortfall and meant it had not been possible to deliver all elements of the project.

The ‘Friends of Newhall Park’ and the wider community had identified concerns over the lack of lighting on the footpath between Parliament Street and Main Street, Newhall. There had been a further successful funding application under the SRB6 Scheme and a grant of £7,426 had been awarded to fund this work. The SRB Board had increased its budget allocation by 10% to meet part of the funding shortfall and there was a deficit of £1,040 to be met, to ensure the project was delivered within identified timescales. Permission was sought to allocate this money from the £1,640 left in the capital budget for new play equipment.

In receiving the report, a Member enquired whether the new footpaths would be suitable for persons in wheelchairs. A local Ward Member advised that the former Guide Hut had now been removed and the area would be reinstated. Tribute was paid to the efforts of the ‘Friends of Newhall Park’ Group by the Chair and other Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED:-

That Members note the additional external finance attracted to the project and that approval be given to re-allocate £1,040 of capital funding to the improvement works.

CS/43. SWADLINCOTE WOODLANDS SRB2 SCHEME FINAL REPORT

Members were reminded that in 1996, the Made in Swadlincote Partnership submitted a successful bid and received funding of 3.4m from the SRB Challenge Fund. The Grant was used to fund a number of projects agreed in consultation with the local community and the projects were brought together under the name of the Swadlincote Woodlands Regeneration Scheme. The Scheme lasted for six years and was completed in March 2002. The Council acted as Accountable Body, taking responsibility for day-to-day management and administration of the Scheme on behalf of the SRB Board. It was now necessary to produce a Final Report and this was submitted for the Committee's consideration.

As part of the end of Scheme arrangements, the Board had agreed to meet for another year. Primarily it would oversee the forward strategy and at its next meeting, scheduled for September/October the draft report would be presented for approval, prior to being sent to emda. The draft report had been divided into four sections: Strategic Objective and Baseline Review, Output Review, Financial Performance Review, and Forward Strategy Review

The Scheme had performed well against its targets in all areas and the forward strategy was well advanced. The one area where progress was slightly slower than anticipated was in relation to future partnership working. However, the formation of a new Local Strategic Partnership was scheduled to commence in early October 2002.

The management and administration functions had largely been undertaken by the Partnership Development Officer. They had formed part of an agreed transitional workload arrangement following his appointment from the post of Community Regeneration Officer in October 2001. Completion of the SRB related activities would enable concentration on the priorities attached to the Partnership Development Officer post.

Praise was voiced for the Chair of the Swadlincote Woodlands Regeneration Board, Mr. John Oake. Similarly, the Partnership Development Officer and the former Leader of the Council, Councillor Lewis were also praised for their involvement in the Scheme. There was recognition of the Scheme's success in terms of its outputs and the private sector investment. One concern raised was the impact the new residential development on the Woodlands Site would have for local primary schools.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee approves the content of the Final Report prior to its submission to the SRB Board and to the east midlands development agency.***
- (2) That the Committee records its thanks to those key individuals involved in the successful delivery of the Scheme and that letters be sent to pass on these sentiments.***

CS/44. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS SCHEME

Members were reminded of the original Community Partnership Scheme which operated from 1997 to 2000. The Scheme had been successful in

progressing new and existing capital projects and had exceeded Government targets. It had been managed by two full-time officers with additional support equivalent to a further two posts. In addition to grant funding, the Scheme was able to offer community development support, funding advice and technical support.

Since the conclusion of the original Scheme, the Council had suffered its financial crisis. It was necessary to reduce staff numbers and to undertake the reprioritisation exercise. As a result, no Community Partnership Scheme ran for two years.

As a result of a recent service development proposal, £50,000 had been allocated for a new Community Partnership Scheme. The grant money needed to be awarded by 31st March 2002. It was proposed that the Partnership Development Officer administer the Scheme in conjunction with the other responsibilities of this post. The Council would be unable to offer direct technical support and only strictly limited community development support and funding advice. Given the success of the previous scheme and the time constraints, it was proposed to retain broadly the same format as that used previously. Suggested guidance for applicants and an application form were appended to the report. The guiding principles remained that the Scheme should provide support for community groups in South Derbyshire, assist in attracting external funds, encourage self help and joint working. The key difference would be that it would not support projects which were Council officer led and part of the Council's Capital Programme. It would however support community led projects where the Council was a key partner.

Grants would support capital costs of between 5% and 25% of the total project costs, with awards of between £1,000 and £25,000. Grants would also be available for professional fees. Applicants would need to meet certain specified criteria. Due to the required timescales, it was proposed to process applications on a first come, first served basis and this would effectively mean a two round bidding process. Details were given of the publicity arrangements. At present the Scheme had only been reinstated for the current year, but it would be reviewed and evaluated on completion, to inform improved management of any future scheme and service development.

Members were delighted at the reintroduction of the Community Partnership Scheme. They spoke about the maximum level of grant assistance and the process in place to authorise larger allocations from the Grant Fund. It was noted that officers would not be able to offer the same level of technical support and that this Community Partnership Scheme would be more a grant only, pump-priming scheme.

RESOLVED:-

That Members agree the revised guidance and application procedures for the Community Partnership Scheme.

CS/45. **LOCAL CULTURAL STRATEGY**

Note:- At 6.50 p.m. Councillor Douglas left the Meeting.

It was reported that in 1999 the Government launched draft guidance for local authorities on the development of cultural strategies. The guidance defined culture as broad and inclusive and the Secretary of State's aim was to ensure that local authorities took a lead role in forging partnerships to develop cultural opportunities for their local communities. The guidance indicated several key underlying principles which were set out in the report.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport now required that local cultural strategies were put in place by the end of 2002. In the Spring of 2001, the Derbyshire Local Government Association had suggested a consortium approach between the County Council and its Districts to develop a Derbyshire Cultural Strategy, with each area contributing to its own local action plans. The County Consortium Officer Group had produced a draft Strategy which was appended to the report and this would be submitted for adoption at the next Derbyshire LGA meeting.

To ensure a local perspective was brought to the Cultural Strategy, a multi-agency officer group had met to prepare local action plans to underpin the County Strategy. Initially, the Group completed an audit of cultural activity in the District and highlighted examples of good practice. The Group would now complete a series of action plans based upon the themes used in the County Strategy and would hold a seminar/event in the Autumn to enable local people to have an input into the development of cultural activity in South Derbyshire.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That Members note the Derbyshire Cultural Strategy and that comments be forwarded to the Derbyshire Consortium prior to the Strategy being adopted by the Derbyshire LGA.***
- (2) That the South Derbyshire Cultural Strategy Action Plan be completed and submitted to a future meeting of the Committee for adoption.***

CS/46. **HOUSING BRIEFING**

Under Minute No. CS/26 of 18th July 2002 the Committee received Performance Management Information and the first Housing Briefing Note. Members comments had been taken on board in reviewing the format of this document and the August Briefing Sheet was circulated for the Committee's information. The Briefing Sheet would be produced each month and be issued to staff, Members, the Tenants Advisory and Consultation Team and to other Council Divisions. The performance information on which the Briefing Sheet was based would be considered each month by managers and team leaders in the Housing Division in order to focus effort on areas where improvements were needed.

Members considered the Housing Briefing and questions were submitted on recent increases in the level of rent arrears. Information was supplied on possible causes and the Chair explained the impact of payments being made by direct debit and via post offices. He spoke of the pro-active approach being undertaken by Tenant Liaison Officers as part of the recently agreed service improvements. The Chair explained that where possession proceedings resulted in a Court Order, tenants were only usually required to

repay the arrears at a low rate. The Deputy Leader of the Council spoke of the need to identify problems at an early stage, so that tenants could get appropriate advice and assistance.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That Members receive the August 2002 Housing Briefing Sheet.***
- (2) That the briefing sheet be circulated to all Members, staff in the Housing Division, Divisional Managers and members of the Tenants Advisory and Consultation Team, on a monthly basis.***

CS/47. **THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROPOSED HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

It was reported that the proposed Housing Asset Management Strategy (AMS) would assist the Council to plan and make investment decisions to meet the decency standards for all of its properties. It would enable the Council to involve stakeholders in decisions in an accountable way and to develop a more detailed approach to option appraisals, once stock survey information had been assessed. The Strategy would be developed further as the stock condition survey was analysed and when new software enabled manipulation and modelling of different implementation strategies to meet the decency standards. The AMS would be used to ensure that Members, tenants and Officers were better informed in strategic decision making and a copy of the Strategy was appended to the report.

Nominations were sought from Members wishing to be involved in the work of the procurement, quality assurance and responsive repairs sub-groups proposed as part of the AMS. Further information was sought on the composition and roles of the sub-groups. Councillor Hood was nominated to serve on the responsive repairs sub-group and further nominations from the Conservative group could be provided if required.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee approves the Housing Asset Management Strategy and that it be developed further in the future as a tool to guide stock investment decision making for the Housing Service.***
- (2) That Members note the opportunity to be involved in the work of the procurement, quality assurance and responsive repairs sub-groups and advise the Buildings Maintenance Manager if they wish to join one of these groups.***

Note:- At 7.10 p.m. Councillor Lemmon left the Meeting.

CS/48. **SUPPORTING PEOPLE REGIME**

At its Meeting on 9th January 2001, the former Housing and Environment Committee approved a Countywide collaborative approach to the use of supporting people implementation grants. A Core Strategy Group (CSG) had been established to discuss the strategic actions required to implement the Supporting People regime. It had commissioned the University of York to undertake research and identify the housing and support needs of vulnerable

people. Work was being undertaken at a County level to set the contracts that would be issued to each support provider. The District Council was a support provider in terms of its Sheltered Housing and Community Alarm Services. The contracts must be in place by March 2003, in order that the monies for the service could be paid. The contracts would then be reviewed by 2008, taking account of Best Value principles.

Further decisions would be required on whether to introduce a local subsidy policy. It appeared likely that a charging regime would be adopted and therefore income lost by not charging for services would have to be borne by the local partners. The local subsidy policy was a variation on the charging regime and it determined whether or not the local authority would subsidise the charges for any tenant not entitled to Housing Benefit. The current charge for the support element of the Sheltered Housing Service was £8.60 and this would become the weekly subsidy per non-qualifying tenant. It was anticipated that the Countywide strategy would be submitted for consideration at the October Committee Meeting. The Strategy would encompass the objectives of each local authority and its purpose would be to detail identified needs, the support schemes in place and those proposed to deliver Supporting People.

For South Derbyshire, the segregation of support costs for Sheltered Housing and the Community Alarm Service had been completed. The costs related to the previous warden service and in total were identified as £521,517. This equated to a support cost of £8.60 per Sheltered Housing tenant per week for the support elements of the service. The management element was a further £3.63 giving a total cost of £12.23 per week as compared to the current charge of £6.50. The rent pool of £521,517 would be paid as a 'windfall' to the Council for one year only. The money was ring-fenced for certain activities and draft guidance had been issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This required councils to consider using a proportion of the money to subsidise the implementation of the service charges for current tenants. A number of options were being prepared and it was anticipated that these would be submitted to the next Committee Meeting.

Details were given of the existing housing and support services in place within South Derbyshire. A number of new pipeline schemes were anticipated to come into effect after April 2003. Further information would be provided to Members through the presentation of the Countywide strategy and Committee reports in the Autumn which would require decisions in relation to the 'windfall' expenditure and the Subsidy Policy for new tenants.

The Chair urged all Members of the Council to attend the seminar on Supporting People, which would take place on 10th September 2002. It would be conducted by Julie Fuller, the County Council's specialist on Supporting People.

Members discussed options for use of the 'windfall' to reduce the impact of 'Supporting People' costs for tenants. A breakdown was needed to provide meaningful figures for tenants. Other issues discussed were the frequently changing guidance on this topic, the need for responsible press coverage to avoid undue anxiety for tenants, the wish to support tenants through this process and to handle Supporting People in an open and transparent way. It was noted that the Tenants Advisory and Consultation Team would be invited to participate in the seminar.

Note:- At 7.25 p.m. Councillor Routledge left the Meeting.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee notes progress in relation to the implementation of the Supporting People Regime.***
- (2) That a Seminar be arranged for Members to explore in more detail the implications for South Derbyshire of Supporting People.***

CS/49. **IMPROVEMENTS TO SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE: CONSULTATION WITH TENANTS AND OPTION APPRAISAL SHELTERED SCHEMES AT BASSES CRESCENT, PINE GROVE AND SMALLTHORNE PLACE**

Under Minute No. CS/83 of 10th January 2002, the Committee agreed to undertake option appraisals for three Sheltered Housing Schemes at Basses Crescent, Castle Gresley, Pine Grove, Newhall and Smallthorne Place, Woodville. The Best Value Inspectors had highlighted the need for the Council to develop its vision for Sheltered Housing and to take into account the likely future demand for sheltered accommodation and the standards of that accommodation. The three schemes suffered from chronic low demand and comprised bedsits and smaller properties with poor communal facilities and a general lack of facilities for older people.

The Council had over 1,100 units of sheltered accommodation which was far in excess of the Government's assessment of the District's Sheltered Housing needs. The introduction of Supporting People and increasing customer expectations meant that future demand was likely to decline further. The initial option appraisal had concluded that all three sheltered schemes suffered from low demand, other than the bungalows at Pine Grove. Whilst they were all in basically sound physical condition, the properties were in need of modernisation and some needed significant improvement. The initial appraisal report recommended that the Council work with the tenants of the three schemes to look at alternative and better housing options.

Extensive consultation was proposed with the tenants concerned before a final decision was made. An outline was given of the consultation proposals which would take place in September and October 2002. The tenants would be briefed about the lack of demand for the schemes, the potential improvement costs and the implications of the Supporting People Review. Consultations would also take place with stakeholders during the same time period and the stakeholders would be invited to submit proposals for redevelopment or improvement of the schemes, so that these could be considered alongside the results of the tenant consultation exercise. Members emphasised the importance of the consultation process.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee approves the proposals to consult and work with tenants of Basses Crescent, Castle Gresley, Pine Grove, Newhall and Smallthorne Place, Woodville, to look at alternative and better housing options at all these schemes, prior to any final***

decision on the future use of these Schemes at a subsequent Committee.

- (2) That Members approve the temporary suspension of lettings at all three Schemes pending a further report which will include the results of the consultation meetings.*
- (3) That the Committee approves the proposals to consult with stakeholders on potential options for these Schemes before considering formally the future use of the Schemes at a subsequent Committee.*

CS/50. **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 18th July 2002 were received.

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS – WILLOUGHBY HOUSE REFURBISHMENT CONTRACT (Paragraph 9)

The Committee discussed options for the delivery of this Contract.

ETWALL LEISURE CENTRE JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (Paragraph 7)

The Committee received the Exempt Minutes of the Etwall Leisure Centre Joint Management Committee Meeting held on 15th April 2002.

PROGRESS WITH THE CHANGE AND IMPROVEMENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME FOR HOUSING (Paragraph 8 & 11)

The Committee received a progress report on improvements to the Housing Service.

R.W. SOUTHERN

CHAIR