

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

12th October 2006

**PRESENT:-**

**Labour Group**

Councillor Southern (Chair), Councillor Richards (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Carroll, Jones, Mrs. Lane (substituting for Councillor Dunn), Shepherd, Tilley and Whyman, M.B.E.

**Conservative Group**

Councillors Harrison, Hood, Shaw and Mrs. Wheeler (substituting for Councillor Mrs. Littlejohn).

**In Attendance**

Councillors R. Lane, Mulgrew and Taylor (Labour Group) and Councillor Atkin (Conservative Group).

**APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillor Dunn (Labour Group), Councillor Mrs. Littlejohn (Conservative Group) and Councillor Mrs. Walton.

**MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE**

HCS/39. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

(a) Fly tipping

Members received information of an incident of fly tipping on land owned by Councillor Bale. The Head of Environmental Services confirmed that the registration number of the vehicle which was believed to have been involved in the fly tipping had been taken and the keeper of the vehicle would be contacted as soon as possible.

Members expressed the view that it was important that the Council took enforcement action and prosecuted those people who were believed to have been involved in fly tipping.

(b) Woodyard Lane, Foston – Gypsy Caravan Site

Councillor Whyman asked for information on the latest developments in respect of the Woodyard Lane, Gypsy Caravan site.

The Head of Housing advised that fifteen of the twenty one plots at the site were now let.

(c) Association of Retained Council Housing

The Committee received a verbal report from Councillor Richards on the latest Meeting of the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) which he and

the Director of Community Services had attended. As a result, the Director of Community Services had been asked to join a Working Group on behalf of ARCH to look at influencing Government policy on housing.

HCS/40. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 31st August 2006 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

HCS/41. **REPORTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

(a) Arrangements for Improving Homelessness Services – BVPI183 (a) and BVPI 183 (b) – Report of Community Scrutiny Committee

The Committee considered a report from a Special Meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on 25th September 2006. The report was presented to the Committee by Councillor Lane, Chair of the Community Scrutiny Committee. The purpose of the report was to contribute to the arrangements for improving services in respect of BVPI 183 (a) [Length of stay in temporary accommodation (bed & breakfast)] and BVPI 183 (b) [Length of stay in temporary accommodation (hostel)].

BVPI 183[a] and BVPI 183[b] had been identified as priority indicators for the Council. The Best Value Performance Plan 2006 had indicated that the outturn performance for BVPI 183[a] in 2004/05 had been bottom quartile and this trend had continued into 2005/06. It was noted, however, that during the same period, BVPI 183[b] was top quartile and trends indicated continuing improvement during 2005/06. It was noted that plans to achieve top quartile performance for BVPI 183[a] by March 2009 were not being addressed, although continuous improvement had been identified in the target setting process.

The Community Committee's findings were reported as follows:-

- A Housing Service Performance report to the Committee on 31st August 2006 indicated that performance of three weeks was currently being achieved in respect of BVPI 183[a]. This performance was better than the published target of four weeks. BVPI 183[b] performance was still top quartile.
- There appeared to be some positive aspects to the performance level quoted above as the service was now moving its focus from being 'reactive' to one that aspired to prevention. In response to customer requirements, housing staff had been trained to mediate and counsel potential homeless people by offering a more flexible advisory service.
- Housing Officers were able to adopt a more flexible approach to prevent homelessness by supporting or stabilising difficult circumstances.
- Housing Officers had indicated that they were confident that the homelessness service they provided would meet the needs of the community, but due to the relative low levels of need, one difficult case had the potential to distort the underlying performance.
- The Committee had been reassured that the Council's Homelessness Strategy document was currently being reviewed.

**RESOLVED:-**

***That the recommendations of the Community Scrutiny Committee in respect of arrangements for improving homelessness services be approved and the Director of Community Services be requested to investigate how other similar local authorities approach homelessness issues and how they achieve top quartile performance for BVPI 183 (a) [Length of stay in temporary accommodation (bed & breakfast)].***

(b) Audit Commission Inspection of the Council's Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service

The Committee considered a report which summarised the findings and recommendations of the Community Scrutiny Committee from its Special Meeting on 25th September 2006. The report was presented to the Committee by Councillor Lane, Chair of the Community Scrutiny Committee. The purpose of the report was to provide feedback and make recommendations on the progress in completing the recommendations made by the Audit Commission following their inspection of the Council's housing, repairs and maintenance service in June 2005.

The Audit Commission inspection covered the following areas:-

- Access, customer care and user focus.
- Diversity.
- Capital improvement, planned and cyclical maintenance and major repairs to the Council's 3,235 homes.
- Responsive and void repairs.
- Gas servicing.
- Aids and adaptations for people with disabilities.
- Resident involvement and value for money.

The Audit Commission report setting out its findings was published in October 2005 and the Commission's overall judgement was that the Council provided a 'fair' one star service with 'promising' prospects for improvement. The Inspectors identified a number of positive aspects about the repairs and maintenance service, but also found a number of service areas that needed improving. The Inspectors stated that the Council's prospects for improvement were promising but they also identified a number of 'barriers' to improvement which included:-

- Some actions identified in previous inspections had not been implemented and progress had been slow on some issues.
- Best Value principles had not been effectively and comprehensively applied to the service.
- Information Technology systems were not yet sufficiently developed.

The Audit Commission made a number of recommendations designed to help the service to continue to improve.

The findings of the Community Scrutiny Committee were based on a detailed assessment of the Audit Commission's recommendations and the progress made to date in implementing them.

The findings of the Scrutiny Committee were as follows:-

- The report now submitted had been prepared to clarify the progress made by the Council's Housing Services in fulfilling the recommendations by the Audit Commission inspection of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service in June 2005.
- The findings revealed that the Housing Services Division was making significant progress in achieving the recommendations made by the Audit Commission.
- Both this Scrutiny Committee and the Housing Services Division were concerned that the Audit Commission had no plans in place to re-inspect the Council's Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service in the immediate future.
- The lack of any formal recognition by an external organisation that improvements to service delivery had been made may have a demotivational effect on staff, who had made progress on the Audit Commission's recommendations, where possible.
- Providing that the Housing Services Division continued to maintain its focus and build on its current progress, it was possible that some elements of the Housing Service could achieve 'Beacon' status.
- If a re-inspection of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service was undertaken in twelve months time, a significant improvement to the re-rating of the service would be realised.

It was confirmed that an independent Value For Money assessment for repairs and maintenance had been agreed by the external auditor as a reasonable course of action. A separate report to the Scrutiny Committee in late October 2006 would comment on whether it might be necessary to place the repairs and maintenance works out to tender. The procurement process was likely to cost in the region of £50,000 to the Council. In the absence of a planned Audit Commission re-inspection of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service, the commissioning of an independent assessment in eighteen months time was likely to cost in the region of £7,000 to £8,000.

**RESOLVED:-**

***That the recommendations of the Community Scrutiny Committee in respect of the Audit Commission's Inspection of the Council's Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service, as listed below be approved:-***

- ***The tenants' obligations with respect to 'dealing with asbestos' should be included in the lettings agreement (see Audit Commission Ref: R3).***
- ***A separate report advising on the implications of the slippages in the Sheltered Housing 'Vision & Standards' Plan be prepared for the Housing & Community Services Committee (Ref R4).***
- ***Consider the need for and frequency of post inspections (Ref. R5).***
- ***A discount system be investigated for retrospective annual review of repetitive work for the proposed contract arrangements (Ref R6).***
- ***There appears to be scope for improvements in the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and arrangements with the Council's Partners need to be reviewed as a matter of urgency. (Ref. R7).***
- ***The extension of reporting times to include Saturday mornings to be reviewed (Ref. R9).***

- ***A ‘capacity building’ exercise be undertaken to develop the housing maintenance and repairs service/DFGs with a view to improving performance, quality and Value For Money (Ref. R12).***
- ***In the absence of a planned Audit Commission re-inspection of the housing repairs and maintenance service, the commissioning of an independent assessment of the service be made within eighteen months time to allow for the completion of the implementation plan and to collect six months performance data.***

#### HCS/42. **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS SCHEME**

The Committee considered a report on applications for funding received by the Community Partnerships Scheme which sought approval for recommendations from the Assessment Panel for awards from that scheme. The following applications were received and considered:-

- The Woodland Trust – Land Acquisition at Botany Bay - £25,000
- South Derbyshire Organ Trust – Preserve and Enhance Pipe Organ - £8,000
- Frank Wickham Charity Trust – Village Hall Refurbishment - £5,945

The Community Partnership Scheme Assessment Panel met on 13th September 2006 to score the applications against questions and weightings agreed previously. Once the weightings had been applied, the final scores for each project were as follows:-

Woodland Trust	6.50
South Derbyshire Organ Trust	5.67
Frank Wickham Charity Trust	5.50

The Panel’s recommendations for distribution of the grant were as follows:-

Woodland Trust	£25,000
South Derbyshire Organ Trust	£ 8,000
Frank Wickham Charity Trust	£ 5,945

#### **RESOLVED:-**

***That the Committee, having considered the recommendations of the Community Partnership Scheme Assessment Panel, awards the following grants:-***

- ***The Woodland Trust – Land Acquisition at Botany Bay – £25,000.***
- ***South Derbyshire Organ Trust – Preserve and enhance Pipe Organ – £8,000.***
- ***Frank Wickham Charity Trust – Village Hall Refurbishment – £5,945.***

#### HCS/43. **SERVICE PLANS 2006/2009**

The Committee considered Service Plans for the following areas:-

- Housing Services
- Leisure and Community Development
- Environmental Services

Members noted that the Environmental Services Service Plan included matters that were also the responsibility of the Environmental and Development Services Committee.

Service Plans were an important part of the Council's performance management framework, acting as an important link between the Corporate Plan and the personal performance objectives established through the Employee Review and Development Scheme. Each of the plans contained the following sections:-

- A description of the service including the customer base, standards of provision, the extent of partnership working, budgets, the management of capital assets and staffing arrangements.
- The opportunities and challenges faced by the service, including future budget pressures over the next three years and plans for efficiency reviews.
- Key tasks for the three years April 2006 to March 2009, which included actions resulting from the Corporate Plan, Improvement Plan and the Community Strategy.
- Workforce planning.
- Managing risks.
- Employee structure, work organisation and development needs.
- National and local performance indicators (with three year targets).
- Useful contacts.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That the Service Plans for Housing Services, Leisure and Community Development and Environmental Services be approved as the basis for service delivery for the period to March 2009.***
- (2) That the Chair of the Committee be requested to write to all Council staff who participated in the Housing Services Open Day to express the thanks of Members for their hard work and contribution to a successful event.***
- (3) That the Director of Community Services be requested to provide all Members of the Council with appropriate information on the law relating to fireworks to assist them when providing advice/information to their constituents.***

HCS/44. **TREE INSPECTIONS – PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee considered a report which outlined the approach followed in the undertaking of a tree inspection survey and the short and long term issues that had arisen with this work to date.

The Council's approach in the past to tree maintenance had been reactive and piecemeal rather than proactive and structured and to date, there was no clear information on the number of trees for which the Council was responsible. The importance of the project had been emphasised following a number of fatalities, serious injury and damage to property from falling trees that had resulted in guidance from the Health and Safety Executive to a major city council in the Midlands and the need for regular recorded tree inspections.

The audit had collected data on 563 trees, of which 296 were classified as mature, 118 were identified as over-mature, with 173 identified as requiring

immediate work this winter. A proportion of the work would involve the felling of over-mature trees and the remainder was described as preventive or cosmetic. If work was undertaken this year, it would probably prevent more extensive work in future years and also impact on the number of complaints received from members of the public. Some of the work could be undertaken in-house, but a significant amount, particularly the felling of over-mature trees, would need to be procured from an external contractor.

The Committee was asked to have regard to the following longer-term considerations:-

- Regular, recorded inspections were critical to the management of the Council's tree stock from both an environmental health and safety perspective.
- The Council needed to undertake an audit of all its trees for which it was responsible.
- There was a clear need to develop further the Council's policy for dealing with trees. At present, the absence of a refined policy made it difficult to be consistent as to what the Council would and would not do.
- There was a major problem with inappropriate tree species being planted, particularly in areas such as Stenson Fields.
- Regular proactive work would have significant cost saving benefits as opposed to the current reactive approach.

In order to progress further with the audit and to undertake all of the immediate tree works identified, the Head of Finance had agreed to bring forward an £10,000 allocation to be spent this year. In addition to allowing more progress to be made, it would also allow for the necessary feasibility work to resolve some of the longer term issues which were likely to involve further service development proposals in future years.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That the contents of the report and the actions proposed in respect of tree inspections be noted.***
- (2) That the Director of Community Services be requested to submit a report to the next meeting of the Committee on the details of the Council's policy on the removal of trees and whether this involves the replacement of trees with another appropriate species.***
- (3) That information be included in the Members' Bulletin setting out the details of the number of over-mature trees in the District which may be at risk of removal and what works can be undertaken to enable their retention in a safe and healthy condition.***

HCS/45. **PROGRESS REPORT – PLAY EQUIPMENT PROVISION**

The Committee considered a progress report on play equipment provision. Members were advised that at its Meeting on 6th June 2006, the Committee approved the appointment of Wicksteed Leisure as the Council's preferred play equipment supplier and an initial programme of works had been agreed as follows:-

- Play and Youth Provision - Arthur Street, Castle Gresley      £45,000

- Play and Youth Provision - Chestnut Avenue, Midway £50,000
- Play Provision - Woodville Road, Overseal £30,000

The above work together with other schemes would be funded primarily from a capital allocation of £100,000 per annum over a three year period together with £30,000 per annum for a similar period from the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership specifically for Youth Provision. In addition to this provision, it was confirmed that £200,000 had been allocated to the District to enhance play provision in its widest sense.

The programme of works had been substantially completed in August 2006, but following discussions with some key stakeholders at Castle Gresley at the pre contract stage, concern was expressed regarding the equipment provided and it was agreed that an additional £50,000 be allocated for an additional item of equipment for older children. Following the completion of works at Chestnut Avenue and Overseal, the works were generally well received and feedback had indicated the desire for greater provision for children in the older age group. To address these concerns, authority had been given to allocate an additional £15,000 to Chestnut Avenue, Midway and £10,000 at Overseal. Overseal Parish Council had indicated that it would be prepared to meet a third of the cost if additional money was allocated. The present situation with regard to the delivery of the priorities identified in the Youth Needs Survey was detailed at Annexe “A” of the report, which summarised the current capital spend and commitments made.

The Committee was advised that requests had been received from local residents regarding the updating of play equipment at Fabis Close, Swadlincote and a meeting had been arranged regarding the options for upgrading. To modernise the play provision at the Fabis Close play site, permission was requested from the Committee to include the site in the programme, provided that satisfactory conclusions could be reached regarding options for upgrading. It was noted that because of the desire to undertake as much of the upgrading work as soon as possible in the current financial year, the amount of expenditure proposed would bring the works within European Tendering regulations. To comply with the regulations, all work still in the process of being delivered would be ordered through the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation which had a European compliant contract with Wicksteed Leisure Ltd.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That the progress in delivering the agreed programme of capital works for play equipment provision be noted.***
- (2) That the additional play and youth provision for the Chestnut Avenue, Midway, Woodville Road, Overseal and Fabis Close, Swadlincote sites as identified in Annexe A of the report be approved.***

HCS/46. **FORMER SITE OF NOS. 22-28 ASKEW GROVE**

The Committee considered a report in respect of restrictive covenants on land at Nos. 22-28 Askew Grove, Repton and a letter received from Repton Parish Council on this matter was circulated to all Members present at the Meeting. The report asked Members whether they wished to grant a request for the

relaxation of restrictive covenants on the site of land at Nos. 22-28 Askew Grove, Repton to allow for the construction of eleven properties on that site.

Members expressed a desire for the Committee to receive detailed legal advice on this matter and accordingly, it was considered appropriate to defer consideration of the report until the next Meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That consideration of the report in respect of restrictive covenants at the site of Nos. 22-28 Askew Grove, Repton be deferred to the next Meeting of the Committee to enable an officer from Legal Services to provide appropriate advice.***
- (2) That the withdrawal of delegated powers from officers in respect of decisions relating to covenants be investigated and a report on the matter be submitted to Council/ Committee as appropriate.***
- (3) That the Deputy Chief Executive be requested to investigate whether the consideration of covenants is a relevant issue which should be included in reports when the Development Control Committee is considering planning applications.***
- (4) That the developer in respect of the land at Nos. 22-28 Askew Grove, Repton be advised by the Director of Community Services that no decision has yet been taken to relax the restrictive covenants in respect of the same site.***

Note: Councillors Atkin and Mulgrew left the Meeting at 7.45 p.m.

HCS/47. **ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES GUIDE AND STANDARDS**

The Committee considered a report on the draft Environmental Services Guide and Standards. As part of the Higher Quality Services Theme of the Council's new Corporate Plan, there was an action for 2006/07 to "plan and establish service standards", in consultation with service users across all service areas. The overall aim of the initiative was to improve access to information and Council services for local people by being:-

- Accountable and open
- To learn from feedback
- To assist in the culture of continuous improvement

The process was designed to improve efficiency and ultimately customer satisfaction and this was a key element of any future Comprehensive Performance Assessment. It was proposed that a booklet would be produced for each of the following services:-

- Environmental Services
- Benefits and Taxes
- Housing Services
- Planning and Building Control
- Leisure and Community

In accordance with best practice, the booklets would be similar in nature, have corporate colours including logo, name of service, website, relevant photos and be available in different languages. The booklets would provide the following information:-

- A copy of the generic customer service standards
- A contents page
- Introduction (key facts: what can these services do for you?)
- Website address including performance updates
- A brief description of the service with relevant telephone numbers
- Standards of service clearly identified.

The text for the guide was attached at Appendix 1 of the report and a colour formatted version was circulated to Members at the Meeting. The booklet, once agreed, would be available in the Council's reception, libraries, on the Council's website and to any person or organisation who requested a copy. The service guide would offer a clear description of the services offered by Environmental Services and would define the standard that could be expected by the public.

**RESOLVED:-**

***That the Environmental Services Guide and Standards document be approved for publication.***

HCS/48. **ETWALL LEISURE CENTRE JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 24TH APRIL 2006**

The Committee considered the Open Minutes of the Etwall Leisure Centre Joint Management Committee from the Meeting held on 24th April 2006.

**RESOLVED:-**

***That the Open Minutes of the Etwall Leisure Centre Joint Management Committee held on 24th April 2006 be received and noted.***

HCS/49. **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 31st August 2006 were received.***

**MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

***Members agreed to receive a report to a future Meeting on the provision of play equipment in Frederick Street, Woodville.***

**HOUSING SERVICES STAFF STRUCTURE (Paragraphs 3 and 4)**

***The Committee supported proposals in respect of an amended staffing structure for the Council's Housing Services, and noted that they would be reported to the Finance and Management Committee for approval.***

**SHELTERED HOUSING PROJECT BOARD (Paragraph 3)**

***The Committee approved proposals relating to the decision-making process in respect of the awarding of a contract for upgrading of the warden call equipment in the Council's sheltered housing stock.***

**ETWALL LEISURE CENTRE JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 24TH APRIL 2006 (Paragraph 1)**

***The Exempt Minutes of the Etwall Leisure Centre Joint Management Committee held on 24th April 2006 were received and noted.***

R.W. SOUTHERN

CHAIR