

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14th January 2002

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Richards (Chair), Councillor Routledge (Vice-Chair) and Councillor Evens.

Conservative Group

Councillors Harrison and Mrs. Robbins.

In Attendance

Councillor Bell (Labour Group).

APOLOGY

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Sherratt (Labour Group).

CYS/17. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 26th November 2001 were received.

CYS/18. **SOUTH DERBYSHIRE LOCAL PLAN**

The Committee received a report (previously submitted to the Environmental Services Committee on 3rd January 2002) on the first Deposit Draft of the Local Plan. The Planning Services Manager gave a verbal presentation outlining the key messages arising from the Local Plan review document. He advised that the Structure Plan had been published recently and given the Structure Plan requirements and the current PPG's, the new Draft Local Plan sought to achieve the agreed set of objectives in the following ways:-

In the Swadlincote Sub-Area

- (1) Improve the status of Swadlincote town centre as the main focus for retailing, service and leisure provision.
- (2) Provide better access to and within the town.
- (3) Maximise the use of suitable brownfield land for housing and employment uses and reduce the need to travel.
- (4) Assist the regeneration of the Woodville area.

In the Derby Sub-Area

Maximise the potential to create balanced communities and reduce the need to travel

District Wide

- (1) Protect and enhance the quality and character of the natural and built environment.

- (2) Ensure as far as practicable that new development provided for the needs of occupiers, users and visitors.
- (3) Direct development in the rural area to sustainable locations.
- (4) Safeguard existing employment
- (5) Ensure that the policies and proposals complement those of neighbouring authorities.

The Planning Services Manager advised that this consultation document would be placed on deposit on 18th February 2002 and a map outlining proposals would be placed on the Council's website for information.

Councillor Evens questioned what action the Council was taking to publicise the Local Plan and ask what background papers to the plan would be available. He also advised that he would have liked to have viewed the Local Plan earlier than it was submitted to Members for consideration. The Planning Services Manager advised that master plans for the large development sites would be drawn up and available as background papers at the second deposit stage. With regard to the publicity for the Plan, seminars for all parish councils were being held together with public meetings and every household was receiving a digestible copy of the summary of the Plan in addition to advertising the Plan on the Council's website.

Councillor Harrison queried the status of the Local Plan in light of the Green Paper recently published. The Planning Services Manager advised that in his opinion he did not think that the Green Paper would become legislation for quite some time and that accordingly, it did not affect the publication of the Local Plan. There were various issues to be resolved before a change of policy could be made but in the future, local plans would be replaced by Local Development Framework documents.

Mrs. Robbins queried the decision to choose a large development site at Boulton Moor and the Planning Services Manager explained the reasons for choosing this area. A debate took place regarding the issue of parishes and settlements and sustainable villages. Mrs. Robbins expressed concern about amenities not being provided at a previous development at Elvaston and was assured by the Planning Services Manager that amenities would be provided at this green field site at Boulton Moor.

The Chair queried how long it was envisaged that greenfield sites would be required for housing development and was advised that as long as there was a requirement for more housing then there would be a need to develop greenfield sites in the foreseeable future.

CYS/19. **USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE**

The Council's IT Network and Operations Manager gave a detailed presentation on the use and development of the Council's website. He explained that the website was originally constructed by an external company but had since been updated and maintained internally by the IT Services Division. This Division had spent significant time working on the site in order to create a more user-friendly environment. The internal structure of the site did not lend itself well to alteration, making any updates a large administrative task. In addition to this, the site did not have any dynamic content available which meant that many of the E-Government initiatives could not be achieved using the technology of the current site.

A Council-wide steering group was to be established with responsibility for deciding the content of the website. This Group would be formed from representatives from each service area within the Council which had a requirement to publish information.

Advance training had been arranged for several members of the IT Service Team in order that they may start work on the development of the new site and in addition to this, basic training would be made available to authors from around the Council who had a contributory role.

The implementation of the improved website was scheduled to take place in approximately eight months time, although several incremental changes would take place as they became available.

The improvements to the website were being made to ensure that E-Government requirements were met whilst at the same time, the user's experience of the site was enhanced. Some of the features to be included were as follows:-

- (1) Online payments for Council Tax, housing rents, bulky refuse collection.
- (2) Online forms to include planning forms, application forms, and housing benefit forms which were submitted directly from a browser.
- (3) Improved content about Members, Committees and Minutes etc.
- (4) A facility to search the site.
- (5) A greatly improved "links" area including local entertainment, other Government sites and charity sites.
- (6) Latest news and events from the area.
- (7) Improved tourist information.

The Head of Community Services advised that at a recent Tenant Participation Meeting there had been queries from tenants regarding having access to PC's at communal areas within sheltered housing accommodation. She suggested that maybe users of the Council's website could serve on the proposed editorial group.

Councillor Harrison suggested that officers view the Derbyshire County Council website which was an excellent example and which included information on tourism, population, staff, committees and Members.

Councillor Evens reported that some information on the Council's website was out of date and was advised that this would be rectified immediately. He also suggested that items on the website needed to be "newsworthy" in order to engage interest.

The Chair thanked the Council's IT Network and Operations Manager for an informative presentation.

CYS/20. **BEST VALUE REVIEW – SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE**

Members received a detailed report outlining actions which had been taken to implement the Authority's own Action Plan (circulated to Members) together with the actions still outstanding to improve the service against the Inspector's original recommendations. The Housing Services Manager gave a

verbal report updating Members on all the progress made to date and paid particular attention to the current staffing situation within the Sheltered Housing Service. Members were advised that the Best Value Inspectors were coming in to the organisation the week commencing 8th February 2002 to re-inspect the service. Members took the opportunity to ask questions arising from the presentation and were advised that a timetable incorporating the revised timescales for the work arising from the Review to be undertaken would be circulated to Members.

Councillor Harrison queried why repair and maintenance did not feature as a priority within the report and was advised by the Head of Community Services that the new Community Wardens would be acting as more of a link from the Sheltered Housing sites to the Council in order that repairs and maintenance were monitored on a more regular basis. The Head of Community Services also advised that the Best Value Review incorporating repairs and maintenance would commence later this year. Customer care issues were being examined and the Housing Services Manager advised that it was his wish that all of the Housing Service Staff would be trained in the area of customer care.

CYS/21. **CLEANSING THE ENVIRONMENT BEST VALUE ACTION PLAN**

(At 7.00 p.m. Councillors Harrison and Mrs. Robbins left the Meeting).

The Action Plan arising out of the Cleansing the Environment Best Value Review contained over seventy actions timetabled to be undertaken over the next four years. A condensed copy of the Action Plan was circulated to Members for information as it contained those actions which were identified for action by January 2002. The Direct Services Manager gave a verbal presentation outlining the Action Plan paying particular attention to the actions which were ongoing.

Arising out of the report it was noted that the Council's response time to remedy fly tipping had reduced from 6.4 days to 1.2 days and this information was particularly well received by the Committee. It was noted that the Rapid Response squad called the "Clean Team" had been introduced into the street cleansing service with effect from 3rd December 2001 and a Freephone service to facilitate reporting from the public and staff was introduced at the same time and both measures were working extremely well. Accordingly, Members asked for a report on the Clean Team Hit Squad detailing information on the first quarter of it being in operation. Members also asked for a report to the next Meeting on the abandoned vehicles service.

With regard to the purchasing of vehicle/equipment to respond to dog fouling in the area Councillor Richards advised that he had recently seen a television demonstration of machinery used to deal with dog faeces without any human contact. Members were advised that a strategy to combat dog fouling was agreed in October 2001 and all parish councils and Members had been made aware of the Strategy and the Dog Warden had been asked to target the issue of dog fouling.

The Direct Services Manager extended an invitation to Members of the Committee to visit the depot to view the work of the Clean Team etc., and it

was agreed that this visit would take place before the next meeting of the Committee.

CYS/22. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee reviewed the Work Programme and noted that an Overview Committee would now take place on 21st January 2002 and a Corporate Scrutiny Committee would take place on 28th January 2002. The issues arising from this Meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee would be incorporated into the Work Programme to be submitted to the next Meeting for information.

CYS/23. **COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**

Members received a detailed report on community consultation within the Council. It was noted that consultation with local people, service users and stakeholders in the public, private and voluntary sectors was an important aspect of the Government's "modernising" agenda. Examples of such consultation were as part of the concept of Best Value, consulting on decisions regarding the new political structures, engaging and involving communities in the development of the community strategy and also the development of "E-Government".

The Council had agreed a consultation strategy in March 2000. The overall aim of the strategy was to encourage more involvement in Council decision-making. Specific objectives comprised:-

- to inform the community and other stakeholders about the work of the Council
- to involve local people, service users and partners in the design and delivery of services
- to provide feedback on service delivery
- to help the Council to make decisions about plans, priorities and the allocation of resources
- to encourage a shared commitment to tackling social, economic and environmental issues
- to make the best use of resources by developing joint consultation programmes with other agencies

Over the last eighteen months, progress had been made in a number of areas including the following:-

- closer working with other authorities in Derbyshire (e.g. on the Best Value User Satisfaction surveys)
- the establishment of the South Derbyshire Citizens panel (part funded by Derbyshire county Council)
- the establishment of the Tenants Advisory and Consultation Team (TACT) and the increasing involvement of TACT in decisions about housing matters
- the use of consultation to inform Best Value Reviews and Improvement Plans (e.g. Cleansing the Environment)
- the training of employees in the use of consultation tools and techniques (e.g. focus groups)

At the same time, some important lessons had been learnt including:-

- consultation programmes needed to be structured
- a variety of qualitative and quantitative techniques needed to be used
- front line staff could make a valuable contribution to consultation programmes and needed to be involved actively in their design and implementation
- Members have a role to play in the process
- the need to build on the opportunities for joint working with other authorities to ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively and that consultation continues to be meaningful to local people and other stakeholders

The Committee was advised that consultation underpinned many aspects of the Council's Corporate Plan – the Vision Statement, guiding principles, key aims and priorities for service delivery. Critical success factors in policy, processes, customer results and society results also related specifically to community consultation. Work on the review of the consultation strategy was being progressed through the Corporate Best Value Working Group and the intention was to produce a draft strategy by the end of March 2002. It was noted that this Council was also a member of the Derbyshire Consultation Group which had assisted greatly with the setting up of a Citizens' Panel.

Members were keen to examine the issue of consultation generally and, accordingly referred this matter to the Overview Committee for consideration.

K.J. RICHARDS

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 7.30 p.m.