

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

10th January 2002

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Southern (Chair), Councillors Carroll, Dunn, Ford, Mrs. Mead, Mrs. Rose, Stone, Taylor and Whyman.

Conservative Group

Councillors Hood, Shaw (substitute for Councillor Lemmon) and Mrs. Wheeler (substitute for Councillor Douglas).

In Attendance

Councillors Bell, Harrington, Richards, and Wilkins (Labour Group).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillor Lauro (Vice-Chair), and Councillors Douglas and Lemmon (Conservative Group).

CS/66. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 15th November 2001 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

CS/67. **BRETRY CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE**

The Open Minutes of the Bretby Crematorium Joint Committee held on 20th June 2001, attached at Annexe 'A', were received.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

CS/68. **BEST VALUE REVIEW - HOUSING SERVICES**

It was reported that following discussions with the Inspector for the Housing Services Best Value Review, it had been agreed to undertake two separate housing reviews. The first review would concentrate on strategic housing, including private sector housing, homelessness and housing advice, housing allocations and the housing register. It would build on and incorporate issues from earlier work on the Strategic Housing Review that was postponed in February 2001. The review would consider in particular the crime and disorder implications of the Council's housing work.

The second review would concentrate on the Housing Landlord and Tenant Service functions. This would build on and incorporate issues from the previous Sheltered Housing Best Value Review and would start in late 2002. The timetable for the Strategic Review was to be complete by November 2002 and an initial project plan was appended to the report. A review team had been established comprising staff, stakeholders, tenants and Members. In addition, a steering group of officers had been formed, responsible for planning and co-ordinating the Review Team and providing information. The

Steering Group met fortnightly and the Review Team monthly. Two sub-groups of the Review Team had been established to develop the consultation and benchmarking plans for the Review. To compliment the Best Value work, a group had been set up to develop the HRA Business Plan and details were provided of its composition and terms of reference.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That two Best Value Reviews be undertaken for Housing Services, for the Strategic Housing and Landlord and Tenants Services functions.***
- (2) That the Action Plan for the review of Strategic Housing be noted.***

CS/69. **ALLOTMENT RENTS**

It was reported that three months notice was required for price changes in allotment licences. It was proposed to increase the annual rental fees by 2.8% to be £12.65 per plot. Whilst the majority of sites were well occupied, there were some sites which gave cause for concern. Information was provided on the Thorntree Lane allotments in Newhall and the improvements proposed in exchange for permission to lay a sewer across the site. A Member sought details of the termination notice required for such allotment licences and details would be provided following the Meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed price increases in allotment rents be approved.

CS/70. **EXIT STRATEGY - SWADLINCOTE WOODLAND FOREST PARK**

The Committee was reminded of the background to this Single Regeneration Budget Scheme, the 'Vision Elements' project and the on-site facilities provided. The completion of the project and production of a 'Best Practice Guide' marked the end of SRB spending on the Site. The 'exit strategy' for the Forest Park had identified issues for the short and longer terms regarding implementation of the Management Plan and completion of the original vision for the park. A way forward was proposed to meet each of the issues raised. Members were reminded of the scheme developed under the heading of 'Access Improvements' and the appointment of a temporary project officer to explore options and to submit funding applications. Particular reference was made to the Gateway Bridge proposal, the other remaining schemes and the capital funding required.

The long term management and development of the site was also addressed. The Urban Forest Park comprised some 35 hectares of land and was an important facility in the creation of The National Forest. It was suggested that a partner be sought with the necessary expertise to assist the Council with this task and advertisements had been placed to seek expressions of interest. Responses were received from four organisations and the next stage was to produce a document to outline the basis of a partnership for consideration by Members and prospective partners. A draft timetable was appended to the report and in the interim, park wardens had been employed to manage on-site problems and address some of the larger, specialist jobs.

In receiving the report, Members questioned the need for the Gateway Bridge, the capital and on-going revenue costs and other options available. Members were reminded of the transformation of this former clay-working site, the funding obtained from other partners and the achievements made to date. It was suggested that this item warranted further consideration.

RESOLVED:

That the proposals for the future management and development of the Urban Forest Park be referred for further consideration by the Overview Committee.

CS/71. **DEVELOPMENT OF NEWHALL PARK**

Members were reminded of the proposed improvements to Newhall Park and the joint project with the 'Friends of Newhall Park' (FONP). Details were provided of the key elements to this project which were valued at £75,500. The FONP had been awarded funding from Waste Recycling Environmental and the Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfields' Regeneration Partnership through an SRB6 Award. With the Council's contribution of £15,000 this meant that the project could be progressed.

Long-term absences were causing a shortage in the staff resources needed to undertake the procurement and detailed design work. Because of the need to complete the project and spend some of the capital monies, other options were being explored to undertake this work. The FONP had shown how community involvement and commitment could bring about major improvements in the quality of the service provided. The Group was keen to establish a base in the Park to be used by themselves and other local community groups. The former pavilion had previously been licensed to the Youth Service but this agreement had been terminated. Permission had been requested by the FONP to use the pavilion on a permanent basis and approval was sought in principle in order that a detailed licence could be produced.

With regard to the funding from WREN, it required applicants to name a third party to reimburse 11% of the grant awarded. The sum of £2,750 was sought from the Council as a contribution to the scheme to cover this cost. Members praised the efforts of the Friends of Newhall Park and details were also provided of the contribution being made by the Old Post Regeneration Association.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted and approval be given in principle to the Friends of Newhall Park to use the Pavilion as a community facility.***
- (2) That the sum of £2,750 be allocated to this project, to meet the landfill operator's levy on an award made to the Group by Waste Recycling Environmental.***

CS/72. **CELEBRATING THE GOLDEN JUBILEE**

The Committee gave consideration to a number of proposed events to commemorate the Queen's Golden Jubilee. The suggestions were to re-title the Festival of Leisure event as the 'Golden Jubilee Festival' for this year and a special event was planned for Rosliston Forestry Centre culminating in the lighting of a beacon. Sunday 2nd June had been designated as the day for Jubilee Church Services and bell ringing across the Country. The Commonwealth Games were to take place in Manchester during July/August 2002 and the 'torch' would travel through as many parts of the Country as possible, being scheduled to pass through Woodville on Sunday 30th June. It was proposed to invite children competing in the Youth Games and members of the local running club to participate in this event. Members considered the purchase of a commemorative mounted print and/or the purchase of souvenir items to be distributed to school children. Some authorities were hosting a lunch for couples who were married on the date of the Queen's Accession or her Coronation. Other proposals were liaison with other tiers of local government and community groups, naming of highways on new developments with a Jubilee theme and regular press releases to keep the public informed.

In considering the proposals, Members felt the Council's role was to liaise, support and co-ordinate as most communities and parishes would develop their own ideas. Support was voiced for the proposals to re-name the Festival of Leisure for this year, to participate in the lighting of a beacon at Rosliston Forestry Centre and the Jubilee church services. Similarly, there was support for the proposal for the Commonwealth Games torch, the liaison with community groups and the naming of highways on new developments.

RESOLVED:

That Officers implement those proposals approved by the Committee through liaison, co-ordination and support, to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

CS/73. **CEMETERY MANAGEMENT - INSPECTION OF MEMORIALS**

It was reported that following a number of fatalities in cemeteries, guidance had been issued requiring cemetery managers to undertake the systematic inspection of all memorials. Good practice had also been issued on the correct method for erecting memorials and to comply with this guidance, inspections and testing had recently commenced at Gresley Cemetery. Once this was complete, inspections would be undertaken at the Council's other cemeteries. At this stage it was difficult to gauge the public's response to the actions taken or indeed the likely financial implications that might arise. With regard to the inspection of memorials, staff had been trained and those memorials considered unsafe were identified by a yellow polythene bag. This was to warn visitors that the monument was potentially dangerous. It would also make the 'grant of right' holders, who were responsible for maintenance, aware of the problem. Correspondence was sent to the 'grant of right' holders to confirm the problem and if a response was not received in a reasonable time, action was taken to lay the memorials flat on the ground. Problems had been experienced in contacting some 'grant of right' holders. Being mindful of the sensitive nature of this service area, it

was decided to publicise the reasons for undertaking the inspections of memorials.

To avoid similar problems in the future, a Code of Practice had been issued for the erection of memorials. It included advice about the need to erect signage emphasising the danger from memorials and this would be taken on board initially at Gresley Cemetery and then at other cemeteries in the District. Access to cemeteries was also considered. Church Gresley Cemetery was used as a through route by children attending a nearby junior school. There were also reported concerns over vandalism.

Members considered the action taken and the sensitivity of this service area. However, health and safety issues were paramount given the tragic accidents that had occurred. Members discussed the implications of restricting access to cemeteries and the need to replace sections of fencing on some boundaries. The approach taken to identify unsafe memorials was also commented upon and Members were anxious to ensure that those unsafe memorials were laid flat as quickly as possible and the environment of the cemeteries was maintained. Members also commented on the implications for parish councils and the classification of parts of the Gresley Cemetery as an Open Space.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the requirement to undertake detailed inspections of memorials and the implications arising from these inspections be noted.***
- (2) That Members' instructions be implemented regarding the treatment of dangerous memorials and general access to cemetery sites.***

CS/74. **COMMUNITY POLICE OFFICE**

It was reported that the Crime and Disorder Audit had identified Newhall as the District's highest crime area for domestic burglary and as one of the highest for disorder, criminal damage and drugs' related offences. These crime levels caused a 'Fear of Crime' for local people. Partnership working with the Police had resulted in a proposal to adapt a Council house in Newhall to provide a base for Neighbourhood Police Officers as well as other services.

The implications of this proposal were considered. It would require planning permission for the change of use and the building would be modified to provide office accommodation, a meeting room and ancillary services. It would mean the loss of a family-sized house in an area which was relatively short of such properties. The proposal was at an early stage and the capital and revenue costs were being assessed. It was hoped that the project could be funded jointly by the Police and the Council. Similar properties had been adapted in the city of Derby and these partnership arrangements would be considered as part of the feasibility study.

Members considered the proposal and were supportive in principle. However, there was a shortage of family sized accommodation in Newhall and the number of Council properties was diminishing generally. It was

questioned whether there were other types of accommodation more suitable to deliver this initiative. Officers were asked to revisit this idea and to resubmit other options to a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee approves the principle of establishing a Community Police Office but defers the matter for further examination of suitable premises in this locality.

CS/75. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGETS 2001/02 & 2002/03 & PROPOSED RENT INCREASE 2002/03**

The Committee was asked to consider the probable out-turn for the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2001/02 and the base budget for 2002/03. The probable out-turn for 2001/02 showed a projected surplus of approximately £129,000, a much healthier position than the original cash limit estimate. It was anticipated that this surplus would help to increase the HRA balances to over £1m by the end of the financial year. The main reasons for this anticipated increase in resources were reported.

With regard to the base budget for 2002/03, this showed a deficit of approximately £346,000 before any increase in current rent levels. A broad extrapolation of current spending levels and anticipated income streams was appended to the report and this showed that balances would fall to approximately £630,000 by the end of 2004/05. It was prudent to have a level of balances of at least £800,000 over this period which meant that additional resources of approximately £50,000 would need to be identified from within the current base budgets.

Members considered the following appendices:-

- Appendix 1 - a summary of the HRA, together with an analysis of working balances and other reserves.
- Appendix 2 - a summary of a broad 3-year projection based on current service levels.
- Appendix 3 - a summary of the proposed service developments for 2002/03, which had been incorporated into the estimates.
- Appendix 4 - a schedule showing the proposed fees and charges for 2002/03.

The budget for 2002/03 had initially been compiled at November 2001 prices. An allowance for inflation had been included where it was considered unavoidable to calculate the cash limit estimate for 2002/03. Details were provided of those assumptions built into the estimates.

Members were asked to consider the level of rent increase for 2002/03. The implications of increasing the rent level by 3.5%, 3.75% and 4.0% were reported. The Government had set in motion proposals to harmonise the rents charged by local authorities and other social landlords, through a process called Social Rent Reform. A formula rent would be determined for each property and each local authority was expected to move towards the

target rent levels within 10 years. The formula had been applied to all of the Council's properties and the average rent level was £1.07 per week below the Government's target. This meant that the Council would be required to increase rent levels by an additional 11p per week above the Government guideline for each of the next 10 years. The Council was not required to implement the rent restructuring fully from 2002/03, as it was one of a number of authorities whose current information technology system could not calculate individual property rents. The information technology system would be developed in 2002/03 to enable rent restructuring to be embraced by 2003/04. It was proposed to submit a further detailed report to a future meeting of the Committee on the implications of rent restructuring.

The final appendix provided a schedule of the proposed fees and charges to operate from 1st April 2002, together with a comparison of the existing charges. Also detailed were the proposed charges for sheltered accommodation and those for garage rents. It was suggested that these be increased in line with general rents.

The Tenants' Advisory and Consultation Team had been consulted on the proposals and the Chair gave an outline of their views. Members commented on the rent reform proposals and the need to keep tenants informed. It was explained that a working group would consider the main issues arising from the Government's proposals.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the estimates of income and expenditure for 2001/02 and 2002/03 for the Housing Revenue account be approved.***
- (2) That a rent increase of 3.75% be approved for 2002/03.***
- (3) That the proposed fees and charges for 2002/03 be approved as submitted.***

CA/76. **GENERAL FUND BUDGETS 2001/2002 & 2002/03**

The Committee was asked to consider the General Fund Budgets for 2001/02 and 2002/03. The probable estimate for 2001/02 showed total net expenditure of £2,733,150 which was a decrease of approximately £88,000 when compared to the original cash limit estimate. The reasons for this decrease were due largely to internal re-charges relating to pension costs, savings made on the maintenance of parks and open spaces, a reduction in internal capital charges, savings on SRB schemes and additional income from Etwall Leisure Centre. This was partly offset by an increase in capital charges in accordance with statutory requirements and implementation of funding for the Crime and Disorder Strategy. The total base budget for 2002/03 was £2,796,960. This was an increase of approximately £64,000 on the probable out-turn for 2001/02 and the main variances were reported.

Members also considered the following appendices:-

- Appendix 1 – a summary of each cost centre under the responsibility of each divisional manager, showing the build-up to a “bottom line” total net expenditure for the Committee overall.

- Appendices 2 and 3 – an analysis detailing the major variances.
- Appendix 4 – a summary of the proposed budget reductions for 2002/03.
- Appendix 5 – a summary of the proposed service developments for 2002/03.
- Appendix 6 – a schedule showing the proposed fees and charges for the Committee's Services for 2002/03.

The budget for 2002/03 had initially been compiled at November 2001 prices. An allowance for inflation had been included where it was considered unavoidable to calculate the cash limit estimate for 2002/03. Details were provided of those assumptions built into the estimates. The Council's overall financial position was reported showing the probable level of spending and projected balances for the current financial year to 2004/05. Key points to note for the medium term financial strategy were also submitted.

A Service and Financial Management Working Group had met to consider the budget proposals initially. It had provided indicators and guidance for the policy committees in determining their respective budgets. The Working Group had identified possible additional expenditure of £232,532, of which £37,782 was for 2002/03 only. Against this increased spending, the Working Group had identified potential savings of some £165,965. The assumed level of Council Tax increases for the next three year period was also reported together with the overall impact on balances for the period to 2004/05.

The budget reduction proposals had been split into three categories dependent upon the effect on service delivery. The proposals of the Working Group were reported insofar as they affected this Committee's areas of responsibility. Service development proposals for 2002/03 were also reported and these had been scored against criteria approved by the Finance and Management Committee. An appendix showed those proposals relevant to this Committee and the schemes suggested for inclusion.

The final appendix suggested the fees and charges to operate from 1st April 2002, together with a comparison of the existing charges. A summary of the main changes was reported.

Members discussed the revenue estimates submitted and particular comment was made on the publicity budgets for the Environmental Health Division. Reference was made to the publicity arrangements used by another local authority to make best use of available resources. A Member also voiced her concerns over the allocation of £50,000 to finance the establishment and running costs of the 'Clean Team', referring to another service which had received no such support.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the estimates of Income and Expenditure for 2001/02 and 2002/03 for the Committee's services be approved and referred to the Finance and Management Committee.***

- (2) That the proposals for budget reductions and service developments for 2002/03 be approved and referred to the Finance and Management Committee.**
- (3) That the proposed fees and charges for 2002/03 be approved as submitted.**

CS/77. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2001/05**

The Committee was asked to consider the proposed capital schemes for 2002/03 and to comment on the relative priorities of each scheme. This was the first year that the Government would make a general capital allocation to local authorities known as the “Single Capital Pot”. It provided local authorities a degree of freedom to determine how to allocate resources between housing and general fund schemes. Last year the Government had introduced the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA), a separate allowance to pay for major works to housing properties. Previously this work had been financed by the Housing Capital Allocation, which had reduced accordingly. The net impact of the MRA was positive and for 2002/03 was expected to be approximately £1.977m.

Under the new arrangements, each authority was required to produce a Capital Strategy. It required councils to set a framework for investing in new Capital Schemes and generating the resources to fund them. Key principles for the South Derbyshire strategy were reported. It included a detailed Action Plan setting out how the Council would adopt a more co-ordinated approach to Capital Programme Management and Investment. Another key aspect of the Action Plan was the introduction of a five-year capital programme to set out funding priorities in the medium term.

At the outset, the Council would not have all the funds necessary to meet the whole programme, but it was an essential tool for prioritising schemes so that bidding efforts were directed appropriately. The Capital Strategy would also influence the amount of resources allocated to each local authority. For the current year 5% of resources were allocated, based on the quality of capital strategies and asset management plans produced. For South Derbyshire, it was expected that extra capital resources of £100,000 would be received.

The estimated capital resources for 2002/03 were £1,126,000. This included an estimate for the Supplementary Credit Approval for Disabled Facilities Grants. If the Council took up the whole allocation, it would need to identify capital resources of £233,000 for matched funding.

All capital schemes had been assessed against criteria included in the Capital Strategy and agreed by the Finance and Management Committee. The results of the scoring exercise and suggested schemes for the Committee were appended to the report. The total indicative capital resources for the Committee were £788,000, being £62,000 for General Fund Schemes and £726,000 for home improvement grants, including disabled facilities grants of £233,000.

The Divisional Environmental Health Manager voiced concerns about the reduced provision for Home Improvement Grants. He explained the proven demand for such grants through the Housing Needs Survey, the current

rating of the service by the Government Office for the East Midlands and the likely impact of such a budget reduction. The Leader of the Council responded, explaining the deliberations of the Service and Financial Management Working Group in suggesting priorities for the allocation in resources by the respective policy committees. The possibility of budget underspends enabling further expenditure on grants was also discussed.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee approves the indicative priorities for Capital Schemes as submitted.

CS/78. **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 15 November 2001 were received.

SELECT LIST OF CONTRACTORS FOR DAY TO DAY ELECTRICAL MAINTENANCE 2002 TO 2004 (Paragraph 9)

The Committee approved a select list of contractors to be invited to tender for the renewal of the contract for day to day electrical maintenance works.

SALE OF COUNCIL LAND, MIDWAY (Paragraph 9)

The Committee approved changes to the terms for the sale of an area of land in Midway.

RESTRUCTURING THE RESALE OF SOCIAL HOUSING (Paragraph 13b)

The Committee was informed of the decision of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions with regard to imposing restrictions on the resale of homes acquired under the Right to Buy scheme.

REMODELLING OF SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEMES (Paragraph 9)

The Committee agreed to progress option appraisals for the future use of three sheltered housing schemes.

BARS AND CATERING PROVISION - GREEN BANK LEISURE CENTRE
(Paragraph 7)

The Committee deferred this item to enable further research.

WALKING THE WAY TO HEALTH PROJECT (Paragraph 7)

The Committee awarded a contract to deliver the Walking the Way to Health Project.

R. W. SOUTHERN

CHAIR