

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18th October 2004

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Harrington (Chair) and Councillor Mrs. Mead.

Conservative Group

Councillors Hood and Lemmon.

In Attendance

Councillor Murphy (Labour Group).

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillors Bambrick (Vice-Chair) and Mulgrew (Labour Group) and Councillor Martin (Conservative Group).

CYS/17. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 6th September 2004 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

CYS/18. **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS**

The Council's Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration advised that the Committee's findings on the issue of car parking had been presented to the Environmental and Development Services Committee at its Meeting held on 30th September 2004. The Committee had agreed to consider the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee but felt that a fundamental car parking review should be considered at a wider forum. Members questioned what this resolution actually meant and the Deputy Chief Executive suggested that this be clarified with the Chair of the Committee. The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration advised that she understood that the Committee considered that the car parking issue was a bigger issue than could be considered by one particular policy committee. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that he assumed that the item was to be discussed by the majority group. It was agreed to clarify with the Committee what this resolution actually meant.

CYS/19. **SHELTERED HOUSING - DRAFT REPORT TO THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

The Committee received a draft report prepared by the Chair which was proposed to be submitted to the Housing and Community Services Committee Meeting on 18th November 2004. The report gave a background to the Sheltered Housing visits undertaken in August and outlined the progress made overall. It detailed particular issues which were identified at Peartree Court, Etwall, Newlands Close, Church Gresley and Unity Close, Church Gresley. Councillor Murphy queried what outcome had resulted

from the Sheltered Housing inspections and questioned what had changed since the findings had been produced. The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration explained why there had been a delay in submitting this matter to the Housing and Community Services Committee in that it had been felt necessary to enable the last Meeting of the Housing and Community Services Committee to focus on the housing stock options issue.

Councillor Hood talked about the need to choose a heating system for Peartree Court, Etwall and noted that Officers had stated at the previous Meeting that a decision would be made shortly. The Deputy Chief Executive explained the difficulty at Sheltered Housing accommodation with bath/shower provision. Councillor Murphy referred to concerns he had regarding such provision for the “most vulnerable residents within the District” and stated that he currently had a ninety year old female awaiting a shower conversion since July 2004 who was washing in a sink. He stated that although this resident did not live in sheltered housing accommodation, he was concerned about the slow rate of response by the Housing Department to such an urgent query. The Deputy Chief Executive advised the Committee that it needed to think about “blockages” in the system to getting such work undertaken, such as budget problems, assessment issues etc.

Councillor Harrington advised that he had spoken to the Head of Leisure and Community Development regarding the anti-social behaviour actions required at Newlands Close and Unity Close, Church Gresley, in particular parking problems by non-residents. It was agreed to include as a recommendation in the report to the Housing and Community Services Committee that consideration be given to working with the Crime and Disorder Partnership on such issues.

Councillor Murphy referred to certain items for action which had been identified at the Sheltered Housing site visits and stated that such items needed immediate action and that the issue should be progressed “more forcefully” with the Housing and Community Services Committee. The Chair talked about trying to keep a balanced approach when making recommendations to policy committees. Councillor Murphy stated that he was sure that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Housing and Community Services Committee would be driving forward action to address the issues raised by the Sheltered Housing visits but he felt that the recommendations made by the Community Scrutiny Committee to the policy committee should be more forceful. It was agreed that there was a need to determine a commitment to action. Councillor Murphy advised that he felt some of the issues could be addressed by a “phone call” rather than needing to ever be placed on a policy committee agenda. He stated that this raised a recognised weakness in the Housing Service. The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration advised that she understood that the Committee wished the point be made that the Sheltered Housing residents were the most vulnerable people in the community and that anecdotal evidence suggested that the issues of concern applying to Peartree Court, Newlands Close and Unity Close might also apply to other Sheltered Housing accommodation. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that it was important that the concerns raised at this Committee Meeting were made by Scrutiny Members directly to the Housing and Community Services Committee in order to communicate the strength of the feeling on this issue. Councillor Murphy stated that the proposed report had not identified what the Committee considered the failure

in the service to be. The Deputy Chief Executive queried whether this issue was resolvable by the Council “sharpening up its act” as he understood that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Housing and Community Services Committee felt that the best service was being provided under the current circumstances. The Deputy Chief Executive queried whether there was a need for a policy change. Councillor Murphy stated that no policy existed which stated that the Council would react to particular urgent matters in a certain period of time and that he felt that the level of service delivery within the Housing Department needed to be challenged. The Deputy Chief Executive asked whether the Committee was saying that the incremental improvement model currently operating was not enough and queried whether it was stating that an operational review of the service was necessary. The Chair advised the Committee that it could not take decisions for policy committees and could only make recommendations. Councillor Murphy stated that the Sheltered Housing service should be challenged from a resident’s point of view. The Chair expressed concern that the relevant policy committee might see such action as the Scrutiny Committee trying to dictate policy and Councillor Murphy responded in stating that the current policy did not service the current residents of the Council’s Sheltered Housing accommodation. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that it was unclear as to whether the current policy framework was failing. Councillor Mrs. Mead advised that she did not feel the current policy framework was failing but that action was not being taken quickly enough within the Housing Department.

The Committee agreed a final report to be submitted to the Housing and Community Services Committee on 18th November 2004 regarding the Sheltered Housing inspections.

CYS/20. **WORK PROGRAMME – THE WAY AHEAD**

The Council’s Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration suggested that the Committee could discuss the Local Strategic Partnership Draft Community Strategy Consultation and co-ordinate the Council’s response. She also suggested that the Committee could consider recreation/leisure provision (play equipment). Both of these topics would cross over with issues such as Communication and Consultation and Rural Proofing issues. The Committee agreed to pursue both of the suggested projects and to hold a special informal meeting, if possible on Wednesday 27th October 2004 to scope out the Draft Community Strategy Consultation Project.

K. HARRINGTON

CHAIR

The Meeting closed at 5.10 p.m.