OPEN

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5th September 2005

PRESENT:-

Labour Group
Councillor Harrington (Chair), Councillor Bambrick (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Jones and Mrs. Mead.

Conservative Group
Councillors Mrs. Hood, Lemmon and Mrs. Renwick.

In Attendance

Councillor Atkin (Conservative Group).

CYS/11. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 25th July 2005 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

CYS/12. **SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICES**

A report was submitted to inform Members of progress made by the Sheltered Housing Team. The report's background reminded of the Best Value Inspection in 2001, the results, the action taken and the re-inspection in December 2002. The report sought to highlight the continuous improvement and progress made by the Service since that re-inspection. The Best Value Report highlighted that there was no clear strategic vision for the Sheltered Housing Service. A draft strategic direction document, including a Vision Statement, Aims and set of standards of accommodation was considered in November 2003 and adopted by the Sheltered Team. All Sheltered Housing Schemes had been audited to identify non-compliance with the physical standards of accommodation and work to implement these physical standards had already commenced. As part of this process, nine schemes had been declassified, which provided some 136 units of accommodation. This process was ongoing and it was anticipated that further schemes would be identified. Consideration would also be given to recent amendments to the Right to Buy legislation, which assisted in determining the physical attributes to be expected of Sheltered Housing. The architects Faulks, Perry, Culley and Rech were looking at options for the future in relation to accommodation at two other, difficult to let schemes.

The disposal of the sheltered housing sites at Basses Crescent and Smallthorn Place resulted in a capital receipt of some £926,000. This had been earmarked to implement the next phase of the Vision and Standards. The report outlined examples of works to be completed. Research had been undertaken to look at current technology for warden call equipment and how that might be best used by the Council. Information was being sought from

the four main manufacturers of this type of equipment and it was hoped to determine a supplier for the new system by November 2005.

The report considered issues surrounding Supporting People funding. It explained the requirements on the Council, to remain contract compliant and the rating of the service provided, following an inspection. The report included a section on improvements to the service and the developments made over the past two years. In particular, it outlined the service standards, the volume of emergency visits undertaken and purchase of equipment to enable the safe lifting of people. It highlighted the social activities undertaken and the work towards accreditation, to provide a quality mark for the service.

Over the past eighteen months the Careline Service had been reorganised, with new shift patterns providing a more responsive service. This service had been working towards accreditation from the Association of Social Alarm Providers (ASAP). As well as ensuring compliance with regard to Supporting People funding, this accreditation would assist the potential growth of the Careline Service. It was anticipated that the accreditation would be achieved by the end of September 2005. The Careline Centre dealt with over 10,000 calls per month and provided a wide ranging out of hours service when the Civic Offices were closed. The service continued to grow its base of lifeline customers at around 10% per annum. The Best Value inspection reinforced the importance in working in partnerships and details were provided of the various multi agency forums that the Sheltered Housing Team and Community Wardens worked with.

The report examined physical improvements to the sheltered housing stock. There was an ongoing programme of improvement including upgrading the Careline control equipment, the installation of fire doors, security lights and upgrading communal lounges. Upgrades at other schemes included heating replacements, upgrading kitchens and laundries and converting an open porch to an entrance hall.

To maintain this continuous improvement, the service needed to achieve the accreditations highlighted, to sustain the Supporting People contract and continue to grow its core business. The report explained recent developments within the social alarm field and a successful bid to the Southern Derbyshire Care and Housing Forum, to establish a telecare resource room at Granville Court. The £6,000 of funding had resulted in a unique facility, with a resource room and a respite flat, which demonstrated assistive technology. The Careline service was considering a lone working system that could be marketed throughout the Authority and to other agencies, to generate income. There was also a possibility that Careline could be involved in the monitoring of CCTV. Work would continue to implement the physical standards of the sheltered housing stock. The cost of bringing the stock up to the proposed standard was identified in the region of £2.15 million. Therefore, further financial investment would be required in addition to the resources from the disposal of the two sheltered schemes.

The financial implications were reported and there remained little scope within the Major Repairs Allowance and the Housing Revenue Account, to contribute towards the shortfall. Currently, available finance was targeted primarily to meet the decent homes standard by 2010. There were options to deliver a higher specification than the basic standard and the additional costs

of achieving this were also reported. Officers had considered other means of raising additional finance and an option based on charging tenants for maintenance/replacement of communal furniture, fittings or equipment was reported. There were major funding issues around achieving higher standards of accommodation both in the general purpose and sheltered housing stock. There was a shortfall of investment resources of up to £1 million for achievement of the full standards set for sheltered housing and currently there was no prospect of further monies being identified.

Councillor Mrs. Mead asked for an update on the status of Meadow Way, Newhall, where there had been the partial replacement of property doors. Tony Ward understood that these replacements were part of planned maintenance works. There were also access difficulties to some of these properties. This point was acknowledged and reflected by the high cost of installing footpaths and rails. This issue would be looked at as part of a review on an individual property basis and the Officer also touched upon the potential for property adaptations. Councillor Jones also pursued the discussion on access difficulties, referring to a specific example.

The Chair advised that there were a number of questions to be answered from the previous consideration of this item. As an example, there was a heating issue at Peartree Court, Etwall, which dated to before the winter of 2003 and he questioned the reasons for this delay. The Head of Housing Services acknowledged that this project had taken too long. Budget provision was made in the previous year, but this would not meet the anticipated costs of £120,000. A letter had been sent to tenants to advise of the proposed works in October/November 2005. A residents' meeting would be held at the end of September/early October. It was proposed to provide individual boiler systems and the Officer explained the benefits of this approach. Councillor Mrs. Renwick referred to the report's Annexe on agreed standards of accommodation. She asked how many units of accommodation were located in each area and Officers agreed to provide this information. The Chair suggested for future reports that these details be provided and Officers explained the typical numbers of properties involved, for the various planned improvements.

The Chair referred to a problem with radiator valves/thermostats and asked whether this had been resolved. Tony Ward understood that the Community Wardens had completed a survey and action was taken in a few cases. At Unity Close, there was confusion over the fire evacuation procedure. Officers explained that a site visit was undertaken and due to the open plan nature of this scheme, it was safer for residents to stay in their own home, rather than be evacuated. The Chair asked whether all residents were aware of this advice, as he had received conflicting feedback. The Officer proposed writing to residents to give advice and explained a further dilemma, as advice from the Council's Health and Safety Officer conflicted with that from the Fire Service. Related issues discussed were the provision of prominent advisory notices and whether alternative advice would be given in the event of a Fire Service strike. Councillor Lemmon highlighted an error on the agreed standards of accommodation and this was acknowledged.

The Minutes of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on 6 September 2004 were circulated. Members were referred to a table showing the position at that time on progress against the standards of accommodation. The Head of Housing Services gave a verbal update on the current position. He

reiterated that the main point was that funding from the sale of the Sheltered Housing Schemes had only recently been received, to progress the identified works. There was still a funding gap to meet the total costs of all identified schemes. The Chair asked how this issue would be progressed and Officers replied that schemes would need to be developed, to determine the actual costs. As a Council, there was a need to address the source of funding for the shortfall and it might prove necessary to reprioritise use of the Housing Revenue Account or Major Repairs Allowance, at the expense of not proceeding with other schemes. In response from a question from Councillor Mrs. Renwick, the Officer explained the source of Supporting People funding and the administration arrangements. The Chair suggested that Members might wish to give further consideration to the report submitted at the next Ordinary Committee Meeting. It would be useful to receive an updated matrix of criteria and progress. If sufficient resources could not be identified to achieve all of the required works, there would be a need to agree priorities.

The Deputy Chief Executive felt that the expansion of the Careline service provided a positive statement. Tony Ward provided further information in this regard and the advantages of securing the ASAP accreditation. Nationally, only fifty local authorities had achieved the accreditation being sought, which would give marketing assistance to the Careline service.

CYS/13. **CORPORATE PLAN – CONSULTATION**

It was reported that at its Meeting the previous week, the Finance and Management Committee had considered options for the development of the Corporate Plan. It was understood that by the end of September, a working party of the majority group would prepare a draft document to be submitted to a Council Meeting or appropriate Policy Committee, to enable consultation. The majority group had made it clear to Corporate Management Team that this would inform the budgetary plans for the following financial year. There would be approximately one month to undertake a consultation process and the Scrutiny Committee had been asked to co-ordinate this. Members were asked to consider possible mechanisms and the Chair suggested use of a Citizens Panel Focus Group. The Deputy Chief Executive felt it might not be feasible to use the full panel as there was usually a two to three month lead time on such consultations. However, a focus group approach might be more manageable and it could give a greater depth of feedback.

The Chair sought Members' input on consultation sources. He suggested parish councils, but was mindful of their meeting timetables. Similarly, the CVS provided a mechanism to contact 'hard to reach' groups, but he was mindful of possible capacity issues. The Area Meetings could also provide a further mechanism. Councillor Jones recognised the current boundary anomalies with Area Meetings. Councillor Mrs. Mead asked whether parish councils could help by distributing questionnaires. The Deputy Chief Executive suggested the Parish Council Forum, but he noted this did not include the urban area. The Chair commented that the process had to be relevant and significant. The Deputy Chief Executive suggested that questionnaires could be provided to parish councils before the Forum, so that representatives could provide feedback. There would be a benefit from using a range of forums to give a cross section of feedback. Councillor Mrs. Mead wondered whether schools could be asked to distribute the questionnaires to pupils' parents. It was questioned how representative this method would be. Councillor Jones suggested the use of Neighbourhood Watch and the Chair

asked for any further suggestions on consultation mechanisms to be provided to himself, the Deputy Chief Executive or the Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration.

The Chair recognised the timescales involved and the need to give consideration to the questions to be asked. The Principal Policy Officer offered to provide a profile about focus group questioning as part of this project. The Deputy Chief Executive suggested that a further meeting of the Committee would be required at the end of September or in early October to give consideration to the questions. After some discussion it was agreed that this be held on Wednesday 5th October at 4.00 p.m. The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration was asked to provide the information about the consultation processes to that meeting.

CYS/14. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair felt that the previous item would provide the main focus for the next two meetings. He suggested a further report from the Housing Division on the Sheltered Housing Service to the November Meeting. There were still some issues to be answered and the Deputy Chief Executive was asked to ensure that the Housing Services were informed well in advance. There was a need to revisit the report presented today at the next Ordinary Meeting of the Committee, to look at the issues still to be addressed. After the November Meeting, the Committee could look to issue a report to the Policy Committee. The Chair sought Members input into the Committee's Work Programme and he spoke particularly about the need to look externally and to engage other organisations. In particular, he referred to Derbyshire County Council's approach to scrutiny.

K. HARRINGTON

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.10 p.m.