

Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 15 July 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **15 July 2004** when there were present:

Cllr T Livings (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs M A Starke (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Mrs R Brown
Cllr Mrs T J Capon

Cllr C J Lumley
Cllr P F A Webster

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs P K Savill, D G Stansby and Mrs M S Vince.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllrs J E Grey and K H Hudson.

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Crofts	- Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
G Woolhouse	- Head of Housing, Health & Community Care
S Clarkson	- Head of Revenue & Housing Management
J Bourne	- Leisure & Contracts Manager
G Dawson	- Senior Monitoring Officer/Parks Officer
N Khan	- Solicitor
J Bostock	- Principal Committee Administrator

ALSO ATTENDING

Mr G Such and Mr D Leicester of Serviceteam

317 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

318 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the schedule relating to progress on decisions.

Review of Policies and Services for Young People within the District (Minute 49/04)

It was noted that responses received from Secondary Schools relating to the type of activities they currently provide and how the Council might support them had been included in the officer report.

Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy/Community Safety - Implementation of Best Value Action Plan (Minute 178/04)

The Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) confirmed that Members will be advised should it not be possible to submit a crime and disorder update briefing report to the 9 September Committee meeting.

319 SERVICETEAM - GROUNDS MAINTENANCE UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) setting out Serviceteam's grounds maintenance contract progress report.

Mr G Such (Regional Manager) and Mr D Leicester (Operations Manager - Rochford), of Serviceteam were in attendance to present the progress report.

During discussion, the Serviceteam representatives advised that:-

- They would check that the appropriate level of grass cutting (two passes) was being carried out on the grass frontages in Ferry Road, Hullbridge.
- The amount of green waste recycled through the Cleanaway, Thurrock site was 17 tonnes (not 12 tonnes as indicated in the report).

It was noted that, whilst officers would investigate the position, it was unlikely that the recycled green waste would attract recycling credits (these usually being applied to household waste only).

The Committee endorsed the observation of a Member that Serviceteam were doing well. The Chairman thanks Mr Such and Mr Leicester for attending the meeting.

320 OVERALL WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive setting out the main areas of the Committee's work programme for the 2004/05 municipal year and reviewing the work undertaken over the past twelve months.

Work Programme 2004/05

Elderly Housing and Support Strategy

Responding to questions on the Elderly Housing and Support Strategy, officers advised that the strategy would address the future housing and support needs of elderly residents within the District, particularly those with special needs due to frailty and great age. The strategy would need to cover:-

- Actions the Council can take as a local authority housing provider, such as working to ensure that its own housing stock and that of Housing Associations is fit for purpose.

- Working with other agencies to ensure effective service provision (including for residents that wish to stay in their own homes).

The appointed consultants would be asked to ensure that the precise nature of consultation undertaken with residents to date was explained in the strategy, the draft version of which would be presented to Members for consideration.

Development of Policy Framework and Service Response in respect of Gypsies and other Travellers

The Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to task a Sub-Committee with undertaking a review of the policy and service response in respect of gypsies and other travellers. It was also agreed that the pro-rata arrangement should be suspended for Sub-Committee membership. The Committee endorsed a motion, moved by Councillor T R Livings and seconded by Councillor P F A Webster, in this regard.

Resolved

- (1) That the progress made in the past 12 months be noted and that the Committee's 2004/05 work programme, as set out at Appendix 2 of the report, be agreed.
- (2) That the Council's appointed consultants be asked to include details of consultation undertaken with residents in the draft Elderly Housing and Support Strategy, for Members' consideration.
- (3) That a Sub-Committee of five Members (three Conservative, one Liberal Democrat and one non-group Member) be appointed to undertake a review of the policy framework and service response in respect of gypsies and other travellers and to report back.

321 REVIEW OF POLICY FRAMEWORK AND SERVICE RESPONSE IN RESPECT OF GYPSIES AND OTHER TRAVELLERS

It was noted that the report of the Head of Housing, Health & Community Care setting out proposals for reviewing the policy and service response in respect of gypsies and other travellers would now be referred to the Sub-Committee established during consideration of the previous item (Minute 320 refers).

322 SHELTERED HOUSING - SECURITY, HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on existing security and health and safety measures in sheltered housing.

There was particular debate around concerns raised at one scheme associated with a recent change of locks on gates to turn handles. Whilst the change had been made in response to a recent Fire Officer recommendation, some residents felt that the change could compromise security. It was noted

that a visit to the scheme by a local Ward Member and the Head of Revenue and Housing Management, followed by further review of the legal position, had established that the Council needed to have introduced new arrangements to ensure compliance with building regulations and the latest Fire Officer recommendations. However, it would be possible to introduce a shroud fitment to a lock arrangement that would both provide reassurance to residents and comply with best fire safety practice. Such an arrangement could be applied to all the Council's sheltered housing accommodation.

Responding to questions, officers detailed the various changes/safety checks now in place and advised that:-

- Written documentation was available that demonstrated the various advice given by the County Fire and Rescue Service.
- Immediate action could be taken to introduce a shrouded lock fitting at all the Council's sheltered housing schemes.

Members recognised that it would have been preferable if advice received by the Council relating to fire safety aspects had been consistent over recent years. Given other safety measures now in place, it was agreed that there would be merit in the proposal that Thameside Fire undertake annual site inspections, subject to assurance from Thameside that different inspectors would be used each year and to a mechanism being in place to ensure that Thameside are consulted in the first instance on any proposed changes to a property.

Resolved

- (1) That the current management arrangements relating to sheltered housing be noted and that the introduction of an annual site inspection survey to be undertaken by Thameside Fire be endorsed, subject to an assurance from Thameside Fire that different inspectors will be used each year and to a mechanism being in place to ensure that Thameside Fire are consulted in the first instance on any proposed changes to a property.
- (2) That the action of officers in introducing a shrouded lock mechanism at all sheltered housing schemes as soon as practicable be endorsed.
- (3) That this Committee receive an annual report on sheltered housing management as it relates to benchmarked best practice (HRHM).

323 HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICE PLAN

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health & Community Care on the Health and Safety Service Plan which had been referred by the Community Services Committee for consideration in conjunction with the report on sheltered housing - security, health and safety.

Responding to questions, the Head of Housing, Health & Community Care advised on the areas covered by the Plan, which was very much about the Council's enforcement role within local businesses. It was recognised that fire safety matters were not within the remit of the plan.

Recommended to the Community Services Committee that the Health and Safety Service Action Plan be approved. (HHHCC)

324 HOUSING NEEDS STUDY

The Proper Officer reported that, pursuant to Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 15, the Chairman of the Committee had requested that the decision of the Community Services Committee relating to the Housing Needs Study (Minute 284/04) be called in for scrutiny.

The Committee endorsed the view of a Member that a number of concerns could be raised about aspects of wording within the Housing Needs specification. In particular, a number of remarks appeared generalised and in need of definition, such as those relating to the term "affordable housing" and "assisting" in the context of the sub-region. The term "vulnerable people, and those requiring specialist housing" could also benefit from clarification.

It was agreed that it would be appropriate for the Housing Management Sub-Committee to be tasked with undertaking detailed review of the areas of concern in time for the Sub-Committee to report direct to Full Council thereon.

Resolved

That the Housing Management Sub-Committee be asked to review areas of concern relating to the Housing Needs Study and report directly thereon to the next meeting of Full Council. (HHHCC)

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining business on the grounds that exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

325 HOUSING APPLICANT

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Revenue & Housing Management which invited Members to agree a proposed departure from housing policy to accommodate an applicant.

Members agreed that, on this particular occasion, it would be appropriate to recommend to Full Council that there be a departure from usual policy.

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Detail on the discussion and the recommendation are set out in the exempt appendix to these Minutes.

The meeting closed at 9.36pm.

Chairman

Date