



COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

17 MARCH 2010

PRESENT:-

Councillors M.R. Sheldon (Vice Chairman)
S. Dungworth, M.C.R. Graham
A. Jackson, M. Moore, D.R. Wright

Chief Executive
Head of Social and Economic Development
Head of Street Scene and Environment, Chief Accountant
Democratic Services Clerk

C52. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chandler, Dean, Freer and Posnett.

C53. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 26 January 2010 were confirmed and authorised to be signed by the Chairman.

C54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

C55. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

There were no recommendations from other committees.

C56. BUDGET MONITORING APRIL TO DECEMBER 2009

The Chief Accountant submitted a report on behalf of the Head of Financial Services (copies of which had previously been circulated to Members) which provided information on actual expenditure and income incurred on this Committee's services compared to the latest approved budget for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 December 2009.

A Member requested further information on the Waterfield Leisure Pools overspend. The Head of Social and Economic Development confirmed that this was a budget profiling issue.

A Member enquired about the overspend on the 'Supporting People' budget. The Head of Social and Economic Development stated that there had been a slight increase in care at home due to an extra hour in the evening and the morning. The Head of Social and Economic Development noted that the increase in expenditure would be resolved for next year's budget.

RESOLVED that the financial position on each of this Committee's services to 31 December be noted.

C57. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING TO 31 JANUARY 2010

The Chief Accountant submitted a report on behalf of the Head of Financial Services (copies of which had previously been circulated to Members) which updated the Committee on the progress of schemes within the Capital Programme to 31 January 2010.

The Head of Social and Economic Development stated that the funding for the Grantham Canal project had been withdrawn and they were working with Leicester City Council to resolve claims for money spent on the project to date.

RESOLVED that the progress made on each capital scheme be noted.

C58. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – BUDGET MONITORING 1 APRIL 2009 – 31 DECEMBER 2009

The Chief Accountant submitted a report on behalf of the Head of Financial Services (copies of which had previously been circulated to Members) which provided information on actual expenditure and income incurred on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), compared to the latest approved budget for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 December 2009.

The Head of Social and Economic Development stated that all empty properties and garages had been inspected and a report would be coming back to Members which would detail potential further uses of the empty properties and garages.

A Member enquired why the gas budget was overspent and noted that elderly people got assistance with their heating bills. The Chief Accountant stated that setting charges for heating was difficult due to the volatility of the product and the charges could not be adjusted throughout the year.

The Head of Social and Economic Development stated that Members comments could be borne in mind when setting the charges for next year.

A Member suggested having a different charging system in the summer and in the winter. The Head of Social and Economic Development stated that this would be investigated.

RESOLVED that the financial position on the Housing Revenue Account to 31 December 2009 be noted.

(Councillor Jackson entered the meeting during consideration of the preceding item.)

C59. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

The Head of Social and Economic Development submitted a report (copies of which had previously been circulated to Members) for Members to note and comment on the HRA Improvement Plan developed in response to the Price Waterhouse Cooper report commissioned to examine the HRA process. The Plan includes internal actions undertaken to mitigate the risk of the HRA moving into a deficit.

A Member stated that the amendments to the Northgate System to improve tackling variances needed to be done as a matter of extreme urgency. The Head of Social and Economic Development stated that this item would be amended to a high priority.

A Member enquired about the protocol on verbal orders. The Head of Social and Economic Development confirmed that verbal orders would not be paid and he had briefed and e-mailed the team to this effect.

A Member queried the comment in the plan highlighting a risk of fraud. The Head of Social and Economic Development stated that there was clearly no signs of fraud but ideally in the team there would be separate roles to raise, amend and authorise jobs. A Member enquired if Internal Audit would review this area. The Chief Executive commented that Internal Audit reviewed this area to a regular timetable.

A Member suggested Officers being issued with a pad which could issue order numbers. Members agreed this to be a good idea.

A Member requested that the transfer criteria be strengthened. The Head of Social and Economic Development stated that this could be considered at the Task Group.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the HRA Improvement Plan be noted and a further update be made in 6 months highlighting progress achieved;
- (2) Members established a Housing Repairs Contract Task group with a remit to cover the new repairs contract and nominate members onto the task group;
- (3) Councillors Moore, Posnett, Wright and the Chairman of the Efficiency Task Group (J. Orson) be nominated to the Housing Repairs Contract Task Group.

C60. CLIMBING FRAME

The Head of Street Scene and Environment submitted a report (copies of which had previously been circulated to Members) which informed the Committee of the outcome of the Policy, Finance and Administration Committee of the 3 March 2010 of a request to utilise section 106 monies to purchase and install a climbing pyramid structure in order that Big Lottery Funding application criteria be met.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

C61. CAR PARKING: RESIDENTS CAR PARKING

The Head of Street Scene and Environment and Head of Social and Economic Development submitted a joint report (copies of which had previously been circulated to Members) which informed the Committee of the outcome of the report on the review of car parking that was presented to the Rural, Economic and Environmental Affairs Committee on the 10 March 2010 and to consider the implementation of Residents permit parking schemes on Housing Revenue Account car parks.

It was noted that a Task Group to look at Residents Car Parking would be set up to include the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Rural, Economic and Environmental Affairs Committee and relevant Ward Councillors.

A Member stated that the charges would need to be affordable.

RESOLVED that further consultation with all interested parties be carried out and subject to a business plan being approved, action residents permit schemes on 'HRA' car parks.

C62. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that the Public be excluded during the consideration of the following item(s) of business in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (Access to Information: Exempt Information under Paragraph 3.

C63. PUBLIC CONVENIENCES: WILTON ROAD

The Head of Street Scene and Environment submitted a report (copies of which had previously been circulated to Members) on the former Wilton Road Public Conveniences.

A Member considered the solution to be unsuitable and suggested negotiating a delay in the sale until the problem was resolved.

Councillor Graham moved the recommendations within the report. Councillor Wright was a seconder for this motion. A Member stated that there needed to be adequate signposting to the facilities and car users to the town also had to be considered.

Members considered St Mary's Way to be the best option for a Coach drop off point. The Head of Street Scene and Environment stated that Leicestershire County Council were unhappy with coaches dropping off at St Mary's Way.

Councillor Jackson moved an amendment not to dispose of Wilton Road Public Conveniences, not to enter into formal arrangements with Wetherspoons and the George Hotel (for Members of the Public to use their facilities) and to continue investigation as a matter of extreme urgency. Councillor Dungworth was a seconder for this amendment.

A Member stated that a proven solution to the problem needed to be found before the Council disposed of Wilton Road public conveniences.

A Member enquired if economic viability in the Town Centre had been affected by the closure of Wilton Road Public Conveniences. The Head of Social and Economic Development stated that the economic viability had not been affected by the closure and business confidence had increased.

A Member commented that the usage of Wilton Road Public Conveniences had been dropping. A Member enquired if free usage of the facility was recorded as well as the paid usage. The Head of Street Scene and Environment stated that the data collected only related to the paid usage of the facility.

On being put to the vote, the amendment not to dispose of Wilton Road Public Conveniences, not to enter into formal arrangements with Wetherspoons and the George Hotel (for Members of the Public to use their facilities) and to continue investigation as a matter of extreme urgency was lost with 2 in favour and 3 against.

On being put to the vote, the motion to approve the recommendations within the Committee report was carried with 3 in favour and 3 against. (The Chairman used his casting vote to vote in favour of the motion.)

A Member requested Officers to pursue the actions with extreme urgency.

RESOLVED that

- (1) Members agreed to dispose of the freehold interest in the former Wilton Road Public Conveniences to the owners of Egerton Lodge;
- (2) Formal arrangements are entered into with Wetherspoons and the George Hotel for public use of their toilet facilities during opening hours and that officers explore similar arrangements with other nearby businesses;

(3) Investigations continue for a comprehensive solution to coach parking and drop off facilities within the town.

(Councillors Dungworth, Moore and Jackson requested that their votes against the preceding decision be recorded.)

The meeting which commenced at 6.30 p.m., closed at 7.53 p.m.

Chairman