

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24th October 2012

**PRESENT:-**

**Conservative Group**

Councillor Mrs. Plenderleith (Chairman), Councillor Atkin (Vice-Chairman) and Councillors Mrs. Hood and Mrs. Patten.

**Labour Group**

Councillors Bambrick, Bell and Pearson.

**In Attendance**

Councillor Lemmon (Conservative Group).

OS/12. **APOLOGY**

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Mrs. Mead (Labour Group).

OS/13. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th September 2012, were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

OS/14. **HOMELESSNESS – TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION COSTS**

Members were reminded of the earlier consideration of this subject and the decision that Housing Services would undertake a review of provision of temporary accommodation, specifically the investigation of two options:

- Option A: to negotiate a reduced bed and breakfast rate for accommodating homeless applicants utilising a threshold of a guaranteed number of applicants.
- Option B: to explore the option of partnering with a local bed and breakfast provider.

A report had been approved at the previous meeting that reviewed the way that Housing Services provided the majority of its temporary accommodation. Currently, several hotels and bed and breakfast establishments were used. Whilst the fees paid were generally below the market rate for such accommodation, there was no fixed price in place with any of the current establishments. Statistics were provided on the number of households placed

in bed and breakfast accommodation, the number of nights of accommodation and average room rate.

In July, the proposal to consolidate temporary accommodation usage was issued to 11 hotels or bed and breakfast premises within a five mile radius of Swadlincote. The response was disappointing, resulting in the need for follow up telephone calls, to establish if there was interest in the proposal. Only one provider was prepared to consider this proposal, but the revised rates offered were not significantly cheaper than those currently charged. In summary, the proposal to consolidate had proven unpopular with hoteliers.

Another option had been progressed working with a charitable organisation, P3. The Council had worked with P3 for over 10 years, which provided and managed the single persons' hostel in Midland Road, Swadlincote. As part of the review, P3 was contacted to see if they would be prepared to build further on the existing relationship. A proposal had been received for provision of temporary accommodation to satisfy the majority of the homeless requirements. This comprised accommodation of two properties with two bedrooms, two properties with three bedrooms and three single rooms for single homeless applicants. It would provide Housing Services with up to 2,555 nights of accommodation and should eliminate the core usage of bed and breakfast. P3 would ensure that the units were only for the Council's allocation. Usage would be agreed via a service level agreement. To ensure the properties were not under-utilised, careful joint monitoring and management would be required. P3 would furnish the properties and refresh them between the homeless tenancies. A member of staff would be employed by P3 to support applicants, to help them manage their tenancy and with other issues, such as benefits. They would work closely with Housing Services to assist applicants in moving on to other accommodation. The accommodation could be available from November 2012 and a phased transition to the new arrangements was proposed. The financial aspects were also reported.

The officer responded to questions about trends in the numbers of homeless applicants and whether Government support was likely to be cut. The provision of a hostel was questioned, but the staffing and financial implications were prohibitive for a Council of South Derbyshire's size. Members noted the benefits of this proposal and the need for detail to be agreed, to ensure that a sustainable financial arrangement was secured. Finally, Members noted that this matter would need to be considered by the Housing and Community Services Committee.

**It was agreed:-**

- 1. To note that a partnership is being progressed with P3, to partly provide and manage in full, a dedicated temporary accommodation service for our homeless applicants.**
- 2. That the Committee recommends this proposal to the Housing and Community Services Committee.**

**OS/15. SERVICE REVIEW: GROUNDS MAINTENANCE**

Further to Minute No. 0S/44 of 2nd May 2012, a progress report was provided. Specifically, the report covered quality control, feedback, County Council-funded works and external accreditation.

Initially, the report covered quality control, identifying the current monitoring in place and the role of the Grounds Maintenance Manager to ensure quality across the board. Appended to the report was the quality monitoring schedule and an amended weekly inspection sheet. Discussions had been held with the three clients, to identify areas where it was felt improvement was needed in the quality regime. The responses from the County Council and the Housing and Leisure Service clients were reported.

Next, customer feedback was considered. The review aimed to get feedback from local service recipients. It was proposed that a targeted questionnaire to 500 residents and a website feedback option be developed by 1st July 2012. The original timescale was not achieved, mainly due to the difficult summer operationally, being the wettest in 100 years. All resources had been directed at service delivery, with staff volunteering to work at weekends to keep broadly in line with the schedule. The survey process was now underway, using a freepost reply card that was delivered to residents living adjacent to the areas of cutting activity. An example of the card was appended to the report. The results of the survey would be incorporated into overall quarterly monitoring processes. Arrangements were in place for a two-month web survey advertised by a banner on the front page of the Council's website, which would commence from the start of the 2013 grass cutting programme.

A section was included on the County-funded works, referring to the agreement in place and the County Council's proposals to cut its levels of funding. The action from the earlier meeting was to complete a service level agreement with the County Council. Two meetings had been held and the County planned to reduce funding, but did not wish to detail service levels precisely. The District Council's position was that any review of service needed to be done jointly. It was agreed that this matter should be brought to the attention of elected councillors in both authorities.

Finally, the report focussed on seeking an external accreditation. The report set out the implications of pursuing a quality standard such as ISO 9001 in terms of staff time and financial implications. The context of a proposal to increase expenditure against anticipated cuts in Government grant funding had to be weighed. It was therefore recommended that the Council did not pursue the formal accreditation route. Officers would develop further in-house quality monitoring processes and produce an annual report detailing priorities for future action. The first report would be produced before the main cutting season commenced in April 2013.

The Grounds Service Manager and recently appointed Direct Services Manager were introduced to Members. There was discussion about the quality monitoring arrangements, the additional work undertaken and work areas being added to the maintenance schedules. A balanced approach was taken, operating to the tender, but trying to be as flexible as possible as the

service was delivered by the in-house team. There was recognition of the service provided in what had been a difficult year for grounds maintenance. However, some complaints were still received and a particular issue was spraying around street furniture. At times this was considered excessive and unsightly, but it might be that ground conditions prevented cutting or that the machinery could damage the street furniture.

Another issue was infrequent full width highway verge maintenance. It was noted that the current funding provided for a full cut once every three years. In between, the first metre of highway verge was maintained to ensure safe visibility. It was considered that the level of maintenance was comparable to that in surrounding areas. A further issue was where cut grass or long grass blocked drainage channels or culverts and could lead to localised flooding.

There was a consensus that the Council should not pursue an external accreditation. Officers were urged to take back the points raised regarding maintenance frequencies to Derbyshire County Council. There was also discussion about the feedback from the quality control cards distributed to properties near to areas of maintained public open space. Feedback from Derbyshire County Council could be captured via the quarterly monitoring meetings. It was summarised that this had been a difficult year for grounds maintenance, due to the weather conditions. A further update report in approximately 12 months time was proposed.

**It was agreed to note the report and that the work programme for 2013/14 includes an update in October/November on the grounds maintenance service.**

OS/16. **WORK PROGRAMME**

It was reported that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed an annual work programme, which was reviewed at each meeting. Details were provided of the review areas to be considered over the coming meetings. A verbal update was provided by the Chairman on the recent regional scrutiny network meeting. The main subject of discussion was Police and Crime Panels, including an update from Ed Hammond of the Centre for Public Scrutiny. It was confirmed that the next quarterly meeting would be held in December and that this Council was hosting the meeting in March 2013, to which Members were encouraged to attend. Officers also provided an update on the Derbyshire Scrutiny Liaison Group. It was confirmed that representatives of the Committee would attend a meeting at Erewash Borough Council, with a view to assisting that Authority with its scrutiny process.

**It was agreed that the work programme report be noted.**

MRS. A. PLENDERLEITH

CHAIRMAN

The Meeting terminated at 7.05 p.m.