

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6th September 2001

**PRESENT:-**

**Labour Group**

Councillor Richards (Chair), Councillor Routledge (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Evens, Knight and Sherratt.

**Conservative Group**

Councillor Mrs. Robbins.

CYS/5. **COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

A copy of the Work Programme for the Community Scrutiny Committee had been circulated previously. It was noted that a progress report was to be received on the Car Parking Best Value Review at the next meeting of the Committee due to take place on 15th October 2001 and accordingly Members requested that details of a previous review of car parking carried out during the last few years be circulated to them in order to inform them fully on the matter.

With regard to Special Projects, the Council's Legal and Members' Services Manager asked for Members comments on the community/stakeholder involvement and/or sustainable development requirements. The Chair advised that there was a definite need to involve stakeholders in Special Projects but it was agreed to review this issue at a future meeting.

A general discussion took place with regard to the role of the Committee and it was noted that issues would be considered at this Committee before issues were considered at Policy Committees. The Legal and Members' Services Manager advised that the Committee would have three different roles, namely;- Policy Development; Call-in and also the Committee would also be involved in examining a decision after it had been made but not necessarily calling it in.

CYS/6. **BEST VALUE – CLEANSING THE ENVIRONMENT**

Members were advised that the final report on this Review was to be considered at the Development Services Committee on 27th September 2001 and the Community Services Committee on 8th October 2001, prior to inspection the week commencing 8th October 2001.

It was reported that the Review undertaken was initially one of the Council's pilot reviews, commencing in May 1999 with an intended completion date of December 1999. However, due to the large scope of the Review and the substantial impact on the "Clean Team" with the Council's financial crisis and subsequent re-organisation the Review was rescheduled as one of the Year One Reviews. Although the revised timetable was for completion in March 2001 this had been postponed due to an inspection in October 2001 in agreement with the Best Value inspectors.

It was outlined that the scope of the Review was for refuse collection, cleansing, highway and public open space grass cutting and dog fouling - issues of high concern to the public.

Having agreed the scope of the Review a base-line assessment was undertaken for the services covered and a copy of this assessment was circulated. Financial support for the Review had been problematic due to the longterm sickness absence of a member of staff. It had been obvious for some time that the limited finance support available would give little opportunity to undertake a rigorous benchmarking exercise. The self-help efforts of technical services staff were never going to satisfy the inspectors and therefore a report was commissioned from a consultant (Techman) who had been used before to provide market price information for D.S.O. tenders. A copy of the consultant's report was circulated and it was noted that it concluded that the Council were operationally competitive in all the former D.S.O. service areas but the central costs appeared to be high.

A summary of the stakeholders consulted were circulated. Also as part of the consultation exercise questionnaires were sent to similar local authorities to compare service provision for dog control, fly-tipping and grass cutting. This process showed that comparison of processes and methods was relatively easy and potentially fruitful.

The main external opportunities and threats in the service area were the Government Waste Management Targets which had been set as Best Value standards. None achievement of those standards was defined as not delivering, de facto, Best Value. It was noted that the stakeholders view of the service were mixed but refuse collection was well regarded and there was pressure to improve and extend the current recycling and composting activities. The Council's Performance Indicators for refuse collection were good whilst recycling was average but at low cost except for some of the bring sites operated by the Council. Grass cutting standards were perceived as poor together with some aspects of cleansing such as responses to fly-tipping and rural litter picking.

Following a number of meetings of the Clean Team the following process was identified to carry out the Review:

- Identify the key issues.
- List options to deal with the above.
- Analysing the above options.
- Produce a draft Action Plan.

A copy of the draft Action Plan was circulated which addressed the main issues to deliver the continuous improvement of services required by Best Value. Wherever possible the service delivery process would employ partnership working arrangements either developing existing partnerships or establishing new ones.

The Action Plan also included details of cost implications, totalling in excess of £100,000 although a lesser figure was recurring expenditure. Recently, financial information available for costs in 2000/01 showed that the service areas covered by the Review achieved substantial savings due to a variety of factors including the restructuring of staff and reductions in services. Officers were recommending an Action Plan with additional cost implications in the knowledge that there were service savings already available to fund these. The Technical Services Manager outlined that the areas of street cleaning, recycling

and grass cutting were all areas requiring additional finance. Approximately £40,000 was required for a “hit squad” to tackle fly-tipping, temporary staffing assistance was required to expand the composting initiative and there was a requirement to increase the level of grass cutting. It was outlined that without the reallocation of the above mentioned savings back to the above service areas it was unlikely that the inspectors would be persuaded that continuous improvement would be achieved. The draft Action Plan made recommendations for additional expenditure to make the required improvement to services. These proposals would need reviewing by Policy Committees in comparison to savings already made to the services and the corporate financial situation as a whole.

The Action Plan also made recommendations regarding the re-structuring of the Technical Services Division to a no split organisation.

Councillor Knight advised that the issues identified to spend savings on were worthwhile. He asked why North West Leicestershire District Council (N.W.L.D.C.) could operate street cleansing cheaper than this Authority. The Direct Services Manager talked about the benchmarking exercise done with N.W.L.D.C. to try and identify why this was. He stated that the number of collectors/ collections/vehicles and cost to run the vehicles were compared and these were almost the same as for South Derbyshire, however, N.W.L.D.C.’s Depot costs were £78 compared to £40,000 at this Authority. In summary, the way N.W.L.D.C. charged their overheads was considerably different and therefore the Council needed to benchmark against other Councils for this exercise to become effective.

Councillor Sherratt queried what measurement for quality of service the Council utilised and was advised that for refuse collection this was based on the number of missed bins per 100,000 collections. The Council had a target of 18 and recently the Council hit 24/25 per 100,000 collections. (The Council collected 33,000 wheeled bins a week.)

A general discussion took place on the size of the wheeled bin and the bulky collection service. Members referred to a previous decision made by the former Recycling Sub-Committee where the Council agreed to register its concerns about the proliferation of packaging in the retail industry. Council Evens felt that there was a need to give the community more advice on recycling and Councillor Sherratt indicated that over the next few years much Government action was required in order to reach recycling targets. Both Councillors Richard and Sherratt expressed their favour for the “hit squad” aimed at targeting fly-tipping.

It was agreed to commend the Best Value Review – Cleansing the Environment document to the Policy Committee.

K. J. RICHARDS

CHAIR

The meeting terminated at 6.05 p.m.