

Time commenced – 6.00pm
Time finished – 9:30 pm

COMMUNITY COMMISSION
2 October 2006

Present: Councillor Turner (in the Chair)
Councillors Afzal, Chera, Lowe, Rawson, Redfern, Troup and Webb.

Also Present: Councillors Gerrard and Nath

30/06 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Winters.

31/06 Late Items Introduced by the Chair

There were no late items.

32/06 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Troup declared a personal interest in relation to minute number 35/06 as his step daughter worked for the Citizens Advice Bureau. Councillor Rawson declared a personal interest in minute number 40/06 as he brother was a private landlord.

33/06 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on 24 July 2006 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to changing Area Planning Partnerships in minute number 21/06 to Neighbourhood Team.

34/06 Call-in

No items were called-in by the Commission

Responses of the Council Cabinet to any reports of the Commission

35/06 Derby Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

The Commission received the minute of the Adult Services Cabinet Member meeting on 13 September when the report of the former Community Regeneration Commission on CAB funding had been considered. The previous Commission had recommended that the Council Cabinet should be prepared to consider an increase in funding after a proposed possible merger of the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Law Centre.

Councillors Nath and Gerrard, who served on the management committees of the organisations, had been invited to attend the Commission for this item. It was reported that the merger was the result of the organisations wanting to come together in response to the Legal Services Commission's decision that it wanted to set up a 'one stop shop' to provide all services in each area.

It was reported that both organisations received approximately £400,000 per year income. Both have what they consider to be unsuitable premises. The Commission considered that there may be a future case made to increase the grants given. It was noted agreed that no redundancies should be made following any merger.

Councillor Webb considered that the merger could be opened up to other organisations such as the REC or Asian over 60's, to take advantage of organisations being available under one banner.

Resolved

- 1. to welcome closer partnership working and wish good luck to the new merged organisation**
- 2. to request that Council cabinet do not review downwards the aggregate of funding to the two current organisations after their merger**
- 3. to reaffirm the recommendations of the previous Commission made on 21 March 2006, namely:**

That Council Cabinet should be prepared to *consider* an increase in the level of grant in future years to the (probably) amalgamated Citizen's Advice Bureau [CAB]/Law Centre in the following circumstances:

- a) the economies of scale available to the combined organisation have been fully utilised to deliver efficiencies**
- b) the savings released are partly used to augment the financial management capacity and**
- c) firm evidence is provided of continuing unmet need.**

Items for Discussion

36/06 Housing and Council Tax Benefit Administration

The Commission considered a report from the Corporate Director of Resources and Housing that provided an update on the new computer system for the Revenues and Benefits Service.

Don McLure reported that the computer system went live on 17 July 2006, on time and within budget. He considered that despite the system only being in place for two

months, the workload was steadily reducing, however it was noted that the Housing Benefits Service would take up to nine months to completely recover. It was reported that before the new system went live no claims had been processed for a month but were now being processed within eight weeks. Changes of circumstance and cancellations were up to date. It was confirmed that problem cases were being fast tracked.

Maria Murphy from Derby Homes raised concerns that the down time involved in service changes was never fully recovered in terms of the impacts on client arrears or the overpayments arising from changes of circumstance.

Councillor Redfern raised concerns about the knock on effect of the backlog on people trying to get accommodation. She asked if there would be an increase in face to face staff. Don McLure responded that there were no problems with staffing numbers for face to face contact or on the phones. He suggested that a direct line for Members could be set up in order for them to report specific problems.

Resolved

- 1. to note the report**
- 2. to keep Members up to date with progress**
- 3. to welcome a) the flexible attitude to the backdating of benefit and b) the proposed direct phone line for elected members.**

37/06 Joint Service Delivery Options for Derby Homes Former Local Housing Offices

The Commission considered a report from the Corporate Director of Corporate and Adult Social Services that included Derby Homes documentation providing an update on the implementation of the Service Access Review. The report demonstrated how Derby Homes intended to maintain a local housing service through joint working with partner organisations.

Maria Murphy informed the Commission that the report had been presented to the Derby Homes Board on 28 September 2006 to consider the possibility of keeping Osmaston, Cowsley and Chaddesden Park local offices open at alternative locations. The Board agreed to keep the offices open.

Councillor Redfern thanked Derby Homes for putting in the effort to find alternative locations.

Resolved

- 1. to note the report**

- 2. to welcome Derby Homes' efforts to maintain a local presence and willingness to absorb the financial consequence.**

38/06 Area and Neighbourhood Agenda

The Commission received a briefing from Andy Thomas on the implementation, roll out and governance arrangements of the developing the Area and Neighbourhood Agenda. This was followed by a dialogue between the Commission and Mr Thomas and Cllr Nath It was reported that the agenda was gaining momentum and a focus on safer, stronger and cleaner agenda had been agreed. It was noted that the key themes of the agenda were:

- Creating safer, stronger and cleaner communities
- Community enjoyment
- Building trust
- Responsive and accountable services
- Developing community leadership

Councillor Redfern considered that in order for Members to do their job effectively money, for Councillors to control, was required to allow the freedom to do things that would be easily remedied.

Resolved

- 1. To i) note that the Community Commission welcomes ward members involvement in the weekly tasking meetings, and ii) take any necessary steps so that confidentiality is not seen as a reason to exclude ward members from such meetings.**
- 2. To consider the Commission's request that a portion of the budgets devolved to neighbourhoods be allocated to ward members to spend on issues raised by constituents.**

39/06 Derby Homes Re-inspection

The Commission considered a report from the Corporate Director of Corporate and Adult Social Services that provided details of Derby Homes' response to recommendations arising from the Audit Commission Inspection in February 2006.

Maria Murphy informed the Commission that the report was presented to Derby Homes Board on 27 July 2006. The Audit Commission assessed Derby Homes as providing an excellent three star service and provided a series of recommendations as practical pointers for improvement. The recommendations were then built into the Consolidated Improvement Plan.

Resolved to note the report.

40/06 Housing Renewal Policy

The Commission considered a verbal report from Martin Gadsby on the proposed Housing Renewal Policy ahead of the Key Decision that was being taken on 19 Dec 2006 by Council Cabinet.

Martin Gadsby reported that a review of the Policy was necessary due to a shift in government priorities for private sector housing, the new Housing Act 2004 and changes in funding arrangements.

The timetable for the adoption of the new policy was:

- 15 November – draft policy to Council Cabinet Part Two
- 4 December – final draft policy to Community Commission
- 19 December – final report and recommendations to Council Cabinet
- 1 January 2007 – new policy implemented

Resolved

- 1. to note the report**
- 2. to request Council Cabinet to promote an accredited landlords scheme and encourage membership from the sector as a means of raising standards.**

41/06 Report 1362: Community Based Finance Institutions – Derbyloans

The Commission considered a report from the Corporate Director of Resources and Housing that provided details of developments regarding the ability of the Council to make loans or grants to Derbyloans. It was explained that a loan to Derbyloans would have been at risk in the case of default by Derbyloans. Funding had been received from other pots including Derby Homes that have given three years grant funding.

Resolved to note the developments in terms of the ability of the Council to make loans or grants to Derbyloans.

42/06 Performance Eye

The Commission considered a report from the Corporate Director of Corporate and Adult Social Services that detailed performance data relating to the Commissions score card.

Resolved to receive specific information on BV76a, BV76d and HCOP 6.1.

43/06 Retrospective Scrutiny

There were no items.

44/06 Focussed Scrutiny

It was noted that the first focussed review meeting was on 14 September 2006. Two further events would take place:

- 16 October 2006 – Section 30 Orders and designated Alcohol Free Zones
- 30 November 2006 – Supplementary Planning Guidance on Affordable Housing

Council Cabinet Forward Plan

45/06 Identification of items on the Forward Plan for consideration at future meetings.

The Commission studied the latest version of the Forward Plan.

Resolved to scrutinise

28/06 – Derby Homes New Build – Derby Homes able to develop new affordable housing

46/06 Matters referred to the Commission by Council Cabinet

There were no items.

MINUTES END