

Community Commission

The remit of the Community Commission covers the portfolio areas of three Cabinet members. These include Neighbourhood, Social Cohesion and Housing Strategy; Leisure and Direct Services and Housing Management. The Commission has scrutinised many subjects within its remit during the year with some areas receiving greater attention than others. The Commission also held two special meetings to respond to issues which could not be considered during scheduled meetings.

Neighbourhood working

The Community Commission conducted an in-depth scrutiny of the proposals to change from Area Panel to Neighbourhood working. At its July meeting the Commission considered the principle of replacing the five Area Panels with a Neighbourhood Board and Forum for each ward. The Commission recommended that the Council Cabinet produce a best practice guide to support the process.

The Commission held a special meeting at the end of August and extended invitations to all elected members to seek cross party support for the new ways of working. This meeting was well attended with members giving their suggestion on how the Neighbourhood Forums could operate. Based on these comments the Commission made 18 recommendations for establishing the Neighbourhood Forums and Neighbourhood Boards, nearly all of which were accepted by the Council.

Neighbourhood Forums and Boards were adopted by the Full Council at their September meeting.

Community Theatre

The second special meeting considered a petition from the Derby New Theatre Association which asked the Council for assistance, as in their view, amateur theatre was in crisis due to lack of suitable venues. The Commission invited the key stakeholders who included the petitioners, Council Cabinet Member and senior Council officers to understand the problems faced by amateur theatre group and explore the level and type of support that could be offered by the Council. Derby Playhouse was also invited to the meeting, since it is funded by the Council to support amateur groups but no one was unable to attend as Playhouse is experiencing crisis of its own.

The Commission made a number of recommendations which included asking the Council to work closely with amateur theatre groups in an attempt to bring the Hippodrome Theatre back into use for community theatre. This is one possible solution for addressing the shortage of suitable performing venues for community groups.

Section 30 Dispersal Areas and Alcohol Free Zones

Section 30 Dispersal Areas and Alcohol Free Zones allow the police to take action and tackle antisocial behaviour affecting certain areas of the city. These provide discretionary powers with the ability to act immediately such as taking away alcohol from the offenders. The zones are based on intelligence such as number and types of incidents and designated following discussions with partner organisations.

The Commission received a presentation from Chief Inspector Gary Parkin at their July meeting on the Section 30 Dispersal Areas and Alcohol Free Zones. Chief Inspector Parkin stated that there were three Section 30 dispersal orders and six alcohol restricted zones in operation.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits Claims

The Commission has regularly received reports from the Assistant Director Customer Services on the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service Performance. The first report presented at the July meeting stated all new claims were processed on average within 58 days during 2006/07 and this had been further improved by 10 days to the end of June. A new target of 34 days had been set for the end of the year.

Members were not satisfied with these times and felt waiting for 48 days for benefit claims to be processed could cause hardship for the applicants and in some instances might affect their tenancies.

However, the January report had showed significant improvement in the claims assessment times with the applicants waiting on average 30.1 days. Members commended the service for making an excellent improvement which clearly benefits local residents.

The Commission Chair has been interviewed in February 2008 by the Audit Commission with respect of its scrutiny of this area of council activity

Performance Monitoring

Monitoring performance is an important role for commission as it enables members to assess Council's performance, hold the Cabinet to account and help to improve local services

In Derby we use 'Performance Eye' an electronic system for monitoring performance with green, red and amber 'traffic lights' showing whether performance is on or off target. Most of our indicators monitor performance on quarterly but there are also a significant number of annual indicators such those monitoring GCSE exam results. All members can access this through the intranet

There are 42 quarterly indicators within the remit of the Community Commission, whose performance is measured every three months and 33

annual indicators whose performance is measured once a year. The Commission resolved to consider the annual indicators at their first meeting and monitor quarterly indicators after each quarter.

Derby Homes

The Commission supported an options appraisal by Derby Homes of its future beyond 2012.

Budget Scrutiny 2008-09 budget

The Commission made four recommendations to Cabinet and three of these were accepted to be included in the budget proposals to be put before Council