

REPORT OF CHAIRMAN OF COMMUNITY HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

(OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

PRESENT:

Councillors Marshall (Chairman), Warfield (Vice Chairman), Mrs Woodward (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Allsopp, Mrs Bacon, Mrs Evans, Humphreys, Isaacs, Pearce, Ms Perkins Mrs Richards, and Salter.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs Flowith

(In accordance with Council Procedure No. 17 Councillor Greatorex attended the meeting).

At the Meeting of the Community Housing and Environmental Health (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee held on 22nd January 2014 the following matters were considered.

1 TOP TEN ISSUES AND PERFORMANCE REPORTING

Mid Year Performance Report – One Year Action Plan 13/14

- 1.1 Members received a report on progress against activities and projects set out in the District Council's One Year Action Plan for 13/14. It was reported that the Fit for the Future (F4F) programme had been developed since the Action Plan had been approved and this had led to the deletion of eight posts and the cessation of the Community and Partnerships team. Consequently, working with partners including the Police and Crime Commissioner and the community and voluntary sector was even more important. Councillor Greatorex commented on progress being made on anti social behaviour, supporting families, service level agreements, homelessness strategy and affordable housing delivery. It was noted that the District Council's objectives and targets are in many cases shared with other partners on the Lichfield District Board and partners work together to deliver positive results for the local community.
- 1.2 Referring to the detailed key service indicators, Councillor Greatorex advised that calls to Revenues and Benefits had reduced after an initial surge following the introduction of welfare reforms in the spring. It was also reported that the number of service requests received through the new Customer Relationship Management system had increased, thereby increasing efficiency.
- 1.3 Councillor Mrs Woodward congratulated staff for the achievement of good results on targets and performance. However, she expressed concern about the future of community transport and was advised that work is in progress to identify ways of improving the financial viability of this service.
- 1.4 Councillor Mrs Woodward also enquired about how the council was now able to help older people living in their own homes given the loss of community development support. She was advised that public health funding was being made available to promote health and well being and one of the priorities is to develop an Ageing Well Strategy. The role of housing as an important contributor to good health is a focus of the work locally.

- 1.5 Members noted there had been an increase in anti-social behavior in the first six months. The Director advised that this trend had now been halted although localised incidents of drinking in public in Burntwood had recently been a cause for concern.
- 1.6 Members felt it was difficult to fully compare recent performance to previous years as the capacity of the Directorate had reduced. It was agreed that further data be made available to Members on the intranet so that trends in performance can be monitored on a more regular basis by those Members with particular interests.
- 1.7 It was agreed that the aim was now to get people in to work and not just back to work. It was also agreed to review the availability of data on what type on employment people were entering into through the Work Clubs.
- 1.8 The report was noted.

Directorate Top 10 and Performance Reporting 14/15

- 1.9 The Committee received a report on the top 10 issues facing the Community, Housing and Health Directorate in 14/15 along with the activity and performance indicators which would be reported to the Committee in the future.
- 1.10 It was reported that the selection of the top ten issues reflected a reduced capacity and so was more focused than in previous Annual Action Plans. Members expressed concern that as the top ten issues were not the only activities planned for the year, it would be difficult to know if there was underperformance in areas. It was reported that the performance and activity indicators as shown in Appendix B to the report would help Members to fully monitor performance across the board of Directorate activities
- 1.11 The report was noted.

2	EQUALITY STATEMENT 2014
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- 2.1 The Committee received a report on the District Council's proposed Equality Statement for 2014 prior to submission to Cabinet along with proposed Equality Objectives, which would be subject to public consultation during spring 2014. It was reported that there was a need to continuously consider equality and carry out equality impact assessments especially as part of the Fit for the Future programme.
- 2.2 Councillor Mrs Woodward commented that Lichfield District Council generally performs well on equality issues but felt that there continues to be an issue with gender equality and a lack of awareness that certain behaviours or comments are not acceptable. It was agreed that people affected by discriminatory behaviour should feel confident to raise their concerns, in confidence, through the whistleblowing procedure.
- 2.3 The Committee felt that all council activities should be embraced within the Statement, not just service delivery and employment practices. Reference to elected Members should be included and a Member Champion for equality appointed. It was agreed that equality training was important and it was suggested that a wallet sized guide could be designed to help highlight Members responsibilities. It was noted that Councillor Greatorex is the lead Member for Equality and in effect champions this agenda.
- 2.4 Councillor Mrs Evans expressed disappointment at the take up of equality awareness training and it was agreed that it needed to be promoted more in 2014.
- 2.5 It was agreed that subject to the inclusion of the Member role, the Equality Statement be endorsed.

3	HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013/18
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- 3.1 The Committee received a report on the Lichfield District Homelessness Strategy 2013-18 including responses to the public consultation. The responses received were supportive of the proposed Strategy.
- 3.2 Councillor Isaacs expressed concern regarding the low number of responses but Members were reassured that the quality of responses received, most from key partners of the District Council, had been of a good quality.
- 3.3 Members also expressed concern at the high risk associated with resource availability to deliver the Strategy and were advised this risk assessment reflects the ongoing financial pressures on the Council and the small team within housing which coordinates the delivery of the Strategy.
- 3.4 Members noted the Strategy did not mention what statutory obligations the District Council had in relation to homelessness. It was reported that the Strategy was based on the Homelessness Review (received by the Committee in September 2013) which had outlined the statutory obligations and that there was a link to the Review within the Strategy document.
- 3.5 Members suggested that more information should be included about the types of housing that are needed and it was agreed to amend the Strategy to recognise the need for one and two bed properties owing to the Under Occupation surcharge.
- 3.6 Members commented on the difficulties faced by the single homeless and vulnerable adults when seeking accommodation. Councillor Isaacs asked how the District Council assists people with complex needs to access housing advice, including people with learning disabilities or mental health problems. Members were advised of the Make Every Adult matter (MEAM) pilot that was underway which addresses the needs of people with multiple issues. Councillor Mrs Woodward raised concern that changes to Supporting People funding may result in the decommissioning of some services which is likely to have an impact locally. Further information is being sought about the impact of this.
- 3.7 Members commended the team for their work and success on homelessness prevention.
- 3.8 It was agreed that the Homelessness Strategy and delivery plan be endorsed and recommended to Cabinet for approval.

4 FUNDING THE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR

- 4.1 Members received a report advising that the current Service Level Agreements (SLA's) with local community and voluntary sector organisations would expire in March 2015 and that steps needed to be taken to prepare for the next round of SLA's. It was agreed by the Committee that the work achieved through the SLA's was value for money for residents in the District. Councillor Mrs Woodward commented that the budget for SLA's with the voluntary sector should be at least maintained at current levels in recognition of the loss of the Council's community development team.
- 4.2 It was reported that the Member Task Group set up to consider SLA's in 2011, Chaired by Councillor Mrs Woodward, had worked well to decide priority areas for investment and scrutinise decisions on successful and unsuccessful applications. It was reported that the Member Task Group met again in 2012 to evaluate the impact of the SLA's. It was agreed that this Member Task Group be reconvened to consider levels of funding, investment priorities and the process for commissioning services. It was noted that the lead Officers from when the last SLA's were agreed had been made redundant and therefore less officer resource will be available to support this task..

- 4.3 Members agreed that Councillor Mrs Woodward should be Chairman again. Councillor Perkins notified the Committee that she could not get involved this time owing to time constraints. Councillor Humphreys volunteered to be on the task group as well as Councillor Isaacs who could also act as a representative of the Operational Services, Leisure Tourism and Communications (Overview & Scrutiny) Committee to contribute from an arts and cultural perspective.
- 4.4 It was agreed that the Member Task Group be reconvened with Councillor Mrs Woodward as the Chairman and also consisting of Councillors Humphreys and Isaacs.

5 FUEL POVERTY AND AFFORDABLE WARMTH

- 5.1 The Chairman of the Health Scrutiny – Fuel Poverty and Affordable Warmth Member Task Group gave an update on the progress of the Task Group which had held three meetings to date.
- 5.2 It was reported that the Council was running the Warmer Homes Greener District initiative through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Marches Energy Agency and Beat the Cold but after consideration, the Task Group felt that an option to join Birmingham Energy Savers (BES) should be pursued to maximise opportunities through the government's Green Deal. It was then reported that before an arrangement with BES could be formalised, BES notified the Council that due to current market conditions and lack of activity in other local authority areas where they were working, the offer to open discussions would be withdrawn for the short to medium term. It was then reported that the Task Group met to consider options and it was decided to renegotiate the existing SLA's with Marches Energy Agency and Beat the Cold for the next financial year.
- 5.3 Members felt that focus should be on helping vulnerable people as they were least likely to be able to access the most economic and discounted energy tariffs especially if on pre-pay meters. It was noted that it was the same Officer leading on public health and affordable warmth, which would help identify the most vulnerable, and in need of help. It was asked if a partnership opportunity with Staffordshire County Council was possible and it was reported that it was hoped that there would be opportunities to jointly bid for funding with the County Council.
- 5.4 The Committee agreed the following:
- (1) That the report be noted; and
 - (2) That the recommendation of the Task Group to renegotiate the Service Level Agreement with Marches Energy Agency and Beat the Cold for the next financial year be endorsed giving time to enable a full review of the service provided to take place and options for delivery to be explored.

6 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 The Work Programme and Forward Plan were considered. It was noted that the date of the next meeting would change to the 24th March 2014. It was agreed that an update of the Burntwood Health Centre be considered at the March meeting. It was also agreed for the Chairman of the Committee to write to the Members of Parliament in the District regarding the Committee's concerns of the systems used to charge for parking at local hospitals.

T. Marshall
Chairman

Community, Housing and Health (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee