

Customers and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 7 November 2012

PRESENT:

Councillor Tuffin, in the Chair.

Councillor Michael Leaves, Vice-Chair.

Councillors Ball, Casey, Damarell, Philippa Davey, Haydon, Jordan, Martin Leaves and Ricketts.

Apology for absence: Councillor Jarvis.

Also in attendance: Darin Halifax, Lead Officer, Katey Johns, Democratic Support Officer, Carole Burgoyne, Director for People, Tony Hopwood, Programmes Director, David Greenwood, Everyone Active, Matt Garrett, Housing Options Manager, Sally Walsh, Library Service Manager (Customer Relations), Dave Saunders, Strategic Manager (Customer Services), Councillor Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Community Development and Councillor Peter Smith, Deputy Leader.

The meeting started at 4 pm and finished at 5.55 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

Councillor Jarvis

The Chair advised panel members that Councillor Jarvis was recovering from surgery following an emergency appendectomy and asked that they join him in wishing him all the very best for a speedy recovery.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the code of conduct, the following declarations of interest were made –

| Name | Subject | Reasons | Interest |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|-----------|
| Councillor Jordan | Library Modernisation Progress Update | Director of Trading Route (Café operating in Devonport Library) | Personal |
| Councillor Michael Leaves | Tenancy Strategy Consultation | Landlord | Pecuniary |
| Councillor Ricketts | Tenancy Strategy Consultation | Landlord | Pecuniary |
| Councillor Damarell | Tenancy Strategy Consultation | Employee of Plymouth Community Homes | Personal |

35. **MINUTES**

Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2012.

36. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

37. **CULTURE, SPORT AND LEISURE PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Members received an update on the Culture Sport and Leisure Programme in respect of progress against the following projects –

- Plymouth Life Centre
- Leisure Management
- Plymouth Pavilions

In response to questions raised, Members heard that –

- (a) an opportunity had presented itself to deal with the removal of the spoil heap at a cost of £347,000. Balfour Beatty were already on site and were able to incorporate its removal into their strategy. The spoil heap removal had never formed part of the Life Centre contract and it would have cost in excess of £1m for anyone else to remove it from the site;
- (b) additional staff had been taken on at the Life Centre to help cope with demand which had far exceeded expectations. Everyone Active now employed 125 FTE staff, including the 43 FTE staff who had transferred with the contract from Plymouth City Council and 11 apprentices.

38. **LIBRARY MODERNISATION PROGRESS UPDATE**

The panel received for its information a summary of the results of the survey undertaken in respect of library services modernisation. Members were advised that over 1,500 users and non-users had been asked for their views on current services and a range of options for future developments.

Concern was expressed at the relevance of some of the questions asked, particularly in regard to a person's sexual orientation and, whilst it was appreciated that the Council had a duty under the Equalities Act to ask such questions, it would seem to be sensible to explain in the survey why they were being asked. In addition, it made little sense to ask someone if they were disabled and then not ask for the nature of that disability.

Agreed that –

- (1) the Library Modernisation task and finish group would be undertaken in December;

- (2) a full copy of all of the survey responses received would be circulated to members of the Library Modernisation task and finish group.

(Councillor Jordan declared a personal interest in respect of the above item).

39. **TENANCY STRATEGY CONSULTATION**

The panel received for its consideration a copy of the Tenancy Strategy Consultation document. Members were advised that Section 150 of the Localism Act 2011, 'Tenancy Strategies' requires Local Authorities to produce a tenancy strategy which Registered Housing Providers must have 'regard to' in formulating policies that cover:

- the kind of tenancies granted;
- circumstances in which particular types of tenancy will be granted;
- lengths of tenancies granted when these are for a fixed term;
- circumstances in which a further tenancy may be granted on expiry of an existing tenancy.

The Council's draft strategy would shortly be available and Members would have the opportunity to discuss/comment on the document via open door drop-in sessions with either Matt Garrett or Kevin Neil, Housing Options Team Leader.

In response to questions raised, the panel heard that –

- (a) the installation of wired smoke alarms in homes was something that was being looked at across the city with the fire brigade, however, this did not form part of this particular strategy;
- (b) one of the priorities identified in the Council's Housing Strategy related to bringing empty properties back into use.

(Having declared disclosable pecuniary interests in respect of the above item, Councillors Michael Leaves and Ricketts left the meeting).

(Councillor Damarell declared a personal interest in respect of the above item).

40. **UPDATE ON POLICE AND CRIME PANEL**

The panel received for its information an update on the developments of the Police and Crime Panel for Devon and Cornwall.

Members noted the report and agreed that minutes of the meetings of the Police and Crime Panel be included as a standard information item on future agendas of the Customers and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

41. **SOCIAL FUND REPLACEMENT TASK AND FINISH REPORT**

The panel received for its information a copy of the task and finish group report into Social Fund Replacement. The Chair took the opportunity to thank all of those involved in the review.

Agreed that -

- (1) the report be recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board subject to the following amendments –
 - the removal of the last sentence in the introductory paragraph at 1.1 and replacement with “With rising living costs and reductions in income to some families in Plymouth as a result of Welfare Reform, together with a shift in Government policy on welfare distribution; this council will be forced to make tough decisions on how increases in demand, on an already stretched service, will be managed”;
 - the removal of the first bullet point from recommendation R5 and replacement with “that the limit for crisis loans be set at one claim in a 12-month period with any subsequent applications being considered in exceptional circumstances only and on a case by case basis”;
- (2) Steve Meakin, co-opted representative for the purposes of the task and finish group be invited to serve as a co-opted representative on the Customers and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel;
- (3) letters of thanks would be sent to all of the witnesses who participated in the review.

42. **PROJECT INITIATION DOCUMENT - THE COMPACT**

The panel considered the project initiation document submitted in respect of The Compact. The purpose of the task and finish group was to advise on how the Council’s relationship with the third sector could be further developed, taking into account the principles of a co-operative council. Councillor Penberthy commented that it was vital for the success of Plymouth that the Council, as a mature local authority, worked in partnership with the community and voluntary sector and that every opportunity to develop relationships should be explored. He also highlighted that the current contract arrangement would expire on 31 March 2012 and it would therefore be more appropriate for pre-decision scrutiny to be undertaken during December 2012 rather than in April 2013, as scheduled in the panel’s work programme.

Agreed that –

- (1) membership of the task and finish group will comprise Councillors Tuffin, Jordan, Martin Leaves and, subject to there being no conflict of interest, Councillor Casey;

- (2) membership would be opened up to other councillors outside of the panel in order to make the numbers up to five;
- (3) the Compact task and finish group should be undertaken in December 2012.

43. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS**

The panel noted its tracking resolutions schedule.

44. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The panel noted its work programme for 2012/13, including that consideration of the Compact and Library Modernisation would now both be undertaken in December 2012.

45. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.