

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

COMMUNITY

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

January, 2012.

The work programme for Panel members since the last report has included the Panel's meeting in November and meetings of the Disabled Facilities Grant and Housing Issues Task and Finish Groups.

At the November meeting of the Panel, having considered the Overview Report and Work Programme, members requested updated reports on the plans for the Resource Centre, the financial liabilities for the Youth Zone and on the Shared Services within the authority.

Four of the Executive Key Decisions on the Forward Plan, (1st November to 29th February) were scrutinised.

In a lengthy discussion on the Housing Strategy 2011-15, questions were asked regarding the planning required for the future need for extra care provision, the steps needed to deal with the demand for low cost/affordable housing given the reluctance of lenders to provide funding, plus the possible land banking by developers until the economic picture is brighter. Adequate housing accommodation for students coming to the University and the need to continue the reinstatement of empty properties were also subjects explored. Disappointment was expressed regarding the result of the tendering process of the Supporting People contracts, a subject the Panel will return to, together with further scrutiny on the need for more student accommodation.

The Budget Process 2012/13 was examined through scrutiny of the Revenue and Capital Budgets reports.

In regard to the Revenue Reports, questions were asked relating to the items that are within the Panel's remit.

The Panel asked for further information on the cost to the Council of the Olympic Torch Relay 2 Day event to be held in June.

The forecast in regard to income fall that's expected, particularly in Car Parking charges and Development Control fees, was also of concern to the Panel. The Panel did take note of the savings that had been made, the proposed savings and additional income projections.

The Panel asked for further information in relation to the Review of Charges. The result of the decision on the Supporting People contracts, means that the Council can only levy a charge at its hostels for the basic rent and communal use areas. However, there may be an opportunity for the Resource Centre to become the hub for the care services funded by Supporting People and provided by a new contractor, a possibility the Panel welcomed.

The Panel accepted the recommendations set out in the Revised Capital Programme for 2011/112 and the Provisional Programme for 2012/13 to 2016/17 and noted the funding that would be available for the Disabled Facilities Grants Scheme.

Under the receipt of the report on the Mid Year Performance of the Corporate Plan questions were asked relating to collating information on the Council's performance in bringing back empty properties into use. This information will be provided for the Panel and considered for inclusion in next year's performance indicators. Further questioning took place in regard to community engagement and partnerships plus the future for the Community Safety Partnership.

Two reports received and approved by the Panel were in regard to the Tullie House Business Plan and Lease Arrangements. Members discussed the strategic themes and key priorities of the Business Plan with Ms Hilary Wade and Mr. Paul Smith, a Trust Board member. Further opportunities for discussion and monitoring progress with the Trust, will be welcomed by the Panel.

The final report on the Task and Finish Group's examination of the Disabled Facilities Scheme, which included ten recommendations, was well received by the Panel and also by the Port Folio Holder.

The report confirmed the importance of the scheme in supporting the independence of people with disabilities. The contribution it makes to preventative measures and consequentially, NHS budgets. However, the costs to the City Council continue and will continue to rise and the report's recommendations addressed this problem.

It is hoped that the Executive will accept the recommendations and that early moves will be made to implement them.

A further Transformation (Community Engagement) update report was received and following questions answered in regard to the new structure, was approved by the Panel.

Finally, I wish to thank those Panel Members plus the Officers and Port Folio Holders who attended, for their diligence and perseverance through what was the longest sitting of the Panel this year.

Olwyn Luckley