

## **SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE**

12<sup>th</sup> September 2012

Scrutiny Co-ordination

Committee Members Present: Councillor Mrs Abbott  
Councillor Mrs Bigham (Chair)  
Councillor Blundell  
Councillor Mrs Fletcher  
Councillor Foster  
Councillor Lakha  
Councillor M. Mutton  
Councillor Skipper (Deputy Chair)  
Councillor Welsh

Employees Present: M. Checkley (Community Services Directorate)  
G. Holmes (Chief Executive's Directorate)  
J. Parry (Assistant Chief Executive)  
M. Salmon (Customer & Workforce Services Directorate)  
D. Shiner (Community Services Directorate)  
A. West (Chief Executive's Directorate)

Apologies: Councillor Howells

### **Public Business**

#### **26. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

#### **27. Minutes**

- (a) The Minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2012 were signed as a true record.
- (b) Further to Minute 15/12 headed 'Overview and Scrutiny Management', Members noted that a Briefing Session on the Call-in process had been arranged for all Members of the Council to be held at 4.00 pm – 5.00 pm on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

#### **28. Overview and Scrutiny Management**

##### **Cabinet Item of Urgent Public Business - Expansion of Frederick Bird Primary School**

The Committee received a copy of a report of the Director of Children, Learning and Young People that had been considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2012 relating to the expansion of Frederick Bird Primary School. The Committee noted that the Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee had attended the Cabinet meeting and agreed that the decision was urgent and that call-in should not apply. In accordance with paragraph 4.5.3.1 of the Council's Constitution, the report is presented to the Scrutiny Co-

ordination Committee to inform them of the reasons for urgency. The reason for urgency was that the increase in reception intake at Fredrick Bird Primary School from 3 to 4 Forms of Entry (FE) needs to be approved ready for the start of the new school term on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2012. The consultation on the City Council's school size policy to increase the maximum size of a primary school from 3 to 4 FE needs to start at the beginning of September in order to inform the formal consultation on the expanding primary school programme for September 2014 for recommendation to Cabinet in October 2012.

## **29. Tackling Fuel Poverty in Coventry**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of City Services and Development that had been considered by the Cabinet Member (Sustainability and Local Infrastructure) and Cabinet Member (Neighbourhood Action, Housing, Leisure and Culture) (their minute 3/12 referred), that reviewed the nature and extent of fuel poverty in Coventry, and detailed key initiatives being implemented to tackle the problem. It looked at changing national policy framework and future opportunities. Further reports would be presented throughout the financial year making recommendations for the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation (ECO) and proposing that a report be submitted in response to the requirements of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995.

In 2012, the City Council approved a Climate Change Strategy for Coventry. The approval process highlighted the connections between carbon reduction, energy efficiency, fuel poverty and the adverse effects of cold homes. The Strategy set out a vision for Coventry which included improving home energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty.

A household was defined as being in fuel poverty when more than 10% of income had to be spent to achieve an adequate level of warmth. The causes of fuel poverty were inadequate thermal insulation, inefficient and uneconomic heating systems, low household income and high fuel prices. Latest figures from the Department of Energy and Climate Change indicated that in 2010, 21.1% of households in Coventry were in fuel poverty, compared with 19% in England, the worse situations being in some of the City's deprived neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood-level Government statistics were often presented by geographical areas known as Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs), each LSOA typically comprised 5-600 homes. Of the 197 LSOAs for Coventry, 68 had fuel poverty levels of 25% or more, 8 had levels of 30% or more, and the worst had a level of 36.8%. The correlation between fuel poverty and deprived neighbourhoods was evident, with problems particularly acute where low-income households were living in older, poorly-insulated houses. The effects impacted various physical and mental health consequences, limited educational attainment and exacerbated child poverty. A map of fuel poverty distribution across Coventry was attached as an appendix to the report and a further appendix to the report provided an overview of the findings of the 2011 Marmot report, a report that examined the health impacts of cold homes and fuel poverty.

Owner occupied and privately rented homes made up 81% of the City's housing stock. A private sector stock condition survey was commissioned this year that included research into home energy efficiency and fuel poverty and the results are awaited.

The report provided details of Initiatives that were being implemented to tackle fuel poverty in Coventry, which included:

- Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) Schemes
- City-wide Free Home Insulation Scheme
- Data Matching to Promote Take-up of Warm Home Discount, Free Home Insulation and Free Home Energy Assessments
- Keeping Coventry Warm Project
- The Warm Front Scheme.

The report also outlined Tackling Fuel Poverty through the Green Deal, a major new energy efficiency initiative being introduced by the Government towards the end of 2012. It would be complemented by the Energy Company Obligation for low income households and for houses that were hard to treat due to solid brick walls or walls with narrow cavities. Green Deal and ECO presented a new opportunity to tackle fuel poverty in Coventry, based on a 'pay as you save' model. Green Deal would enable energy efficiency measures to be installed without up-front costs and finance would be made available to householders who chose to take out a Green Deal Plan with repayments made by instalments attached to household electricity bills.

A sub-regional approach to the Green Deal and ECO was being developed under the direction of the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership. Details of four delivery options identified for appraisal, each conferring a different level of local authority leadership and influence, were set out in the report and an appendix set out ten strategic aspirations proposed for Coventry and Warwickshire.

Local authorities had a duty under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) to prepare reports on energy conservation measures for submission to the Secretary of State, for which Government had recently issued revised guidance on reporting arrangements under the new policy context of the Green Deal and ECO. The guidance referred to the significance of the local authority role in addressing fuel poverty and delivering carbon reduction plans, and highlighted that they were uniquely placed to act as catalysts for change using their position to improve the energy efficiency of all tenures of residential accommodation. Under the new guidance, the Council would be required to produce and submit a first report by 31 March 2013 that set out what it considered 'practicable and cost effective and likely to result in significant improvement in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation'. Significant improvements should, where appropriate, be achieved through 'the Green Deal/ECO, Renewable Heat Incentive and other initiatives' and through 'measures which an authority had developed to implement energy efficiency improvements cost-effectively in residential accommodation by using area based/street by street roll out involving local communities and partnerships'. Measures were defined as including 'information, advice, education, promotion, any available financial assistance, making grants and loans and carrying out works'.

The Government required local authorities to submit progress reports every two years to be published on the Council's website for public access and the web link sent to the Secretary of State. Guidance suggested that reports could cover: Local energy efficiency ambitions and priorities; measures to take advantage of the Green Deal/ECO, Renewable Heat Incentive and other initiatives; area based/street by street measures; and the delivery timeframe and partnership arrangements.

The Cabinet Member (Sustainability and Local Infrastructure) and Cabinet Member (Neighbourhood Action, Housing, Leisure and Culture) had acknowledged the progress made so far in addressing fuel poverty in the City, agreed that officers undertake further work to appraise potential options for the effective delivery of Green Deal and ECO and agree to receive two subsequent reports; one to present more detailed recommendations in relation to the Green Deal & ECO and the second a Home Energy Conservation Act report for approval for submission to the Secretary of State.

The Committee questioned the officers on aspects of the report and discussed the following:

- Fuel Charges applied to pre-payment meters for fuel
- The availability of Public Health resources
- Private landlord responsibilities
- The promotion of energy efficiency initiatives
- Energy company cold - calling
- Working with Energy Companies and attracting them into the City
- City Council branding of energy efficiency initiatives
- Stock conditions and characteristics

The Committee requested that further information relating to the fuel charges that are applied to pre-payment meters, be circulated to Members. They also requested that officers prepare a 'checklist' of energy efficiency schemes and the criteria for eligibility and that this be made available to Members. The Committee outlined the need to promote the energy efficiency initiatives available to Members of the public, to advise them of their eligibility for the schemes and to encourage 'take-up'. Members suggested that a guide for members of the public be made available through media publications e.g. Citivision.

**RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee supported the recommendations approved by Cabinet Member (Sustainability and Local Infrastructure) and Cabinet Member (Neighbourhood Action, Housing, Leisure and Culture) and agreed that the Committee would maintain an over view of the work being undertaken to address fuel poverty in the City and that Scrutiny Boards would undertake detailed work on the issue.**

### **30. Outside Bodies Task and Finish Group**

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Outside Bodies Task and Finish Group that informed the Committee of the outcome of the work of the Group.

At its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2012, the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee agreed that a group of Members would look at the current list of outside bodies which were required to report to Committee and identify how the process could be made more meaningful. The group, comprising Councillors Bigham (Chair), Abbott, Lakha, Skipper and Taylor, was tasked with looking at the criteria for appointments to outside organisations, where reports back should be considered and whether other organisations should be included.

The Group agreed that the following criteria be applied to those outside bodies that reported to Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee:

- i) The Council funds the organisation through a grant of some sort.
- ii) The Council has a financial interest in the organisation
- iii) The organisation has a strategic role beneficial to the Council

If the outside body was of relevance to the work of the Council, but sat very clearly under the remit of a specific Scrutiny Board, the outside body report was referred to the relevant Scrutiny Board. The list, attached as an appendix to the Briefing Note, was therefore sorted into the following headings:

- i) Report to Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee
- ii) Report to a specific Scrutiny Board
- iii) No report required

The Group identified that there was no clear consistent criteria for identifying which organisations the Council appointed Members to, there were several outside bodies that were no longer functioning or had been merged with other organisations, and there were organisations that the Council had a financial interest in but had no Elected Member representation on, or reporting routes to Elected Members.

**RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee:**

- (1) Agreed the amended list of outside bodies that report to Scrutiny Boards, as set out in the appendix to the Briefing Note.**
- (2) Requested that Officers timetable the required outside bodies reports on the appropriate Scrutiny Work Programmes.**
- (3) Agreed that the list of outside bodies that report to Scrutiny is reviewed on an annual basis in accordance with the criteria specified in the Briefing Note.**
- (4) Agreed the following recommendations to Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance):**

**The Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) is recommended to:**

- (i) Ensure all outside bodies that the Council appoints to are up to date, still in existence and operational. This should be subject to a bi-annual review.**
- (ii) Identify whether there are organisations that the Council has a financial interest in but have no Elected Members representation and to identify how these organisations can best report to Elected Members.**

**31. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2012/2013**

The Committee noted the Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2012/13.

**32. Outstanding Issues**

There were no outstanding issues.

**33. Meeting Evaluation**

The Committee evaluated the meeting, commenting that it had been very informative.

Members agreed that future presentations should provide Members with a brief overview of the subject matter and concentrate on a question and answer session. Comments given by members would be used to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of future meetings.

#### **34. Any Other Public Business**

##### **Jos Parry**

The Committee noted that Jos Parry, Assistant Chief Executive, was due to retire at the end of September after 22 years with the City Council. Members expressed their thanks for her services to the Authority and wished her a long and happy retirement.

##### **Private Business**

Nil

(Meeting closed at: 11.35 p.m.)