

**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY FINANCE
REVIEW GROUP**

TUESDAY 16TH SEPTEMBER 2014 AT 6.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Titmuss (Chair), Councillors Bailey, Burnett, Franks, T. Khan, Malcolm and Skepelhorn.

LBC SUPPORT OFFICERS / ADVISORS:

Dave Kempson - Head of Finance
Matt Hussey - Democracy and Scrutiny Officer
Robin Porter - Director of Commercial & Transformation Services

LUTON LAW CENTRE:

Gillie Sharp - Practice Manager, Luton Law Centre

Action

30. MINUTES (REF: 2.1)

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7th August 2014 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

31. CHAIR'S UPDATE (REF: 5)

No matters to report.

32. LUTON LAW CENTRE – FINANCIAL UPDATE (REF: 6)

Members had before them the draft Trustee's report and financial statements for Luton Law Centre.

Gillie Sharp advised Members that the Luton Law Centre was an independent charitable company which provided specialist legal services in social welfare law, which opened in 1989. It currently employed 12 staff (7.5 f.t.e.) of whom 8 (5 f.t.e.) were qualified solicitors and caseworkers. Luton Law Centre specialised in Housing, Welfare Benefits, Debt, Immigration & Asylum and Community Care.

Luton Law Centre was a partner in the development of Luton Access, and was working with Luton Borough Council (Customer Services), Luton CAB, Luton Rights and Luton Irish Forum. Luton Access aimed to "*deliver the best customer service through fully integrated, efficient Information, Advice and Advocacy.*"

Luton Law Centre's role in this partnership was very much as the specialist provider of legal services, receiving referrals for casework from its partner agencies, and other members of the Luton Advice Network, as well as from statutory service providers. It also provided a Telephone Advice service to the public on four mornings per week.

She went on to say that financially, the Luton Law Centre had an estimated income of £349,730 per annum and an estimated expenditure of £335,932.

She added that due to the current financial climate, the Centre had put in place efficiency and economy plans as there had been changes in the scope of Legal Aid. This came into effect in April 2013 which would severely restrict the Luton Law Centres income from Legal Aid. The Centre was currently still working through the "residual" casework from the pre-2013 contracts, so the full effect of the changes would not be seen until next year. In addition, there would be an expected 20% reduction in LLAL funding over 3 years. The following measures were being taken to mitigate these factors:

- Working with Luton Access partners to co-locate and integrate services, which will reduce costs by sharing resources and eliminate duplication.
- Maximise income from our remaining legal aid contracts
- Introducing fees for immigration work to provide a new source of income
- Developing projects to attract new funding – eg a Legal Education project aimed at young people, working in partnership with TOKKO.

Gillie Sharp concluded that Luton Law Centre must ensure that it can focus the LLAL and Legal Aid resources on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people. If co-location into shared premises with CAB and Luton Rights could be achieved, it would be a major step towards the efficiencies that Luton Access was aiming for.

Resolved: That the Financial Update report of the Practice Manager of Luton Law Centre Trust (Ref: 6) be noted.

33. BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 1 2014-15 (REF: 7)

The Head of Finance submitted a report to enable the Finance Review Group to review the budget monitoring report that had been approved by the Executive at its meeting on the 26th August 2014.

Resolved: That the Report (Ref: 7) be noted.

34. FINANCE UPDATE (REF: 8)

The Head of Finance informed Members that the Financial Accounts had been submitted to the Audit and Governance Committee where relatively minor issues had

been reported.

He added that the Value Form Money study had been given a marking of 'Green' on all four measures by the external auditors. This had not had not happened in previous years and was an indication of the councils strengthened financial position compared to other local authorities.

Resolved: That the Report (Ref: 8) be noted.

35. WORK PROGRAMME AND DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS (REF: 9)

The Democracy and Scrutiny Officer presented the FRG draft work programme and dates of meetings for 2014-15 and advised the programme would be appropriately amended and updated to include future items, as and when decided by the Committee.

He advised the most up-to-date Executive Forward Plan was also presented for Members consideration and suggestions on any items they wished to scrutinise ahead of Executive decision.

Resolved: (i) That the FRG work programme and dates of meetings for 2014-15 be noted and approved;

(ii) That London Luton Airport Limited be added to the Work Programme for the October 2014 meeting.

(iii) Dates of meetings for 2014-15:

- 30th October 2014
- 20th November 2014
- 11th December 2014
- 28th January 2015
- 12th March 2015
- 28th April 2015

36. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, PART VA

Resolved: That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting as it is likely that if members of the public were present during consideration of the item Ref: 9 (excluding the appended draft strategy document), there would be disclosure to them of exempt information falling within Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended.

37. TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATES (REF: 10)

The Luton Excellence (LEx) Programme Director updated FRG on the Transformation Programme.

She went on to respond to Members' questions/ comments.

Resolved: That the Report of the Luton Excellence Programme Director on the Transformation Programme (Ref: 10) be noted.

(Note: The meeting ended at 7.00 p.m.)

Date of next meeting: 30th October 2014