

REGENERATION AND CITIZENSHIP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5th October 2006 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Mead (Chair); Councillors Bailey, R J Davis, Hinkley, Hoyle and Skepelhorn

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Rutstein

50 MINUTES (REF: 2)

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22nd June 2006 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

51 BUDGET PROSPECTS (REF: 8.1)

The Director of Scrutiny reported on the medium term financial position and advised that when the forecast for 2007/08 had been made in February 2006, a three year Local Government financial settlement allocation had been expected. It was now apparent that, as the comprehensive spending review had been delayed until June 2007, definite funding allocations for 2008/09 and 2009/10 would not be received as part of the 2007/08 settlement.

He further warned that there would be a significant impact on the revenue budget due to the scale of the capital expenditure required for the Building Schools for the Future programme. He advised that efforts would need to be made to minimise the effect of the programme on taxpayers, and this would involve meeting some of the costs from education budgets. He indicated that it was unlikely there would be any significant increase in the Government's revenue support grant to local government beyond 2% per annum.

- A further significant impact would be the financial implications connected with a future Waste Minimisation Strategy and Waste Disposal Technology. He advised waste disposal was a key issue confronting all local authorities and various options would be considered.
- The additional costs of concessionary fares scheme being extended from April 2008 would allow free national travel and had to be met from the Councils budget.

The Director of Scrutiny pointed out that the Council was required to produce a balanced budget for 2007-08 and explained that from 2008-09 the Authority faced a challenge to produce a balanced budget for that year and the two subsequent years that needed to be addressed by Members.

The Chair enquired if council tax increases would be capped.

The Director of Scrutiny replied that the assumption was that council tax increases were to be limited to 5% and that the Council would be facing constraint rather than growth.

The Director of Environment and Regeneration explained that the sheer volume of major projects being undertaken in Regeneration had put pressure on the department.

Heads of Service identified the following pressures with regards to the budget:-

The Head of Regeneration explained that the service had

- Delivered many major projects such as the Butterfield innovation and Business Base.
- Tried to secure new funding such as £14 million of GAF II and £28 million of LEGI over the summer.
- European funding was now available for the eastern region and not just key locations such as Luton. A new fund Investing in Communities had replaced SRB but this was administered across Luton and Bedfordshire. The service was pulling together different sources of funding.
- Marsh Farm cash flow would be on a monthly rather than quarterly basis for 2007/08.

A Member enquired if there were any significant growth items.

The Head of Regeneration replied that there were no significant growth items.

The Chair enquired when Luton would be informed if they had been successful with the casino bid.

The Head of Environmental and Consumer Services explained that news was expected in December 2006/January 2007. The initial assessment showed that Luton's bid was second behind Great Yarmouth. The Government had indicated that there would be 8 large casinos around the country. The Council had produced a submission and second assessment in response to specific questions on the bid proposals.

The Head of Environmental and Consumers Services further reported that:-

- Elster water meters informed the Council a year ago that they no longer required the Council's services to test their water meters. The income generated from the work was approximately £300,000 per annum. The last working date for the Council is 24th November 2006. Four members of staff from Luton Borough Council work at the factory and will transfer to Elster

under the T.U.P.E. (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employees) arrangements.

- Environmental Health Best Value Review restructuring had revealed that the service was top heavy on the management side.
- The dog warden service produced a gold star service; Members needed to decide whether the gold star service would continue or the Council gave a lesser service.
- Liquor licensing that had been delegated to the local authority licensing by Central Government, the extra work had not eased as was expected. The department had retained the two temporary staff.
- The Gambling Act will be part of local authority licensing responsibility delegated by Central Government and will commence in April 2007. It is anticipated that the extra cost would be covered by the fee income, but the statutory fee bands have yet to be published.

The Head of Street Services explained that Street Seen had recruited volunteers that acted as eyes and ears to the Council and reported environmental issues such as graffiti. No cold calling had been piloted that had resulted in a reduction of 100% in distraction burglary, burglary had gone down by 90% and cold calling had reduced by 89%.

The Head of Leisure and Community read a statement from the Director of Housing and Community Living in her absence. She set out the general issues facing the Leisure and Community service in the context of the Department's overall budget.

- The Head of Leisure and Community stated that the Department as a whole had a £2.2 million overspend in 2005/06, mostly due to Adult Social Care. Leisure and Community as a consequence of the department's overspend had to reduce its budget accordingly. Budget setting for 2006/07 had been tough.
- Substantial savings in the current and future years had been achieved by the leisure facilities being outsourced to the Active Luton Trust.
- The Museums Service was expected to make over £300k of savings in 2007/2008 by outsourcing to a trust.
- In the current year, the Library service withdrew the mobile library, many of its customers now using branch or housebound services. The housebound services were being delivered in a different way with residents receiving delivery 1 in 8 weeks instead of 1 in 4. Volunteers were being recruited and once Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks had been carried out the service should revert to 1 in 4 weeks.
- Adult Learning restructuring changes take place in January 2007.

- Community Development £1/2 Million savings identified from April. Considerable efforts had been required to restructure the service as a consequence and this should now take effect from December 2006.

The Head of Leisure and Community informed the Committee that the Department had imposed a moratorium on non-essential spending in order to improve the likelihood of budget targets being achieved.

A Member enquired how services could be provided against a low level income in the next financial year.

The Head of Leisure and Communities replied that services would work to budget and that community centres could be used without increased costs to the Council.

The Director of Scrutiny had no issues in regard to the scrutiny budget.

The Head of Local Democracy considered community safety as a growth area. Big expenditure items included the local elections. He advised Councillors to review Members' allowances even though it would involve additional expenditure.

The Head Of Corporate Policy, Performance and Cohesion could not foresee any budget pressures although there was a one off budget cost next year of the Joint Area Review and CPA Corporate Assessment that occurred in December 2007. The external auditors would need to be accommodated.

The Head of Corporate Policy, Performance and Cohesion advised that the cost of the reviewed assessment was in the region of £160,000. The annual audit of the accounts would cost £10,000.

The Head of Communications advised members that, in spite of budget difficulties, the Council still needed to communicate with residents and customers; the issue was communicating cost-effectively. The Council's newspaper Lutonline and a recently produced A-Z guide attracted revenue from advertising. Both were widely recognised as best practice and both were highly cost-effective. Usage of the Council's website continued to increase and a wide-ranging suite of fact sheets offering the additional benefit of support to frontline staff through the web were about to roll out.

The sponsorship and advertising team were meeting and beating their targets for another year, although this was getting increasingly challenging. The 24/7 press office service did not involve the authority in additional costs.

A Member commented that he found the A-Z guide very useful.

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref: 8.1) be noted.

(ii) That the recommendations made by the Officers be noted.

52 LEISURE TRUST UPDATE (REF: 8.2)

The Chief Executive of Active Luton presented to Members the achievements and progress made since the Council agreed to grant leases in respect of seven Council properties to the Leisure Trust (Active Luton).

The Head of Leisure and Communities pointed out that Active Luton had formed a partnership with Beds County Sports Partnership. They were using school facilities during the day time.

A Member remarked that the use of schools during the day time must be encouraged as people wanted local leisure provision.

Another Member enquired about investment.

The Chief Executive of Active Luton explained that the Trust was examining how to achieve extra investment for the service.

The Director of Scrutiny enquired how £170,000 of investment would be used.

The Chief Executive of Active Luton replied that the Council were informed of the proposed projects and set the priorities for Active Luton.

Resolved: That the report (Ref. 8.2) be noted.

(Note: Councillor Mead declared a personal but non-prejudicial interest in the above item as he was a Council appointed representative on Active Luton Board, he remained in the meeting for discussion of this item).

53 PROGRESS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (REF: 8.3)

The Head of Children and Families reported on the progress made on Domestic Violence by the Council and other agencies that dealt with domestic violence issues. She reported that the domestic violence co-ordinator post is now fully funded by Luton Borough Council located in the Safer Luton Partnership where it is managed.

Sue Baker the Area Co-ordinator for Domestic Violence was in attendance to answer questions from Members. She pointed out that since the original action plan was launched in October 2005 there had been more willingness for people to listen to each other.

Councillor Bailey pointed out that a whole range of work was on going with plenty of partnership working. The new structure was good and worked well with the Domestic Violence Co-ordinator. All Members of the Committee

agreed that the post of Domestic Violence Co-ordinator had been a positive enhancement for the service. The Luton Domestic Violence Forum was one of the best and was meeting all best value performance indicators except one.

The Scrutiny Officer enquired if the drop in facility would continue next year.

The Domestic Violence Co-ordinator replied that it was affected by SRB funding. Luton All Women's Centre funding was not secure beyond March 2007, it would be very sad if the centre closed. Luton Women's Aid had opened offices within central Luton and hoped to be able to offer a drop in Centre in due course.

The Scrutiny Officer asked about BVPI 205 about the development of the Sanctuary Scheme?

The Head of Children and Families replied that the Strategic Group was looking at this area. It was not thought PSA funding had been secured and the Strategic Group considered it would be beneficial to go beyond the BVPI and look in detail at the needs of Luton. The Sanctuary Scheme would be discussed at the next meeting of the Strategic Group.

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref: 8.3) be noted.

(ii) That an annual update on the progress of Domestic Violence be presented to the Committee next year.

(Note: Councillor Bailey declared a personal but non-prejudicial interest in the above item as she line-manages the Domestic Violence Co-ordinator. She remained in the meeting for discussion of this item).

54 ENCOURAGING AND SUPPORTING NEW BUSINESSES (REF: 8.4)

The Scrutiny Officer provided the Committee with a summary of evidence collected so far for the Encouraging and Supporting New Businesses topic including the results of the e-questionnaire consultation.

She asked the Committee to make conclusions and recommendations to take forward in the final report for submission to the Executive.

Members remarked that the key findings needed further clarification and more research was needed to formulate the key findings to conclusions for the Committee to deliberate. For instance business mentoring was mentioned but it was not adequately linked to the start up cycle. The aim of the review is to clarify where businesses can receive help and the type of help there is available. Members suggested once the amendments to the report had been made other agencies should be invited to attend to be involved in the conclusions and recommendations put forward to the Executive, as the

remit of the review requires a joint decision between Council and other agencies within the town.

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref. 8.4) be noted.

(ii) That the Scrutiny Officer be instructed to carry out further work to obtain more information to analysing a clear direction where there are deficiencies and bring back to a future meeting of Regeneration and Citizenship Scrutiny Committee

55 RESPECT AGENDA (REF: 8.5)

The Scrutiny Officer reported that the Committee had chosen to scope the Respect Agenda as its next topic and had invited the Head of Local Democracy the Lead Officer on this project to advise the Committee.

A discussion took place on what issues of the Respect Agenda would need to be examined as the topic encompasses a wide area of issues that goes beyond the remit of this Committee. After a long discussion the Committee decided to instruct the Scrutiny Officer to conduct a mapping exercise via a questionnaire to discover what was being achieved by voluntary agencies or Council departments to identify the gaps that need to be addressed that would be discussed at a future meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref. 8.5) be noted.

(ii) That the Scrutiny Officer in consultation with the Head of Local Democracy and Councillor Bailey formulate a questionnaire that covers all the areas within the Respect Agenda to identify the gaps and bring back to a future meeting of this Committee.

56 YOUTH LEISURE RESEARCH (REF: 8.6)

The Scrutiny Officer reported on the conclusions of the research conducted out during the summer on youth and leisure activities provided by the Council available for young people in Luton.

Members pointed out that youth and leisure activities were also provided by the voluntary sector and requested the Scrutiny Officer add this information to the report.

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref. 8.6) be noted.

(ii) That the Scrutiny Officer research further information with regards to youth and leisure activities provided by the voluntary sector and report back to a future meeting of the Committee.

57 WARDEN SCHEMES (REF: 8.7)

The Scrutiny Officer provided the Committee with a summary of the warden schemes operated by Luton Borough Council and informed the Committee of a Junior Warden Scheme that had been developed by Peterborough City Council. The scheme had started when two street wardens had worked with local primary school children that introduced their awareness to the quality of the environment. The scheme had since evolved further and led to the Junior Street Warden Scheme that operated within a partnership that involved a variety of Council teams.

Members enquired about the possibility of more joint working between different Council departments. They also remarked that there were less wardens employed than had been first thought.

Resolved: That the report (Ref. 8.7) be noted.

58 REGENERATION & CITIZENSHIPS WORK PROGRAMME (REF: 8.8)

The Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee of the details of the latest version of its work programme. It was agreed to make the following changes to the Work Programme.

- Encouraging and Supporting New Businesses – evidence report be presented to the 9th January 2007 meeting.
- Respect Agenda – Results of the mapping exercise to be presented to the 15th March 2007 meeting

The Scrutiny Officer explained a pilot scheme that is currently in operation. She said scrutiny committees can become overloaded with reports for information only. The Committee was asked to consider the items on the work programme scheduled for the next meeting and identify reports that can be circulated prior to meeting but would not be included in the final despatch of the agenda. In doing so Members have the opportunity to ask questions by contacting the report authors directly. If further information is required they could request the item be added to the next agenda.

The Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee on the impending change to the way Priority Performance Indicators are to be reported to scrutiny committees. The Director of Scrutiny reported that the usual format of this report had been changed and a new format which combined financial and performance reports with progress on major projects and developments was being trialled. He further advised that the new layout had been approved by Executive at its meeting on 11th September 2006, and a report would be submitted to the Scrutiny Board meeting on 24th October 2006 to seek the Board's views on the new format and how they will be reported to scrutiny committees.

Members of the Committee felt that Performance Indicators should be presented to Members and that Officers should be in attendance to answer

questions from Members. Not all Councillors accessed the Internet regularly which would be raised at the Scrutiny Board meeting on 24th October 2006.

The Director of Scrutiny advised the Committee that he intended to invite each of the Scrutiny Chairs (or a representative Member of each scrutiny Committee) to the Board meeting on 24th October 2006, to participate in consideration of the item and Members agreed that this was a good suggestion.

Resolved: That the report (Ref. 8.8) be noted.

(ii) The issue of the changes in reporting Performance Indicator information is to be discussed at the meeting of the Scrutiny Board on 24th October 2006.

(Note: The meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.)