

REGENERATION AND CITIZENSHIP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22nd June 2006 at 6.00 p.m.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Farooq, M. Hussain, Patterson, Shaw, Simmons, Strange,

38 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR (REF: 1)

The Democratic Services Officer sought nominations for Vice-Chair. No nominations were received.

Resolved: That no Vice-Chair be elected for this municipal year.

39 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE (REF: 2)

An apology for absence from the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor Bailey.

40 MINUTES (REF: 3.1 AND 3.2)

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20th April, 2006 and 18th May 2006 be taken as read, approved as correct records and signed by the Chair.

41 REFERENCE FROM THE EXECUTIVE – FUTURE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (REF: 7.1)

Resolved: That Agenda Item 7.1 be considered in conjunction with Agenda Item 9.1 – Called-In Decision of the Executive – Proposals for the Community Development Service.

42 REFERENCE FROM THE EXECUTIVE – REDUCTION IN COMMUNITY CENTRE PROVISION IN LUTON (REF: 7.2)

Resolved: That Agenda Item 7.2 be considered in conjunction with Agenda Item 9.1 – Called-In Decision of the Executive – Proposals for the Community Development Service.

43 CALLED-IN DECISION OF THE EXECUTIVE (5.6.06) (REF: 7.1, 7.2, 9.1 and 10.3)

The Chair advised the Committee that the Executive at its meeting held on 5th June, 2006 had considered a report of the Head of Leisure & Community in relation to the 'Proposals for the Community Development Service'.

In accordance with Standing Order 55.2 the decision of the Executive relating to that report had been 'Called-in' by two Members of the Council, Councillors Harris and Shaw.

Councillor Shaw explained that the Executive Decision had been called in as the proposals laid out in the report of the Head of Leisure & Community gave significant rise to concerns about the impact the proposals would have on the service and service users, particularly the elderly and vulnerable.

Councillor Shaw outlined the following concerns:

- The manner in which those under threat of redundancy had been treated, and the lack of notice given to long standing clubs that alternative venues for their meetings would need to be sought – in some cases only 2 weeks
- The lack of impact assessments undertaken to measure the additional burdens which would be faced by Social Services as a result of the withdrawal of Community Centre services
- Poor treatment of the public - no public consultation had been undertaken prior to the decision to cut services being taken
- No investigations had been undertaken to ensure any necessary cuts were made in the least painful way for service users

A member of the public addressed the Committee and outlined the grave concerns felt by many that any reduction in the currently excellent levels of service provided in Community Centres would lead to feelings of isolation amongst the most vulnerable members of the community. She further stressed the impact of the removal of much needed respite facilities from those caring for elderly/vulnerable family members and the need for replacement services if services are to be reduced or withdrawn.

Members of the public commented that withdrawal of the current facilities would place a heavier burden on Social Services, and that brief daily visits by Social Services could not make up for the benefits enjoyed currently by community centre service users. Community centre staff were praised for the high levels of care and understanding demonstrated to the service users, as well as their ability to deal in a professional and non-patronising manner with the wide-ranging illnesses suffered by those attending the various clubs in operation.

The public stressed to Members that in many instances the clubs attended at Community Centres were a safe haven and an invaluable support network, and for many the only opportunity available to leave home and spend time with other people. Concern was expressed that for those totally alone without family and friends, feelings of total isolation were a genuine worry.

In response to a query in respect of the cost of the running of community centres, Cllr Patterson explained that the service provided in Luton was one of the most expensive in the country. He explained that in many areas members of the community ran the centres rather than the local

authority. In some instances, the centres were staffed during the day by Community Development staff, and by responsible members of the community in the evenings who ensured the centres were opened and closed appropriately for various activities, such as guides, cubs etc, as happened at Wigmore Church.

The Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Community Development addressed the Committee. He stressed that the aim of the proposals for the future of the Community Development service was not the closure of community centres, but it had to be recognised that changes had to be made in light of budgetary constraints. He further advised that the changes being considered would ensure that community centres remained open.

Cllr M. Hussain enquired of the Portfolio Holder whether consideration had been given to the possible rise in anti-social behaviour if community centre provisions were reduced. The Portfolio Holder responded that it was unfair to assume that all young people would be out to make trouble if activity levels were reduced and suggested that more faith should be placed in the younger members of the community.

Further questions arose around liability for health and safety and insurance issues when members of the community and not community centre staff were running the centres. The Portfolio Holder responded that staff would remain responsible for activities with the centres with greater involvement on the part of the community.

Members informed the Committee that the service had been subject to a Best Value Review, and advised that countrywide there was an emphasis on community centres becoming self-governed, however, it was recognised that a central community development staff function was essential.

The Head of Leisure and Community addressed the Committee and outlined the current status with regard to the proposals for the future of Community Development. He confirmed that a central training and administrative function would be retained and that all community centres would remain open. He further advised that two proposals were currently under consideration, with the likely outcome a mixture of both. Staff and union consultations regarding the proposals had been ongoing since March 2006 and he confirmed that staff concerns and views would be taken into account when drawing up the final proposal.

A member of the public enquired further about the Best Value Review and a Member of the Committee explained that the Review had been carried out two years ago. The review had been very thorough and had included community centre visits countrywide. A view was established that to enable the management handover of community centres to the community was a time consuming process and would take between approximately three to five years to complete but as yet sufficient work had not been undertaken to move towards self-governance.

The Portfolio Holder responded that the Best Value Review undertaken had been a very good piece of work, however some aspects were flawed and this included timescales. He advised that current proposals were built around the key aspirations of the review and the establishment of Trust Status for the community centres and a central community development service. He further advised that the review had initially recommended a saving of £1million but this had been reduced to £½million. He stressed that the Executive did recognise the importance of community centres and that the new proposals would enable centres to remain open on a more cost effective basis resulting in less of a financial burden.

Those present expressed concern that more information had not been made freely available to the public, and many commented that they had only heard about the Scrutiny committee meeting by chance. The Scrutiny Officer responded that she had supplied each of the Community Centres with the dates of the Scrutiny meeting.

Members voted on the options to either implement the decision of the Executive, or to defer the implementation of the Executive's decision until full impact assessments had been carried out and the Best Value Review had been revisited to allow a proper period of time to allow community involvement in the running of community centres and to seek alternative schemes.

Resolved: That the Executive be advised that the Committee have no objection to the called-in decision being implemented.

44 COMMUNITY COHESION – PROGRESS REPORT (REF: 10.1)

The Director of Scrutiny updated the Committee on progress made with regard to Community Cohesion. He further advised that the report had been written in conjunction with the Community Cohesion Policy Officer and submitted her apologies to the meeting.

The Director of Scrutiny advised that the Council's Community Cohesion Strategy was almost ready to go out for consultation. He further advised that when the document was ready, it was planned to submit it to a meeting of the full Council to inform Members and seek their views as quickly as possible.

The Service Head for Adult Education updated the Committee on progress made with regard to adult learning and advised that additional funding sources worth £200,000 had been secured. She informed the Committee that courses were available which led to formal qualifications as well as non-qualification courses. She further advised on funding issues with the Learning and Skills Council.

The Committee was further advised that a bid had been submitted to the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) for funding for the development of a Luton Equalities Agency and a grant of £30,000 for the year had been awarded to assist with funding a part time employee and the provision of

accommodation for this employee. The Committee was informed that a constitutional model for the Agency had been developed and would be considered at the stakeholders meeting on 26th June 2006. Unfortunately, a further bid to the Home Office by the Luton Assembly in respect of the Luton Equalities Agency had proved unsuccessful.

With regard to demand for teaching English to those to whom English was not their first language, the Service Head for Adult Education advised that burgeoning demand currently outstripped supply. This was a situation being experienced nationwide and was further exacerbated by the requirement for staff to be qualified to Level 4 with a specialism in teaching non-English speaking students. Work was ongoing in conjunction with Barnfield College to re-skill and up-skill staff in local authority education to satisfy these requirements.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) that the Service Head for Adult Education be kept advised in respect of the appointment of a part time employee to look at the unmet need for ESOL in Luton.

45 MONITORING OF WARDEN SCHEMES (REF: 10.2)

The Parks Operations Manager referred to the Briefing Note submitted to the Committee on 20th April 2006 and apologised that a further more detailed report was unavailable at the meeting. He advised that he had been requested to attend the meeting at short notice in the absence of a colleague.

Members enquired as to how many different types of warden schemes were in operation and the Parks Operations Manager responded that he was only able to provide information relevant to Street Services, as this was the service area covered under his remit. Services operating warden schemes were individually responsible for their own schemes.

The Parks Operations Manager advised that currently Street Services received funding for wardens equivalent to 1.8 full time equivalent employees in the town centre, parks and promenades areas. Additional PSA (Public Service Agreement) funding provided for an additional three wardens. He warned that the PSA funding would expire at the end of April 2006 and no alternative funding source had been secured.

Members stated they wished to receive a detailed report containing information on the various warden schemes in operation, how many wardens were in place, which services area each warden type fell under, funding schemes available for warden schemes and exit strategies in place to protect resources on the expiration of funding schemes.

As no-one service area held responsibility for collating the information requested, the Scrutiny Officer offered to find and collate the required

information and prepare a report for submission to a future meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Officer be requested to prepare a report to the Committee providing detailed information on the various warden schemes in operation, how many wardens were in place, which services area each warden scheme fell under, funding available for warden schemes and exit strategies in place to protect resources on the expiration of funding schemes.

46 REDUCTION OF COMMUNITY CENTRE PROVISION IN LUTON – LEWSEY CENTRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (REF: 10.3)

Resolved: That Agenda Item 10.3 be considered in conjunction with Agenda Item 9.1 – Called-In Decision of the Executive – Proposals for the Community Development Service.

47 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GRANTS PANEL (REF: 10.4)

The Policy and Performance Manager reported on the consideration of the Grants to Voluntary Organisations Process.

He advised the Committee of the suggested recommended changes to the Grants Application process, and advised that the guidance notes for applicants and also the application form had been updated.

In response to a query regarding recommendation four, supply of accounts when applying for grants, Members stressed that it was not acceptable for applications to be granted on a self sign-off basis. It was acknowledged that for some smaller organisations, account auditing and production could be a costly exercise, and Members agreed that bank statements for these smaller organisations would suffice. Also being considered was assistance from Voluntary Action Luton, who could be requested to independently assess and verify accounts for applications.

With regard to recommendation one, it was the view of the Committee that no new applications for core funding should be approved. Corporate Grant Scheme funding should be a source of supplementary funding where possible and not the sole source of funding.

The Policy and Performance Officer requested that the Committee meeting scheduled for 8th February 2007 be set aside for appeals from organisations unsuccessful in this years round of applications. The Committee expressed concern with suggestion, as it would clearly be impossible to estimate how many appeals would be lodged. Members commented that the review process being undertaken, along with the suggested revised recommendations should filter out many cases which could possibly lead to an appeal situation. For any case that did make it to appeal,

the onus would be on the applicant to demonstrate that an error had been made during the application process. In addition to this, it must be stressed that no additional evidence or information supporting the application would be accepted.

In response to recommendation seven, that periodically invitations by the Committee be issued to a representative sample of applicants informing the Committee of the work undertaken on receipt of Grant funding, the Committee selected four applicants they would like to receive presentations from and the Scrutiny Officer scheduled the presentations into the Committee's Work Programme accordingly.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Policy and Performance Officer be requested to amend recommendation 4 in respect of all applications being accompanied by independently assessed/audit accounts.

48 RECOMMENDATION FROM DRUGS STRATEGY (REF: 10.5)

The Corporate Director, Housing and Community Living reported on Luton Borough Council's Contribution to the Luton Drug and Alcohol Partnership Strategy to date. She advised that Glynis Allen, Head of Strategic Development for the Luton Drug and Alcohol Partnership had been present at the meeting but had had to leave before the item was reached due to prior commitments.

She further advised the Committee on the progress that had been made since the last meeting of the Committee, and outlined the staff training that had taken place with 84 frontline staff on drug and alcohol awareness.

The Committee was also informed that the Head of Strategic Development for the Luton Drug and Alcohol Partnership had confirmed that she would be happy to meet with each Departmental manager to brief them on the statement of principles for dealing with drug and alcohol issues and participate in discussions on how to implement the strategy.

She further reported that the Corporate Human Resources department would commence a review of the Council's Policy and Procedure for Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Abuse in December 2006 (the earliest slot possible) and would report back to the Committee once the review was completed. Annual monitoring reports would also be provided to the Committee.

Members thanked the Corporate Director, Housing and Community Living for the report provided, and confirmed that the report addressed many of the issues outstanding from the previous meeting. Concern was expressed, however, that the Director of Housing & Community Living had not been able to identify a specific officer from within existing staffing resources to pursue the updating of current policies, corporate strategy, practice, and awareness levels within the Council as per the Executive's decision on 14th

March 2005. She recognised that this was an area of concern to the Committee but advised that no specific officer had been identified due to a lack of capacity within her department and that the situation was the same with regard to a specific officer being identified to identify the financial implications, although it was agreed that this would not necessarily fall under the remit of the Corporate Director for Housing and Community Living as the strategy was council-wide.

The Corporate Director, Housing and Community Living offered to formally report to the Executive to explain the processes being undertaken, and to further explain the lack of resource to appoint a specific officer to lead on the task. She further re-iterated the help and support offered by Glynis Allen. The excellent progress made on the strategy and the high levels of external support received was acknowledged by the Committee, but concern remained that specific instructions issued by the Executive had not been fulfilled.

Resolved: (i) That the Executive be advised that the Director of Housing & Community Living has not been able to identify a specific officer from within existing staffing resources to pursue the updating of current policies, corporate strategy, practice, and awareness levels within the Council (Executive decision EX/74(vi)/05) due to lack of capacity within her department and that the Committee is of the view that the identification of a lead officer remains an appropriate response to the Committee's report on drugs.

(ii) That the Executive be recommended to instruct a specific officer to identify the financial implications in respect of the Committee's recommendations in the drugs report and ways in which those implications may be met from within the Council's budget.

49 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (REF: 10.6)

The Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee on the details of the latest version of the work programme. Members agreed that the following items be added to the work programme:

- Presentations from recipients of grants from the Grants Panel
- A full written report on Monitoring of Warden Schemes
- Drugs Strategy update scheduled for meeting in October be replaced with progress of the Domestic Violence Recommendations.

Resolved: That the Work Programme of the Regeneration and Citizenship Scrutiny Committee be noted and amended accordingly.

(Note: The meeting ended at 8.30 p.m.)