

SOCIAL INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9th December, 2004 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Shaw (Chair); Councillors McGarvie, Timoney, and Yasin

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor R. J. Davis

82 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)

An apology for absence from the meeting was received from Councillor Skepelhorn.

83 MINUTES (REF: 2.1)

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee held on 4th November, 2004 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

84 REFERENCE FROM SCRUTINY BOARD – SCRUTINY BEST PRACTICE (REF: 7.1)

The Scrutiny Officer reported that the Scrutiny Board at its meeting held on 26th October, 2004 had considered best practice initiatives and wished to seek the Committees views on those suggestions.

The Committee agreed to adopt the following recommendations:

- Committee meetings to take place at the Town Hall unless the topic attracts a large public turn-out in which case the meeting should be held in an appropriate community venue;
- Individual members are appointed to lead Review Panels and report back to the Committee on the progress of the review.;
- Presentations and briefings are made to the Committee by Officers, which replaces lengthy reports being attached to agendas;
- Note to be included in Lutonline advertising Scrutiny Committees that members of the public could notify any issues to the scrutiny team for action, should be pursued;
- When giving evidence members of the public and external organisations are invited to give evidence first, as opposed to waiting until Officers had given evidence;
- Members are invited to ask questions and not to comment. Comments can only be made when summing up;
- Direct questions are posed to Officers at the meeting for a response to be made there and then instead of the officer having to return to a future meeting of the Committee to provide a response;

- The constitution is used to enforce compliance if an Officer refuses to attend or to provide the report that they have been requested to provide;
- The Director of Scrutiny be requested to prepare questions by the Committee and prepare questions on a standing basis for the scrutiny budget process;
- Stage 3 Reports include only key findings and all evidence is attached in appendices;
- Press Officer should be requested to attend Scrutiny meetings when final reports only were being presented;
- Where the final report was being reported to the Executive and the Executive chose not to take on board all or any of the recommendations then the relevant Portfolio Holder should be required to attend the Scrutiny Committee to explain the Executive's reasons for that decision.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

85 REGIONAL ASSEMBLY PLANNING PANEL – MAJOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS (REF: 8.1)

Councillor R.J. Davis updated the Committee on major housing developments and the work of the Regional Assembly Planning Panel. He explained that the regional planning guidance had gone to the Minister and will go onto Public Inquiry in due course. Luton, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linsland were expected to achieve 26,300 new homes by 2021. A local development document was to be drawn up between South Bedfordshire, North Hertfordshire and Luton.

The Chair enquired whether a study had been undertaken to identify all available sites that could be built on within South Bedfordshire and Luton.

The Head of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) replied by explaining that the Investment Plan within the Bedfordshire Sub-regional Housing Strategy had identified a number of sites for new housing. These were a combination of sites where planning permission had been obtained and a number of speculative sites where planning permission had not been obtained or even sought in some cases.

The Chair enquired about the timescales involved in submitting a joint planning application by the Borough Council and South Bedfordshire District Council for the development of social housing with South Bedfordshire of which Luton would receive joint nomination rights.

The Head of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) explained that discussions had only just commenced and that it would be at least 18 months before both Authorities would be in a position to proceed with such a planning application.

The Committee felt that 18 months was too long and recommended that the Executive be asked to endorse a proposal to submit a joint planning application within 6 months from Luton Borough Council and South Bedfordshire District Council for a development in South Bedfordshire from which Luton Borough Council would receive 50% of the nominations.

The tenants representatives requested that the Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee consider recommending that Officers work towards a joint TARA with South Bedfordshire District Council and that a representative from the Joint TARA be nominated as a member of the [conurbation] Committee.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Executive be recommended to instruct officers to submit a joint planning application within 6 months from Luton Borough Council and South Bedfordshire District Council for a development in South Bedfordshire and from which Luton Borough Council would receive 50% of the nominations.

86 MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP TRUST (REF: 8.2)

The Partnership Trust Project Director and Head of Community Care jointly updated the Committee on the work undertaken to set-up the Mental Health Partnership Trust. A three month consultation period with staff, key stakeholders and union representatives had just concluded which resulted in overwhelming support for a Partnership Trust.

The launch for the Partnership Trust had been planned for April 2005. The 3rd draft of the Section 31 Agreement was to be approved by the Board at their December 2004 meeting.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Executive be advised that the Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee support the recommendations subject to the views of the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee.

(iii) That the Partnership Trust Project Director be thanked for her update to the Committee.

87 ANTI-POVERTY WORK CARRIED OUT BY THE SOCIAL INCLUSION TEAM (REF: 8.3)

The Policy and Projects Manager Social Inclusion reported on the work undertaken by the two social inclusion policy/project officers on anti-poverty.

She explained that there was significant poverty and disadvantage amongst Luton residents and that Biscot and Dallow wards were in the 10% most

deprived wards in England according to the Government's Indices of Deprivation 2003.

The Council employs two specialist money advisors based at the Citizens Advice Bureau who provide money advice to local residents, helping with debt problems and assessing entitlement to benefit. A new initiative was due to be piloted to deliver the Council's new Corporate Debt Policy. Outreach Money Advice provision was to be linked to tenants to consolidate the debt into one single payment, which the Council would then apportion appropriately.

Members expressed concern that the forms and leaflets in the housing offices were out of date, particularly the medical form.

The Head of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) responded by saying the he would ensure the latest information was available for the housing offices.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Scrutiny Officer be requested to invite Housing Benefits as the next standing item for the February 2005 meeting.

88 FUNDING FOR SOCIAL HOUSING (REF: 8.4)

The Head of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) reported on proposed changes to the funding of new social housing. He explained that the Regional Housing Board were due to consider a paper on funding options which would be circulated to authorities for consultation early in the New Year. He suggested that he report further to the January 2005 meeting when the draft proposals had been received.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Director of Scrutiny be requested to invite the Housing Minister through the MP's for Luton South/North, South Bedfordshire District Council and the 3 tenants representatives to meet the Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee.

(iii) That the Head of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) be requested to report back to the Committee in January 2005 on the consultation paper about draft proposals for new funding arrangements.

89 SOCIAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN NEIGHBOURING AREAS – PROJECT PLAN (REF: 8.5)

The Director of Scrutiny presented to the Committee the draft Project Plan for the Social Housing Development in Neighbouring Areas.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Chair, Scrutiny Officer and Head of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector) meet to agree the dates suggested in the Project Plan.

(Note: The meeting concluded at 8.10 p.m.)