



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SCRUTINY
COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 13 MARCH 2014 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cutkelvin (Chair)
Councillor Gugnani (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Bhatti

Councillor Corral

Councillor Grant

Also present:

Councillor Russell: Assistant City Mayor, Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Sood: Assistant City Mayor, Community Involvement , Partnership
and Equalities

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101. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Cutkelvin declared for the avoidance of doubt that in respect of item 8, Transforming Neighbourhood Services Programme – South Area, she had had contacts with various groups, and in particular groups that used the Linwood Centre and she had submitted a letter of representation (which had been included in the report). Councillor Cutkelvin added that she had been advised that she did not need to vacate the chair for this particular item of business.

107. TRANSFORMING NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PROGRAMME - SOUTH AREA

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that provided an update on the Transforming Neighbourhood Services (TNS) programme and the engagement and consultation that had been carried out in the south area of the city.

Councillor Russell, the Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services presented the report and the Chair invited Karen Pickering and Maria Cook to address the commission and give their views on the proposed closure of the Linwood Centre.

Karen Pickering explained her background and her involvement in the area and in particular with the Linwood Centre and made the following points:

- Local people felt that they had not been adequately consulted concerning the change of use at the Linwood Centre.
- There were only two options on the consultation document; it did not give people an opportunity to choose an option that they wanted.
- People in the community had concerns about travelling to the Pork Pie Library; they felt it was not safe for them to access the building because of the traffic. Traffic calming would not change people's perceptions.
- The library was also on the top of a hill and difficult for people with COPD or disabilities to access.
- Members of the community felt that the Linwood Centre could be retained for community use by adapting the building to have the access control system.

Maria Cook then addressed the commission and explained that she had run the community café at the Linwood Centre for the past 8 years; the café was popular and yesterday she had had 36 customers. All the profit made by the café went to community groups. Ms Cook questioned whether there would be room for the café in the Pork Pie Library.

Assistant City Mayor Russell and the Director for Neighbourhood Services responded to the comments and queries raised and explained that there had been many opportunities for members of the community to give their views and people had been listened to. Attempts had been made to find solutions, however, for example, providing access control for part of the Linwood Centre would be problematic. The toilets were in a different part of the building and it would be difficult to ensure security. Shared use of the space would be

unrealistic and not viable for workshop tenants. There would also be cost implications which would impact on the savings that needed to be made on the overall running costs, particularly staffing costs.

In respect of the Pork Pie Library, the commission heard that in terms of the current level of usage, there was sufficient space there to accommodate all groups from the Linwood Centre that would need space there. In respect of the concerns over road safety, following changes in traffic management, there had been significant reductions in the number of pedestrian accidents; however it was agreed that there was still a perception over road safety issues.

The Chair commented that whilst she fully understood the reasons for the review, she felt that there were options that could be considered for the Linwood Centre. She suggested that other services could be brought into the building, for example, the Housing Office could be relocated there.

In respect of the community café, a possible option was suggested that the café could be run from elsewhere, e.g. the Kingfisher Centre and as a social enterprise like other community cafes. However, the Chair commented that the café in the Linwood Centre was an asset and very popular. Some people came to the café and stayed all day. The Linwood Centre was the only large centre in the area. The Chair asked for Assistant City Mayor Russell and the City Mayor to re-visit the centre before the next Executive Briefing.

The Vice Chair commented that the report stated that the Pork Pie Library was not viable as a commercial building and he questioned whether this had been tested. It was explained that this had been explored, but it was a listed building which restricted this option.

Assistant City Mayor Russell responded that she was unsure as to whether the visit would be possible prior to Executive Briefing, however she assured the commission that they would work with the user groups to minimise the effects of the change. She added that she understood the concerns relating to the Pork Pie Library but the usage generally at the Linwood Centre was not high and while the café was popular, the numbers using the café other than groups / tenants based in the building were also generally low. There was a need to maximise use to make best use of the council's resources.

Comments were raised from members that the consultation leaflet was limited, with only two options offered and they asked for this to be addressed before the next phase of the programme was rolled out. Assistant City Mayor Russell responded that such feedback was helpful; the programme would be rolled out into the west area of the city next and the comments raised in respect of the consultation would be taken on board.

The chair stated that the commission welcomed the community led approach to the programme and thanked officers for the details in the report appendices.

RESOLVED:

- 1) that the commission support the proposals but ask that the Executive consider the following:
- 2) that the commission stress that care should be taken against raising expectations and in respect of this consultation, the possible closure of the Linwood Centre should have been clear from the outset;
- 3) that the commission stress the need to be sensitive to tensions between different community groups;
- 4) that artefacts in any buildings due to be closed, should be treated with sensitivity and the views of the users of the centres in respect of those artefacts should be sought.
- 5) that the commission request that the City Mayor and the Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services re-visit the Linwood Centre before Executive Briefing (scheduled for the following week), and if that is not possible, the Executive Briefing be postponed until the visit has taken place; and
- 6) that the consultation document be revisited before the next phase of the Transforming Neighbourhood Services Programme is rolled out.