



Minutes of the Meeting of the FINANCE, RESOURCES AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 19 DECEMBER 2002 at 5.30pm

<u>PRESENT:</u>

<u>Councillor Blackmore - Chair</u> <u>Councillor Mrs. Middleton - Conservative Spokesperson</u> <u>Councillor Connelly - Labour Spokesperson</u>

Councillor Coley Councillor Gajjar Councillor Soulsby

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE :

Councillor Patel – Cabinet Lead Member for Finance and Resources

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62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were requested to declare any interests that they may have in the business to be discussed and/or indicate that Section 106 of the Local Government Act 1992 applied to them.

No declarations were made.

71. REVITALISING NEIGHBOURHOODS: UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Assistant Chief Executive submitted a report informing the Committee of principal developments in the Revitalising Neighbourhoods project since the first quarterly progress report (considered by the Organisations Working Party on 13 November). The Committee also considered a letter from Councillor Patel to Councillor Blackmore of 29 November 2002 addressing the questions previously put by the Committee. Councillor Patel was also present to answer questions from the Committee.

Concern was expressed by the Committee regarding the potential costs of new customer service centres in each of the ten areas, and how these could be budgeted for in the future. Councillor Patel informed the Committee that judgements about individual service centres would be taken in the future, and the amount spent would depend on the resources available at that time. It was agreed that it would be difficult to replicate the centre in New Parks across the other nine forum areas, but that alternative ways of providing such facilities would be investigated. New centres and access points would be integrated with other services and provisions, and each centre would be tailored to meet the

specific needs of the area which it served.

Questions were also asked about the role that Councillors would play in the forums, and if they would have voting rights as the Committee believed that initial guidance was unclear. The Committee also expressed their concern that as yet, there was no guidance about how members of the forums would be chosen. It was felt that this needed careful consideration and that an ill informed choice could seriously undermine the credibility of the forums.

Concern was also expressed about the amount of money that would be devolved and managed by the forums, and in particular about the amount of money that could be devolved in the future (giving rise to risks). It was also pointed out that, for a major project, the initial sum of £50,000 was small and may not be enough to make a major impact. Councillor Patel stated that any devolved budgets would be subject to the usual finance procedure rules and mechanisms were in place to ensure that risks were managed. It was also noted that at this stage it was not possible to give an accurate figure on the amount of money that may be devolved, this would depend on what each area wanted and what was practical.

Questions were also asked about the suitability of the areas which made up each of the 'neighbourhoods' as the Committee felt that some of these did not reflect the views of people living in the areas. It was also suggested that the number of people sitting on each forum would not be enough to give a real sense of community involvement, with approximately only 1/1000 residents participating. Councillor Patel stated that discussions were currently taking place about how people would be selected to serve on the forums, and stressed that the project was a major system change in the way that the Council took decisions. It was acknowledged that the project did have risks attached but that Cabinet had taken every step to ensure that these risks were minimised and managed.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee express its concern to Cabinet regarding the level of funding for Revitalising Neighbourhoods,
- (2) That the Committee express to Cabinet its concern at the lack of significant capital provision for the development of the project.
- (3) That the Committee express to Cabinet its concern that no method of choosing forum members has been agreed, and
- (4) That the Committee express to Cabinet its concern that the proposed neighbourhood areas are insufficiently related to local communities.