



Leicester
City Council

MINUTES EXTRACT

Minutes of the Meeting of the
STRATEGIC PLANNING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Held: TUESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2002 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Hunt - Chair
Councillor Soulsby - Labour Spokesperson
Councillor Mugglestone - Conservative Spokesperson

Councillor Henry

Councillor Thomas

Councillor Hunter

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42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

There were no declarations made.

49. DRAFT REVENUE STRATEGY FOR ENVIRONMENT, REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The Corporate Director of Environment, Regeneration and Development and the Chief Finance Officer submitted a joint report outlining the draft revenue strategy for the Environment, Regeneration and Development Department. The Committee were requested to comment on matters relating to their portfolio.

The Committee also received further information relating to the expenditure of support services in the Department and details about difficulties with recruitment in the planning service.

Members made the following comments on the budget:-

There was concern over the loss of contribution to the Leicester Regeneration Agency. Officers stated they would be given assistance to bid for external funding to replace the City Council's contribution.

The Committee expressed concern regarding the cut in funding of £58,000 to

the Northfields Employment Development Initiative. Members felt this may be seen as punishing the organisation for their success. It was queried whether the funding would continue until the organisation was able to obtain other sources of funding or whether the funding would stop despite there being no new sources and possibly leaving the organisation unable to continue. Members felt this was an important point of principle and it was felt that funding should continue until new sources were approved. Officers commented that it would be possible to know the outcome of funding bids for SRB and European Regional Development Fund Objective 2 money before the 1 April 2003 when the funding was proposed to stop. Officers also stated that if funding was reinstated for this organisation then a cut would need to be made elsewhere.

Members of the Committee were opposed to the proposed cut to the Training Fund. It was felt this would remove the opportunity to bid for match funding to enable voluntary organisations to undertake training, despite the City Council assisting with bids for other funding to replace this money. It was also felt this was contrary to what the Council was trying to achieve in terms of developing community capacity and equipping community organisations to have the appropriate skills to run their organisations. Members of the Committee requested to see further details including comments from Voluntary Action Leicester before any decision was taken on this matter.

Members of the Committee also considered a detailed breakdown of the costs associated with support services within the Department. A number of queries were raised about the analysis and further details with regard to the expenditure on the following matters was requested:- I.T. both Departmental and Central, Best Value / Performance Management, Finance, Office Services, the Directorate Team, Highways & Transportation Division, the carry forward account, legal services and car parking. It was agreed that the Triumvirate be supplied with this additional information after which it would be decided whether there was a need for an additional meeting to consider the extra information.

Recruitment and Retention in the Planning Service

Members then considered further information requested by the Committee regarding recruitment and retention in the planning service and in particular a comparison of the salary levels in Leicester City Council compared with Nottingham and Derby who it was felt were the main 'competitors' for Council staff.

Further to the information supplied, Officers commented that to raise the salary levels for Team Leaders and Senior Planners to that which would be broadly comparable with Nottingham and Derby, would cost about £45,000.

Officers also informed the Committee that the Government had announced extra funding for planning services to start from next year. It was anticipated if this money did arise then there would be even further difficulties in recruitment as there would be even greater demand for staff in all local authorities. The Committee felt it important that Government monies made available through

this new Planning Delivery Grant should be used to enhance the planning service.

Members of the Committee were concerned that staff were leaving the Council to go to other authorities for what were considered to be minimal increases in salary. The Committee also noted problems associated with staff leaving such as the damage and disruption to service provision as the Council was only able to recruit less experienced staff who required more training. The Committee asked for more information to be gathered in relation to the actual costs of recruitment.

Having considered the issues surrounding recruitment and retention in the planning service, the Committee resolved to write to the Cabinet Lead Member for Strategic Planning and Regeneration asking him to undertake an investigation on recruitment and retention. This should deal with the immediate problems identified in the report including re-grading of posts in the Planning Service to ensure a competitive position in the local labour market. It should also look at other courses of action in the longer term to ensure that the city council was not disadvantaged in this particular jobs market. The Committee also requested that the appropriate measures be included within the Environment, Regeneration and Development Department budget to enable this to happen.

RESOLVED:

- (1) that the Cabinet be requested to consider the Committee's comments with regard to the draft revenue strategy for the Environment, Regeneration and Development Department;
- (2) that the Committee be given further details, such as the views of Voluntary Action Leicester, with regard to the cut to the Training Fund before any decision be taken;
- (3) that the Triumvirate be provided with a detailed breakdown of costs associated with certain support services as detailed above;
- (4) that the Cabinet Lead Member for Strategic Planning and Regeneration be requested to undertake an investigation in to recruitment and retention in the Planning Service with a view to considering re-grading of posts and any other courses of action to ensure a competitive position in the local labour market and that staff were not lost to local authorities that were considered to be in the 'travel to work' area;
- (5) that the Cabinet Lead Member for Strategic Planning and Regeneration also be requested to ensure that the appropriate measures be included within the Environment, Regeneration and Development Department budget to enable this to happen.

