



Leicester
City Council

MINUTES EXTRACT

Minutes of the Meeting of the SOCIAL SERVICES AND PERSONAL HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Held: MONDAY, 27 JANUARY 2003 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Gajjar - Chair
Councillor Coles - Liberal Democrat Spokesperson
Councillor O'Brien - Conservative Spokesperson

Councillor Blackmore Councillor Connelly
Councillor Nurse

CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Mr J. Scruton – Voluntary Sector

* * * * *

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Getliffe – Cabinet Lead Member for Social Services and Personal Health

* * * * *

46. 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 Act applied to them. No such declarations were made.

52. DRAFT DEPARTMENTAL REVENUE STRATEGY 2003/04 - 2005/06

The Corporate Director of Social Care and Health and the Chief Finance Officer submitted a report that sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the Draft Revenue Strategy for the Social Care and Health Department.

The Corporate Director reported that the departmental budget faced fundamental difficulties. He took the Committee through a number of national and local issues that had contributed to the current budget difficulties. He outlined the budget position for 2003/04 and then provided a break down of possible areas where savings in the region of £4 million would have to be made, if no additional assistance was available. This figure assumed redirection of grants of around an additional £2.5 million, assuming conditions

allowed it.

He stated that based on present financial assumptions, there was three possible ways in which the budget deficit could be bridged;

- i) Raising the threshold for entitlement of services. -
- ii) Raising charges - Making charges for services that were more closely related to the cost of services. This was a policy that was already adopted by other council's. The reasoning behind it being that those that had the ability to pay *should* pay. In addition, this would involve substantial increases in charges for meals, transport, laundry and home care. This could be offset by major anticipated changes in Income Support and Disability benefit.
- iii) Increasing waiting lists.
- iv) Other Efficiency or Service Reviews: he stated that the Department would have to look at duplication and quantity of service within the voluntary sector, and whether any efficiency savings could be made. Whilst there were not any proposals to cut homecare funding, a rethink of the whole service was being considered as well as any scope for making efficiency savings.

The Chair invited Janet McKenna of Unison to address the Committee. She stated that she appreciated that many unpopular and difficult decisions lay ahead. It was clear that long-term solutions could not be found from within the Department and that further reductions could not be made. Cutbacks would have an impact on both staff and service users alike.

Managing recruitment would lead to further pressures on existing staff, which would have a knock-on effect on sickness levels and retention. There already existed among staff a fear that budget difficulties and staff shortages could have fatal consequences.

She recognised the constant pressure that the Government placed on Social Services Departments to provide for a wider community. Social Services was expected to support an expansion of its services as well as its service users with no additional support. Unison felt strongly that an external solution had to be sought, before the situation became irretrievable.

The Chair agreed that action needed to be taken, as the impact on staff morale was unacceptable. The Committee thanked Unison for their contribution.

Members raised a number of detailed queries about the implications of proposals in relation to charging, home care and mobile meals, transport and eligibility for service.

The Committee felt strongly that a long-term solution was required, and not a short term fix.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Scrutiny Committee urge that the Cabinet address the long-term shortfall in Social Services funding and not resort once again to short-term solutions,
- 2) that a deputation of 3 Party spokespersons from the Scrutiny Committee seek a specific and dedicated meeting with the Cabinet Lead for Social Services, the Cabinet Lead for Finance & Resources and the Leader, to discuss the Committee's views and concerns, asking that their points be taken forward.

* * * * *