



Leicester  
City Council

## MINUTE EXTRACT

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

Held: THURSDAY, 15 JANUARY 2004 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Farmer - Chair  
Councillor Thomas - Labour Spokesperson  
Councillor O'Brien - Conservative Spokesperson

Councillor Fitch  
Councillor Saleh

Councillor Kitterick  
Councillor Wann  
(for Cllr. Waddington)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Hunt – Cabinet Link Member for Environment, Regeneration and  
Development

\* \* \* \* \*

### 80. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Thomas declared an interest in Report A 'Draft Revenue Strategy for the Environment, Regeneration and Development Department' in that he had been lobbied by Hitslink.

The Chair commented that it was not necessary for the Committee to report who they had been lobbied by for this meeting.

### 84. DEPARTMENTAL REVENUE STRATEGY - CULTURE AND REGENERATION DEPARTMENT

The Corporate Director of Regeneration and Culture and the Chief Finance Officer submitted a joint report presenting a draft revenue strategy for Environment, Regeneration and Development for 2004/2005.

The Corporate Director of Regeneration and Culture outlined for the Committee the current budgetary position which determined the proposals contained within

the report. Also outlined for the Committee were the proposed budget reductions in the areas which related to the Committee.

With the permission of the Chair, Gary Garner from UNISON addressed the Committee. He urged Councillors from the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Groups to give consideration to what they were voting for when faced with a vote on budget proposals. He felt these proposals were not in line with the Liberal Democrat manifesto. He also expressed concerns about the services that were provided to the 'outer estates' of the city, particularly with regard to proposed closures of playgrounds, advice services and community centres. He felt that the Liberal Democrat manifesto promised open discussions but felt that existing rules prevented this from happening with regard to staff. He felt the proposals for the budget shouldn't have been Officer proposals but should have been Councillor proposals. He was concerned in particular at the proposed losses to services in the Highfields area. He also informed the Committee of a joint trade union meeting that was taking place on Friday 16 January. A further point was raised about the level of reserves; it was felt that elected members should give justification for putting £1.4 million back in to reserves.

The Service Director, Resources commented that it was a recommendation of the District Auditor that reserves should be at a level of £5 million.

The Committee then discussed the budget proposals. With regard to the proposed reductions in resources for advice services it was queried whether the budget proposals were on the basis of political priorities or on the basis of the organisations not performing their role to a sufficient standard. It was also queried whether there was an excess of advice services in Leicester at the current time. The Head of Advice Services commented that the budget proposals were made with a view to balance the budget and were arrived at following a dialogue between Officers and Members. Further to this he said that an audit by the Legal Services Commission had concluded that there was not currently enough advice services provision in Leicester. Members of the Committee then asked that before the Cabinet take a decision on this matter that they be provided with information on the long term consequences of these reductions and the implications of the loss of match funding when taking any decision to reduce advice services funding.

Members of the Committee then commented on the level of reserves. It was noted that certain members of the Committee had been County Councillors when they had a level of reserves of £2.25 million. It was also commented that if a disaster happened it would be covered by departmental budgets or the Government would step in. On this basis it was felt that the level of reserves should be left as they are. The Corporate Director of Regeneration and Culture said as this was a corporate matter she would report the Committee's views to the Cabinet.

Members of the Committee commented further that they felt the budget process had not contained sufficient consultation with voluntary organisations which were facing cuts. It was considered that voluntary organisations helped

the most vulnerable members of society and the volunteers that staff these bodies were saving the Council money as they did not receive wages. It was also commented that it was not sufficient for Officers to say they would assist organisations to access other funding as it was noted that an organisation which had previously had a funding cut was now due to be closed.

Members of the Committee also discussed the proposals with regard to the funding for twinning organisations. Concerns were expressed about the proposed cut for funding of the Masaya Link group and the way it was felt they were being treated differently from the other organisations that the Council funded for twinning activities. It was also commented that there was no justification for the cut to the Masaya Link group on the basis that it was a different type of twinning arrangement. It was felt that Masaya provided an interesting and useful link to the wider world beyond Europe and that there were far more opportunities for external funding for European twinning organisations. Concerns were also expressed that the Link group didn't have an opportunity to make their case to retain funding. Members of the Committee also stressed that they weren't requesting that additional funding be provided for twinning activities but that there be a reallocation of funds within that proposed to be available.

At this point the Committee then considered two motions which were moved, and seconded as follows:-

*i) that this Committee opposes the budget strategy with regard to its proposals, in particular those relating to cuts to advice services and to regeneration employment projects, Cabinet is asked to reconsider these priorities.*

The Committee voted on this motion and 4 voted in FAVOUR (Councillors Wann, Kitterick, Saleh and Thomas) and 3 voted AGAINST (Councillors Farmer, O'Brien, and Fitch), therefore the motion was carried.

*ii) that a joint Strategic Planning and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and Overseas Links Working Party forum be held to reconsider the funding for twinning and Leicester Masaya Link be invited to the meeting.*

The Committee voted on this motion which was carried unanimously.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) that this Committee opposes the budget strategy with regard to its proposals, in particular those relating to cuts to advice services and to regeneration employment projects, Cabinet is asked to reconsider these priorities.
- (2) that a joint Strategic Planning and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and Overseas Links Working Party forum be held to reconsider the funding for twinning and Leicester Masaya Link be invited to the meeting.

