



Leicester
City Council

MINUTE
EXTRACT

(vi)

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the
HIGHFIELDS AREA FORUM

Held: Monday 26 January 2004 at 7.00pm
at the Highfields Library, Melbourne Road, Leicester

PRESENT:

Priya Thamotheram – In the Chair

Hanif Aqbany	- St Peters Tenants Association
Faruk Bhoayat	- Resident, St Peters Estate
Dr. S. I. Chowdhury	- Bangladesh Youth and Cultural Shomiti
Amarjit Dhaliwal	- Shama Womens Centre
Ruth Frank	- Hitslink Advice Centre
Chino Gabon	- Leicester Racial Equality Council
Pam Galton	- Sparkenhoe Community Tutor
Paul Henderson	- Highfields Community Association
Donna Jackman	- Sure Start, Highfields
Insp. Rich Keenan	- Asfordby Street Police Station
Clare King	- St Peter's Community Centre
Cllr. Patrick Kitterick	- Councillor, Castle ward
Val Lea	- Highfields Library
Johnathan Lewis	- Resident
Iris Lightfoote	- Leicester Racial Equality Council
Dhrutee Mistry	- Hitslink Advice Centre
Yasmin Nathani	- Highfields Advice Workers Forum
Jo Penman	- Moat Community College
Anita O'Reily	- Medway Community Primary School
Philip Parkinson	- Eastern Leicester Primary Care Trust
Gulam Hussein Patel	- SWS
Vida Pearson	- Wesley Hall Community Centre
Naim Razak	- Eastern Leicester Primary Care Trust
Roy Roberts	- Chief Executives Office, Leicester City Council
Cllr. Mussa Saleh	- Councillor, Spinney Hills Ward
Rory Samuel	- African Caribbean Citizens Forum
Kevin Sherriff	- Highfields Adventure Playground
Cllr. Hussein Suleman	- Councillor, Stoneygate Ward & Cabinet Member
Satpal Virdee	- Wesley Hall Community Centre
Tony Walters	- Highfields Association of Residents and Tenants
Paul Winstone	- Chief Executives Office, Leicester City Council
Woody Wood	- Highfields Association of Residents and Tenants

6. CITY COUNCIL BUDGET PROPOSALS

Priya Thamotheram left the Chair for this item as he was a Council Officer and under the Political Conventions of the Council's Constitution he was unable to pass comment on the budget unless through the proper channels.

Claire King took the Chair for this item.

The Chair welcomed Cllr. Suleman to the meeting. Cllr. Suleman explained he was limited to the extent to which he was able to comment on the current budget proposals as he was currently undertaking a number of discussions with a variety of community groups.

Woody Wood read out a statement from Councillor Rob Renold who was unable to attend the meeting. Councillor Renold stated that he felt there were particular reasons why the Council was facing budget difficulties. He also commented that he did not support a number of the proposals and would not vote in support of the budget in its current form.

In his statement Councillor Renold stated that there was a great deal of wasted Council spending. Members of the Forum suggested this needed serious investigation.

He also suggested that Council Officers did not have enough information about the work that voluntary groups undertook. Certain Members of the Forum commented that voluntary groups which received Council funding were required to produce a great deal of information about the work they did including details of outputs and their accounts.

Councillor Kitterick commented that in his view the proposals that had been released for consultation were politically based and that the proposals were worked up through discussions with the Cabinet. He also commented that proposals to cut the local voluntary organisations would not have been accepted by the political leadership in previous years. He also felt it was insulting when Officers described Highfields as not being a poor area. He welcomed Cllr. Renold's commitment to vote against the cuts and he undertook to work with politicians of all parties to reverse the cuts. He then referred to the Leicester Mercury article which showed that Highfields was facing the biggest funding reduction to voluntary groups out of the whole city.

Members of the Forum then queried whether the necessary assessments of the impact of the proposed cuts had taken place or were proposed to take place. Cllr Suleman said that impact assessment reports had been requested where cuts were being made to specific organisations. The Forum commented that there should be an assessment of the cuts to all the groups as a whole. It was also noted there were specific requirements under the Race Relations Act which required Local Authorities to undertake impact assessments when make decisions regarding reductions in services.

Concerns were also raised about the consultation on the budget, it was felt there hadn't been sufficient consultation and that it hadn't been undertaken at an early enough stage as there had not been enough time for projects to make arrangements if their budgets were cut. It was felt that Officers should have been defending these budgets and protecting the voluntary groups and projects from cuts.

Further concerns were expressed with regard to the Education and Lifelong Learning Department. It was felt the Officers who lead the Department and the Cabinet Link Member for the Department had ignored the wishes of the Scrutiny Committee to consider the Lifelong Learning review in greater detail. Members also felt that their concerns had not been fully addressed at a previous meeting of the Forum. It was also noted that the cuts proposed were a small total from the whole of the Education budget and that a small amount of money was creating a large amount of bad will.

Members of the Forum also expressed fears about the effects on community cohesion following any budget cuts to projects. It was noted that Highfields had received visitors from a Government task force because of the relatively harmonious community relations. It was thought that the proposed budget cuts could become divisive and exacerbate existing community tensions. Serious concerns were also expressed about the inevitable closure of projects which had built up their services over many years and the sizable increase in social and other hidden service costs (eg. Police, criminal justice, vandalism, anti social behaviour etc) that were likely to be incurred.

The Forum also wished to make it clear that they did not wish to see any restoration of funding to Highfields projects to be at the expense of projects elsewhere in the city. There were also concerns about the compounding of this situation by the failure of the Leicester Partnership to support Highfields through the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme.

RESOLVED:

- (1) that the Forum feels that Senior Officers of the Council have not taken the concerns of the Highfields community seriously enough and recommends that elected Members of the Council take more control over their actions to avoid future conflict;
- (2) that the Forum expresses its disappointment in the lack of a proper consultation process over the proposed budget reductions;
- (3) that there hadn't been sufficient consideration given to the impact the cuts would have on the community in terms of the legislative requirements under the Race Relations Act and potentially exacerbating existing community tensions; and

- (4) that the Forum expresses its disappointment at the fact that the Highfields area is receiving a disproportionate level of cuts to projects;
- (5) that these views, including the rejection of these budget proposals be communicated to the Leader of the Council and to all Ward Members.