



Leicester
City Council

**MINUTE
EXTRACT**

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

Held: MONDAY, 14 JUNE 2004 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Bhatti - Chair

Councillor Draycott
Councillor Fitch (for Cllr. Karim)
Councillor Willmott
Councillor Hunt (for Cllr. Garrity)
Councillor Renold

* * * * *

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

There were no declarations.

6. NEEDS OF THE SOMALI COMMUNITY

The Policy Officer to the Committee submitted a report in response to a resolution of the Committee at its meeting on 18 February. A presentation was then given by Jawaahir Daahir of Somali Development Services and Hashim Duale of the Eastern Leicester Primary Care Trust (speaking in a personal capacity). Mr Faisal Haji also address the Committee and Paul Winstone from the Chief Executive's Office responded to some of the points made.

Ms. Daahir outlined a number of the needs of the Somali Community. The subject areas covered were Housing, Employment, Benefit Advice, Community Development and Business Development. The problems faced by the Somali Community in these areas were outlined and suggestions were made for a way forward to improve these matters.

Mr. Duale then spoke to the Committee and he outlined further areas of community development need in the Somali Community which were Education, Health, Youth Services, Crime and Disorder and Asylum Seekers & Refugees.

Details of both these presentations were circulated and a record was kept with agenda file.

Then Mr Haji spoke to the Committee, he informed the Committee that he had responded to the issues raised in the report in writing, which he had circulated to the Committee. Mr Haji felt that the Somali Community had not been treated well by the City Council and he felt as an organisation it was not responsive to the community's needs. He stated that the Community didn't want special favours but only wanted what they were due. He commented further that there were particular problems faced with young people as there was a high level of exclusions and bans from the city centre. He said that there was now a chance to change the situation and to provide for the Somali children to have good lives. He stated that he felt that there needed to be action and that he would continue to campaign as long as it took to get the action.

Paul Winstone from the Chief Executive's Office then outlined a number of ways in which the Council had sought to assist the Somali Community. He informed the Committee that there had been a problem with fragmentation and duplication of requests for support received by the Council from a number of different organisations claiming to represent the Somali Community. The Council has been attempting to develop an appropriate response. He stated that there was now a possibility of moving forward on these issues.

On Housing Mr. Winstone commented that the housing department had a coherent strategy in place which was seeking to provide more four and five bedroom houses in the city. He also said he had been in contact with the St Matthews Housing Office and they were looking at enhancing the effectiveness of CCTV coverage of the estate to be better able to identify those carrying out anti social behaviour. The Council was also working with the police and community leaders from the Muslim and African Caribbean Communities to address community.

With regard to the provision of space for community activities Mr. Winstone commented that there was a lack of space within the Highfields area. He commented that Cllr. Suleman was working hard to provide space and facilities in the Highfields area for all communities. He commented that the Highfields Youth and Community Centre was nearly finished and it was hoped it would become a centre for sporting excellence and the opening ceremony would be a 'get to know your neighbour' event. He stated that the Council was aware of women's needs and was looking to develop a women's centre in the area.

Mr. Winstone acknowledged that there were not as many youth employment initiatives as he would have hoped, although he felt the number of businesses was encouraging and he hoped that further developments would occur in providing Muslim friendly economic services.

Mr. Winstone noted that there was a need for all communities to unite as part of a community cohesion strategy to enable the city to work together.

Members of the Committee then made comments on what they had heard. It was felt there was a need for the Council to do all it could within reason to address the issues raised in the presentations. It was acknowledged that there were areas such as health and employment where the Council's role was

limited. It was also acknowledged that that some of the issues such as the lack of General Practitioners were issues for all communities. It was suggested that all departments have input in to a strategy which addressed the needs of the Somali community.

Members of the Committee also commented that there wasn't currently a great deal of money being spent on the Somali Community and it was felt there should be more. It was also felt that Mr. Haji should have received some form of response following the meeting which he attended with the Leader on 12 March 2004. Paul Winstone commented that letters had been sent in response to this meeting but there were still issues which were being explored. Further to this it was thought that the issues raised as part of the presentations should be brought to the attention of the Cabinet and a meeting held where these issues could be discussed in detail between the Cabinet and representatives from the Somali Community.

Members of the Committee also suggested that some form of officer task force be set up to address the needs of the Somali Community. Paul Winstone commented that there was an existing Somali Working Party which was currently in abeyance.

Members of the Committee enquired about the community's reticence about competitively bidding for funding from different sources. Mr. Haji explained that he felt his community had been advised to share services such as ESOL lessons with other communities but he felt that the Somali Community required targeted assistance initially because their needs were specific. The particular lack of information, translation services and a community centre was affecting all other issues. In response Members of the Committee suggested that on this basis there should be no reason why the Somali Community couldn't bid for money from sources such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

Members of the Committee then discussed the number of the Somali people in the city. It was the view of some members on the basis of figures for children in schools in the report and figures from the Department for Work and Pensions that the numbers of Somali people in Leicester were far lower than the figures in the report were suggesting. Hashim Duale felt that there were large numbers of members of the Somali Community whose details weren't registered with many statutory agencies therefore they didn't show up on official figures. It was also the case that many people arrived in the country after the last census was carried out. Jawaahir Daahir also commented that there was no system of registration for children under school age.

RESOLVED:

that the following issues be co-ordinated in to a report and submitted to Cabinet:-

- (1) to instruct Officers to create or revive a working party / taskforce which looks at the needs of the Somali Community and has representation from all Council Departments and relevant agencies;

- (2) to instruct this working party/taskforce to produce proposals to address the issues raised in the report and the presentations;
- (3) that a report be produced by the working party/taskforce which considers the long term needs of the Somali Community;
- (4) to instruct Officers to enable the Somali Community to have a full opportunity to access the Community Cohesion Fund;
- (5) that Cllr. Suleman, as Cabinet Lead for Community Cohesion and the Chief Executive, or the entire Cabinet if necessary, be requested to meet with representatives of the Somali Community to explain how the Community Cohesion fund will work and to discuss in detail any issues which the Somali Community have raised;
- (6) that the Leader be requested to make a formal response to the meeting held on 12 March 2004 with Mr. Haji outlining what action has been taken following that; and
- (7) that progress on these matters be reported to the next meeting this Committee.