

Beaumont Leys Community Meeting

Your Community, Your Voice

Record of Meeting and Actions

6:30 pm, Wednesday, 12 January 2011

Held at: Christ The King Church, Beaumont Way (next to shopping centre)

Who was there:

Councillor Vi Dempster

Councillor Keith Lloyd-Harris

Councillor Paul Westley

INFORMATION SHARING – ‘INFORMATION FAIR’ SESSION

The following information stands were sited in the room. Members of the public visited the stands and were given an opportunity to meet Councillors, Council staff and service representatives.

Ward Councillors and General Information	Police Issues
Housing and Housing Repairs	Community & Healthy Living Centres
City Warden	Beaumont Leys Library
Home Choice	Benefits Advice
Youth Services	Local Improvement Network

At the conclusion of this informal session members of the public were invited to take their seats and take part in the formal session of the meeting.

26. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor Vi Dempster was chair for the meeting.

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

No declarations were made.

29. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the previous Beaumont Leys Community Meeting held on 1 September 2010 be agreed as a correct record.

30. CITY COUNCIL BUDGET

Jerry Connolly, Member Support Officer gave the meeting an overview presentation on matters relating to the current Council budget process.

- Details were given about government cuts which had meant there was a need for Council budget cuts on a large scale.
- Jerry outlined what the cuts would mean for the city, such as the cancellation of city centre regeneration projects.
- It was noted that the Council received its funding. This was mostly from Government grants; also he explained how its expenditure was divided up for different services.
- Details were provided of the measures which were being undertaken by the Council, such as looking at which areas to cut and the impact that would be faced.
- In summary, Jerry noted that the Council had no choice but to make cuts, which would have a major impact on services across the city, but were seeking to protect the most vulnerable people.

Following the presentation Councillor Dempster made a number of points

- Due to the number of lower rateable value houses in the city, the city received a comparably lower amount of its funding from Council tax, compared to other areas, such as Leicestershire.
- Details of funding from the government had been received late and information has been incomplete.
- A large amount of preparation and actions had already been undertaken in anticipation of these cuts.
- The main focus was making reductions on back office functions and reviewing the numbers of support staff – whilst protecting frontline services.
- Also being considered was the merger of services where there was overlap and using buildings for more than one service, such as happened at Barleycroft School.

Councillor Westley also made the following points, mainly with regard to housing:-

- The government were now clawing back large amounts of rental income, as 'negative subsidy'.
- The government were also requiring Councils to increase rents at an average of 6.8%, but the City Council keeping this level to 5.9% and a commitment to maintaining the decent homes standard, which the government had removed.
- Details were currently being considered with regard to the Government's planned five year tenancies.
- He noted that a number of other rules were being changed, such as the age increase from 25 to 35, for new single tenants, being able to claim housing benefit levels for a flat, rather than a room in shared house.
- As Cabinet Lead, he had taken a decision to the expenditure of some local capital funding at Community Meetings.
- As a result of the changes to housing rules, it was felt that homelessness would rise in the city.

Residents asked questions / made comments about the following matters:-

The government wanted people to take more responsibility for their areas, but would grants still be available to support initiatives?

In housing, it was noted that Supporting People and Supporting Tenants and Residents funding had been stopped, but the city Council was considering whether such support could be continued.

The Council used to receive large amounts of funding from the government in the form of grants for specific tasks. These had recently been joined up together and significantly reduced overall.

More details were requested about the change to single person tenancies.

The new rules meant that the age had been extended, from 25 to 35. This was for any new single person tenancy to be able to claim housing benefit for a flat, rather than a room in a shared property. Existing tenancies would not be affected

A resident felt that there were inefficiencies at the Council relating to the mixed ownership of land / buildings between different parts of the Council. It meant that the responsibility for maintenance and cleaning was often confused and it was difficult to get work done.

City Warden Manager, Barbara Whitcombe commented that she and her staff also felt that this was a problem, noting that different parts of the Council had separate budgets for cleaning, which was a problem.

Councillor Dempster commented that this issue of re-charging was being looked at as it caused Councillors confusion as well. It was however a very complicated issue to tackle.

A resident raised the issue of a hedge around the Bennion Pools area which needed cutting back for security reasons. He said that the Parks services said that it was Highways who were responsible for the hedge. Highways however said that they could not afford to cut the hedge back, but wouldn't let a private contractor undertake the work on behalf of the friends of Bennion Pools.

It was requested that the Member Support Officer look into this matter.

With regard to five year tenancies for Council properties – what would happen at the end of the tenancy?

It was thought that the tenants would be assessed for their suitability to remain in the property, if for example children had left the home, it was likely that they would be required to move. Also if they could afford to buy a house, they would probably be expected to do so. The details of these arrangements had not yet been made clear though.

Action	Officer Identified	Deadline
The issue with regard to the hedge being cut back at Bennion Pools be looked into.	Jerry Connolly	March 2011

31. UPDATE FROM THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Kevan Liles, Chief Executive of Voluntary Action LeicesterShire (VAL) gave the meeting a brief presentation on the view of the voluntary sector with regard to the forthcoming budget cuts.

- VAL supported 1000 voluntary groups in the city from small to very large.
- The Big Society – this was felt to be a branding exercise and that real voluntary activity was firmly already in place, and it would continue regardless of any particular government initiative.

- It was generally felt that the Big Society was a means for making budget deficit reductions, by getting public sector roles undertaken for free, such as job clubs for the unemployed.
- There were no resources to support the public having a greater say in decisions (ie planning permission), no planned structure to it.
- As a community activist, Kevan felt that people would always help other people in need of a service. As an organisation VAL would always seek to help organisations and communities make a difference, particularly in this era of cuts.
- 20% cuts to funding couldn't be made through efficiencies, but 80% funding still remained and political choices needed to be made about how that money was spent.
- It was felt that there needed to be a fundamental rethink about how services were structured – the voluntary sector could help to make a smaller amount of money go further by running services cheaper and reflect what the community wanted better.

Questions / comments were raised as follows:

A resident noted that he was a member of the Friends of Castle Park, he queried whether this organisation could run the park?

Councillor Dempster responded to this question. She pointed out that it was an attractive idea to have groups run parks. There were however a number of complicated practical issues. There was an issue of timing where cuts would need to be made to free up resources to pay for the new arrangements because it would take time and effort to put new arrangements in place. The alternative would be to 'twin track' to allow new and existing arrangements to run alongside each other for a time, but this would cost additional money. There was also a concern about how fixed the arrangements could be if the park was run by volunteers or a community group; for example, people may move away from the area. It wasn't impossible that services could be run by community groups, but there were difficulties with it.

Councillor Dempster also responded to the point regarding the voluntary sector being able to run services cheaper. Again, she pointed to the requirement to 'twin track' whilst arrangements changed. Also, where a small grant is given to a ward based organisation, if that is multiplied by 22, for each ward in the city, the amount soon builds up.

It was commented that enthusiasm in community groups was often there at the beginning of a project, but often groups would get smaller as people lost interest or moved away.

Kevan commented that there were risks with this model, but there were also risks associated with the public and private sector running services. The example was given of failed hospitals.

The issue of the Bennion Pools hedge was raised again. It was felt that this was something which the community should be able to do for themselves, but were told that they couldn't use external contractors.

Councillors agreed that there were issues with regard to Council bureaucracy, but there was no way of overcoming problems relating to legal and insurance matters. It was also noted that the rules around Council procurement were impossible to work around, these were often set down by the European Union. It was suggested that if a bid was put in for funding from the Community Meeting Budget, then it may be possible to use outside contractors.

It was queried whether Community Meeting budgets were being cut.

Councillors gave assurances that they were not.

32. UR CHOICE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROJECT

Kim Thorrington, Detached Youth Worker introduced three young people who came to the meeting to inform about their roles and the work carried out by the UR Choice Young People's Project.

Simon – Board Member

- The project was an independent project run entirely by young volunteers which started in April last year.
- Being a board member was about being involved in a group in the local area.
- The group was able to make changes and improvements in the local area.
- He felt that being involved was good experience for his future career prospects.

Sophie - Chair of the project board

- The aim of the project was to work with young people to develop projects to meet their needs and raise achievements for 13-19 year olds.
- Up to 25 year olds were supported where they had particular needs.
- Young people would lead the projects and they oversaw drop-in sessions each week.
- A football group had been set up.
- Sophie felt that the project was relevant because this was a key time for young people who were going through a difficult transition.

Tasha - worker on the project.

- Since the project started 168 young people had been contacted.
- Projects and sessions had taken place to inform young people how to stay safe whether that was in relation to sexual matters or drink /drugs. There had also been sessions on leadership.
- Consultations had taken place with young people to seek their views on the things that mattered to them. Arising from this it was planned to do some work on issues related to gangs and violence, but also relating to identity in a multicultural society.
- It was hoped that a café could be set up, which would involve disabled young people.
- Generally it was hoped that the project would play an active part in the community.

Councillor Dempster commented that this was a great project. She noted that a similar project called Street Vibe had been operating in Braunstone. When the statutory service was reduced, the project was contracted to undertake more work. It was hoped that this model could be extended to projects like UR Choice. Projects like this were better able to be flexible and adapt quicker to local issues. She hoped that the project would continue its good work.

33. POLICE UPDATE

Sergeant Rich Jackson gave the meeting an update on Police activities and successes.

There had been three key areas of focus for the Police in recent months.

- Joint operations with the Fire Service at the Beaumont Leys Shopping Centre.
- Astil Lodge Road area – problems with young people buying eggs and flour; this would be tackled over the next two weeks.
- Butterwick Drive – an ongoing drug problem. There had been evictions and convictions in relation to this as well as the confiscation of the proceeds of drug dealing.

Residents requested that efforts be made to publicise the convictions of drug dealers to send out a message of no tolerance of this kind of behaviour. It was noted that the Leicester Mercury did look at the Police website where this information was published.

Cllr. Westley reiterated the Council’s willingness to evict tenants where there were drug problems. Sergeant Jackson said that this was welcome in support of the actions they undertook.

The issue of dog fouling was raised. It was felt that there should be publicity about fines which were given out for this. Barbara Whitcombe commented that details of court cases relating to this were provided to the Leicester Mercury, but they rarely reported on it.

It was requested that both of these issues be considered for inclusion in the One Neighbour Magazine.

A resident also raised concerns about the Black Pad which had particular problems with dog mess left in bags lying about. There were also problems with vandalism and poor lighting. It was requested that the Member Support Officer investigate the possibility of getting bins installed on the Black Pad.

Action	Officer Identified	Deadline
Consider issues around drug convictions and dog fouling for inclusion in the One Neighbour magazine.	Carlym Sandringham	March / April 2011

Explore the possibility of providing a bin for dog mess on the Black Pad.	Jerry Connolly	March 2011
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34. BUDGET

Councillors were requested to consider the following budget applications:-

Application 1 – Barleycroft Youth Centre Young People Group

This was an application for £400 for the production of a Christmas play.

RESOLVED:

that as the event did not go ahead, it would not be formally considered for approval.

Application 2 – UR Choice Young People’s Project

This was an application for £6,600, to set up a youth and community café at Home Farm Neighbourhood Centre.

The Member Support Officer reported that further work would be undertaken with this project to explore other ways of finding funding for this project as it was a substantial amount. It was also felt that it needed to be explored whether this was the correct venue for this project.

RESOLVED:

that the application be deferred for further discussions about other funding opportunities and venues.

Application 3 – Mrs Denis Richardson – Coffee Morning

This was an application for £80.40 to start up a coffee morning for the Beaumont Leys community, with the money being used to cover the venue hire at Barleycroft Healthy Living Centre for three weeks.

Councillor Dempster commented that it was often difficult to get events like this started up and that it should be investigated whether a rent free period could be provided.

RESOLVED:

that further work take place to explore whether a rent free period could be provided at the Healthy Living Centre.

Late Application

It was noted that a late application had been received from Beaumont Lodge Neighbourhood Association for £2,500 for some award ceremonies and some first

aid training. This application was not considered as there was not enough funds left in the budget to support it.

Fast Tracked Applications

The following applications were included on the agenda for formally noting as they had been agreed by Councillors in between meetings under the fast track process.

Application 4 – Barleycroft Evergreen Club

This application was for £925 for a theatre trip, coach travel and a Christmas lunch.

This project was supported at £500.

Application 5 – Unity Boxing Club

This application was for £400 to cover the cost of boxing gloves.

This project was supported at £300.

Application 6 – Barleycroft Primary School

This application was for £450 to support a special community event, linking up with the Barleycroft Healthy Living Centre and the Barleycroft Youth Centre.

This project was supported at £450.

Application 7 – Income Management Team, Leicester City Council

This application was for £300 to support the 'Stay Warm, Stay Solvent' event at the Beaumont Leys Neighbourhood Centre which provided residents with a range of advice on money matters, benefits and other support.

This project was supported at £300.

35. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would be Wednesday 2nd March 2011.

