



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SCRUTINY  
COMMISSION

Held: WEDNESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2013 at 5.30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cutkelvin (Chair)  
Councillor Gugnani (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Bhatti                      Councillor Cleaver  
Councillor Corral                      Councillor Desai  
Councillor Grant

Also present:

Councillor Russell – Assistant City Mayor (Neighbourhood Services)

\* \* \* \* \*

**64. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Naylor.

**At the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 4 December 2013, an amendment to this minute item was agreed as follows:**

*Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor for Community Involvement, Partnerships and Equalities.*

**65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Gugnani declared that in respect of agenda item 10: Supporting the

Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) – Consultation Proposals, he was Secretary of the Leicester Council of Faiths and he would leave the meeting for the consideration of this item of business.

**66. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 17 October 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

**67. PETITIONS**

In accordance with Council procedures, it was reported that no petitions had been received by the Monitoring Officer.

**68. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE**

In accordance with Council procedures, it was reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received by the Monitoring Officer.

**69. UPDATE REPORT: TRANSFORMING NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PROGRAMME**

Councillor Russell, Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services, presented a report that provided an update on the Transforming Neighbourhood Services (TNS) programme and the engagement work that was being carried out in the south area of the city.

A member queried whether ward councillors had been consulted on the proposals and Assistant City Mayor Russell responded that the ward councillors had been sent information prior to the distribution of the consultation leaflets and she confirmed that there would be opportunities for councillors to comment. She explained that it was not possible to state what would happen regarding the future of specific buildings as options were still be considered and no decision had been made.

The Chair expressed concerns that information relating to the TNS programme on the south side of the city had been sent to councillors electronically, because emails could be missed or accidentally deleted. A request was made for there to be briefing sessions for ward councillors in the future when the TNS programme was planned for their area.

Concerns were expressed at some of the consultation methods and the Director of Neighbourhood Services explained that officers had taken advice on how to carry out the consultation; however it had been research intensive and difficult to obtain responses. A suggestion was made to consult with focus groups in the future.

The Assistant City Mayor was questioned as to what would happen with any of the buildings if they became empty and she responded that any buildings which became empty would be subject to the community asset transfer process. It was suggested that some of the buildings could be used for business start-up programmes which would generate income.

RESOLVED:

that the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission request that briefing sessions be held for ward councillors in future when the Transforming Neighbourhood Services Programme is rolled out into their area.

## **70. COMMUNITY CENTRES: USE OF SHARED SPACE**

Councillor Russell, Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services presented a report that provided information regarding the proposal to offer rent free open access space in identified community centres as part of the new charging scheme. As an example, the commission heard that a user group at the African Caribbean Centre, had started to meet in the centre's cafe area and as this was shared space, they no longer incurred any rental charges.

The aim of the proposed approach was to make community centres more accessible to local communities and to be able to enhance what was offered. If a particular building was no longer in use, officers would try to help those user groups find an alternative option.

**At the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 4 December 2013 an amendment to this minute item was agreed as follows:**

*Commission members raised the issue of promoting the option to users, in particular to existing users of the centres. This would allow for groups that were currently paying to have the option of using a shared space for free if it was suitable for them. Officers stated that they would explore options of how to promote the rent free shared spaces.*

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

## **71. NEW OPTIONAL GARDEN WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE**

Councillor Russell, Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services and the Director of Environmental Services submitted a report that outlined a proposal for a garden waste service. The commission heard that this proposal had arisen from requests from members of the public for a garden waste collection service.

In response to a query from a member of the commission, the Assistant City Mayor explained that a press release relating to the proposal had been issued when the scrutiny agenda had been published; however no decision had yet

been made.

A query was raised as to whether people would be fined for putting their garden waste in to the regular waste bins and Assistant City Mayor Russell responded that although they would prefer people not to add garden waste to the regular bins (because it made it harder to recycle what was already there) there were no plans to issue fines. In addition, gardening clubs and members of the public would continue to be encouraged to compost garden refuse wherever possible.

A question was asked as to whether there would be discount concessions for older people, or people with disabilities and Assistant Mayor Russell responded that whilst the authority offered assisted collections there were no plans at the moment to offer the scheme at a discounted rate.

Assistant City Mayor Russell explained that 5000 garden waste refuse bins had been purchased a year ago at no cost to the council; more could be purchased if required. Concerns were expressed that it could prove expensive if only one person on a street participated in the garden waste collection service. The Director of Environmental Services explained that the collections would take place on Mondays between March and October, when there were no regular refuse collections, and Biffa had factored-in for participants being dispersed over the city. Participants of the scheme would have one collection per fortnight.

Members of the commission indicated their support for the scheme and commented that any measures taken to prevent more waste being sent to landfill would be a positive step forward.

RESOLVED:

that the report and recommendations be endorsed.

## **72. WARD COMMUNITY MEETINGS (WCMS) IMPROVEMENT PROJECT: PHASE 2 PROGRESS**

The commission considered a report which outlined progress on the Ward Community Meeting Improvement Project (Phase 2).

The Chair referred to the attendance figures for community meetings and queried why some wards had better attendance than others. She noted that on some wards attendance had increased whilst on others, the numbers had decreased. The Project Portfolio Manager explained that some of the attendance figures did not correlate to the figures that the officers on the pilot scheme had recorded and she suggested that they could meet with the Chair outside of the meeting to discuss these further.

Officers stated that the ward community meetings were not necessarily the most productive way of dealing with issues and as alternatives, they had attended forums and patch walks. Officers were also currently working in the community, building up their local networks and intelligence. They added that the whole idea of the pilot scheme was that the same model did not work in all

the wards. In respect of the community meeting budget, they had streamlined the funding process and funding applications could now be dealt very much quicker.

The Project Portfolio Manager added that they were currently working on a number of issues such as developing the Communications Matrix, updating the Councillor Guide and also looking at how there could be better engagement with young people. A further report would be brought back to scrutiny in January 2014.

The Chair thanked the Project Portfolio Manager for the report and requested that in any future reports, there should also be input from the Head of Community Services given the transition on ward meetings to that division. The Chair expressed concerns that the report focussed primarily on vision, but there was no evidence to add substance behind the vision, and previously in the agenda meeting, she had requested amendments to include details of achievements during the 18 months of the pilot scheme. The Chair commented that patch walks were costly and time consuming and could also create significant amounts of case work for the ward councillors. She had hoped that the report would contain more evidence to show whether or not the pilot scheme had been successful and expressed concerns that the report lacked information and detail. The Chair added that community meetings were very important to the councillors, and she expressed concerns that the pilot was moving away from its original direction. She requested that the pilot scheme be re-focussed and stressed the need for clear communication with the ward councillors.

Members mentioned that there had not been any dialogue with them on the objectives mentioned for each ward in the report. There was a request that there needed to be more engagement and dialogue about the progress of the project.

Members stated that residents had requested a range of different speakers at community meeting (for subjects such as dementia for example) to make the meetings more interesting, rather than the standard police, city warden and housing items.

The Project Portfolio Manager acknowledged some of the concerns and explained that in some wards, only one cycle of meetings under the new pilot scheme had taken place so there had been insufficient time to gather evidence. They had also hoped to have implemented some of the initiatives quicker (the involvement of young people, for example) but this had not happened. In some wards, the councillors had wanted the community engagement officers to work in different ways; some of the patch walks that they wanted were smaller than the Eyres Monsell model and did not necessitate the presence of as many officers. The Project Portfolio Manager offered to talk to the Chair outside of the meeting to share evidence and discuss this further.

The Chair summarised the points raised by members as follows:

- There were concerns that the pilot scheme had lost its overall focus.
- A clear evaluation of the scheme was needed.
- It was important to share good practice.
- Clear details of the transitional arrangements were needed; such as who would administer the meetings and what resources would be available.
- Members would like to see more exploration as to why some meetings were better attended than others.
- There needed to be more involvement of all councillors during the transitional phase.
- Scrutiny needed to see proposals before a final Executive decision was made.
- Members acknowledged that there were good ideas and good communications taking place, but would like to see more evidence in the report.

The Project Portfolio Manager confirmed that a report would be coming back to the commission in January 2014 which would address those issues. The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance stated that information would be sent out this month to all councillors to update them on the direction of travel of the project.

RESOLVED:

that the comments of the commission be noted and that a further report be brought to scrutiny in January 2014 to incorporate the information requested.

### **73. SUPPORTING THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS) - CONSULTATION PROPOSALS**

**Councillor Gugnani, having declared a potential disclosable pecuniary interest, withdrew from the meeting and did not return.**

The Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance presented a report that set out the background and provided an overview of the consultation proposals for the future support model for the voluntary and community sector (VCS).

Members considered the report and the Chair commented that information had been requested on the funding position of the VCS groups, which would help the commission understand the impact of any funding cuts. The Director explained that some of the information requested was not publicly available and she was waiting for legal advice as to what information could be released.

Concerns were expressed in relation to the funding cuts to the voluntary sector. Members commented that the VCS groups provided value for money and they also questioned as to whether those groups who had their funding withdrawn, would be able to continue. The Director commented that the authority was conscious that the organisations affected would face difficulties; however they needed to ensure that the money the authority spent made the maximum

impact.

The Director explained that managing the time line for the consultation would be critical as the contracts ended on 30 June 2014 and the new arrangements would come into force on 1 July 2014.

The Chair advised that if required, a Task Group could be arranged to look into the consultation proposals further.

RESOLVED:

that the report and the comments of Members be noted.

#### **74. WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the scrutiny commission work programme. It was noted that an update on the Citizens' Advice Bureau would be due in March 2014 and the Chair commented that although Members' training on this was previously offered; the notice had been placed in the Members' Bulletin and 'lost' amongst all the other information. A request was made for this training to be offered again to Members prior to the scrutiny commission's meeting in March 2014.

RESOLVED:

that the commission note the work programme and request that further training on the Citizens' Advice Bureau be made available to Members, prior to the commission's meeting in March 2014.

#### **75. CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 7.42 pm.