



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: TUESDAY, 7 JANUARY 2014 at 5.30 pm

P R E S E N T :

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

Councillor Bhatti Councillor Desai
Councillor Cleaver Councillor Naylor
Councillor Corral

Also present:

Councillor Russell – Assistant City Mayor (Neighbourhood Services)

Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor (Community Involvement, Partnerships
and Equalities)

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76. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Grant who was in another meeting.

77. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

78. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Members were asked to agree the minutes of the previous meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission

held on 4 December 2013.

An amendment to minute item 64:Apologies for Absence was requested to record that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor for Community Involvement, Partnerships and Equalities.

An amendment to minute item 70: Community Centres: Use of Share Space was requested to record the following:

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 minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 4 December, subject to the above amendments be agreed as a correct record.

79. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Minute item 69: Update Report – Transforming Neighbourhood Services Programme.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services confirmed that there would be briefing sessions for ward councillors when the Transforming Neighbourhood Services Programme was rolled out into their area, although these had not yet been programmed in.

Minute item 72: Ward Community Meetings (WCM) Improvement Project: phase 2 progress.

Following the offer made by the Project Portfolio Manager to meet with the Chair to go over some of the Ward Community Meeting attendance figures and some potential inaccuracies, the Chair agreed that amended figures could be presented at the meeting.

Minute item 74 – Work Programme

In relation to a request that further training on the Citizens' Advice Bureau be made available to ward councillors, the Scrutiny Officer to the commission confirmed that this request had been actioned.

80. PETITIONS

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

81. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

82. "PASS IT ON" RE-USE TRIAL

The Director of Environmental services submitted a report that provided feedback on the first nine weeks of operation on a pilot scheme to re-use household waste.

Councillor Russell, Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services explained that the early results were very encouraging. The pilot scheme aimed to meet the essential needs of clients applying for Community Support Grants (CSG) from Revenue and Benefits for furniture, white goods and household items. Savings had been made, and more importantly, people were able to obtain items over and above that which the CSG could provide for.

Members were advised that the scheme currently linked to the CSG, however there was a concern as to what would happen when the government terminated the CSG next year. It was hoped to find ways of making the scheme sustainable, by working with partners in local charities. The commission were told that other processes to enhance the scheme were being explored.

Members of the commission praised the scheme and expressed hope that ways would be found to continue to deliver the scheme to benefit people in need. A request was also made that staff working in the community, such as in Sure Start Centres, should be made aware of the scheme so that they could inform members of the public as appropriate.

The Chair requested that a further report on the 'Pass it On' scheme be brought back to the commission in four months' time.

RESOLVED:

that a further report on the 'Pass it On' Re-use scheme be brought back to the commission in four months' time.

83. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE UPDATE

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that provided an update on the Community Governance arrangements. The Director and the Head of Community Services presented the report and explained that one of the aims was to encourage more local people to get involved in volunteering and community management.

The meeting heard that the Community Services staffing review had been completed and as part of the new arrangements there would be five Neighbourhood Development Managers; three of whom were present and introduced to the meeting. There would also be 11 Community Engagement

Officers (CEOs) who would support their Neighbourhood Development Managers in a defined geographical area. As part of the new arrangements there would also be a Commercial Development Officer whose role would be to enhance the opportunities for the promotion and marketing of services; this was in response to previous criticisms relating to the lack of marketing. The various officers would work together to improve the way that community services were delivered in the area.

Councillor Russell, the Assistant City Mayor for Neighbourhood Services explained that the response to the new initiatives had been overwhelmingly positive. Members of the community had more accessible premises and there were benefits to the user groups and the council as a whole.

A query was raised in that the report stated that there were no significant financial implications; the meeting was advised that the organisational review had resulted in financial savings; however the report provided an update and it was not a report on the original organisational review.

Several Members of the commission praised the new community governance arrangements stating that they allowed volunteers and the community to make a positive impact.

A concern was raised that some areas of Leicester would need more officer support time than others and it was queried as to whether this could be managed. The Assistant City Mayor acknowledged that it was important not to be too prescriptive as all the areas were different and some groups would need more support than others.

The Chair questioned whether sufficient time had been programmed in for the new Neighbourhood Development Managers to become acquainted with their patch. The Head of Community Services responded that the Managers would need to know their areas and would be working with the CEOs, staff in local centres and also partners.

The commission heard that there was no 'end date' to the initiative. There would be new groups coming forward, but instead of having to draw up new plans and constitutions themselves, they would receive the support and help they needed to access external funding. It was acknowledged that there would need to be an ongoing process for working with the local communities.

The Chair extended a welcome to the new Neighbourhood Development Managers who were already in post. She added that the key to the initiative was partnership arrangements and questioned whether it would be possible to follow up the partnership agreements again. Members agreed that the views on the experiences of people who had made a partnership agreement should be sought.

RESOLVED:

- 1) that the report be noted; and

- 2) that members of the commission will visit groups that have entered into partnership agreements to see how they are progressing.

84. WARD COMMUNITY MEETING IMPROVEMENT PROJECT UPDATE

The Ward Community Meeting Improvement Project: Initial Evaluation Results

The Director for Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submitted a report that highlighted the findings and evaluations from the first 15 months of the Ward Community Meeting Improvement Project.

The Project Portfolio Manager stated that the pilot project was due to close at the end of January 2014. A further report would be brought back to the commission in March with a more complete evaluation and a clearer objective for the future arrangements for ward community meetings.

The Chair welcomed the honesty of the report given previous reports had some inaccuracies. The Chair expressed some concerns that the purpose of the pilot appeared to have changed although this had not been communicated to ward councillors. The Chair requested clarity of the transitional arrangements and better communications with all councillors (not just the councillors involved in the community meeting pilots). The Chair stated she had met with officers outside of the meeting to clarify these issues to ensure future reports gave a clearer picture. The Chair noted that the Director of Delivery, Communications and Political Governance had stated in the previous meeting, that a letter would be sent to councillors before Christmas to inform them of the transitional arrangements and the future of ward meetings, but the report indicated that this was planned for January. The Project Portfolio Manager explained that this communication had been delayed to ensure clarity of information however she could confirm that this would be sent out in January.

The Project Portfolio Manager advised that pilot councillors would be invited to a meeting to give their feedback of the pilot as part of the final evaluation. This meeting would then be transcribed and checked by councillors to form their feedback. The Chair welcomed this initiative but stated that written evaluations and hard evidence from councillors were needed as well as previously there had been inaccuracies in the information provided which may have got lost in translation. Members questioned whether any feedback given would actually change anything. The Chair expressed concerns that the Members who had taken part in the scheme may have had their expectations raised as to potential outcomes at the end of the pilot, and asked that expectations are managed during the feedback sessions. The Chair requested that officers bring the raw anonymised feedback from councillors to the meeting in February.

Updated attendance figures from the pilot community meetings were circulated to all present for Members' consideration. A query was raised as to whether officers compiling the figures differentiated between partners/officers who were present and members of the public. The Project Portfolio Manager explained

that although the meeting evaluation forms requested this information, it was not always provided. Members heard that the pilot had demonstrated that in respect of community meetings, 'one size did not fit all' and it was all about providing the best option for the area.

Members discussed the publicity for community meetings and comments were made that more effective means of communication were needed. It was felt that the current methods were not working and there was a concern that many of the leaflets that went through people's letterboxes were thrown away unread. Members felt the pilot had missed an opportunity to explore social media and other communication methods. The Assistant City Mayor for Community Involvement, Partnerships and Equalities stated that in her ward, which was not in the pilot, leaflets were delivered and information sent electronically and there was always a good attendance at community meetings. The Chair made reference to her own experience as being part of the pilot scheme and noted the inconsistent approach to the use of e-mail during the pilot. The Chair commented that new ways of communication were needed and while there was a need to be cautious, new ways might be found through social media, such as Facebook.

Members asked that the Community Engagement Officers be tasked to promote the community meetings and also suggested that the meetings could be publicised through schools, churches and community centres, at their fetes, coffee mornings, working men's clubs, social gatherings or fundraising events. It was further suggested that information and literature about community meetings could be distributed to local groups.

The Chair asked if a timeline for the transitional arrangements had been agreed yet. Officers stated that discussions were still ongoing and there needed to be some dialogue with the Executive Members first but information would be shared with councillors soon.

The Chair concluded the discussion and stated that as there was a change in responsibilities for delivering the community meetings, the councillors would need to talk to the Community Engagement Officers to identify what they wanted to try out in their ward. The Chair requested that:

- There be clarity of the transitional arrangements
- There be effective communications with all councillors about the future of community meetings and the expected transition
- The WCM Improvement Project is re-branded to WCM transitional arrangements
- Best practice examples are gathered in order to give councillors a glossary of options to consider
- Written evaluations and hard evidence on councillors' feedback on the pilot scheme experience be produced with raw data shared in the February meeting

RESOLVED:

that the comments of the commission be noted and that the raw

data feedback be brought to scrutiny in February 2014.

Ward Community Meeting Improvement Project: The Councillor Guide

Councillor Sood, the Assistant City Mayor for Community Involvement, Partnerships and Equalities introduced a report which provided information on the Councillor Guide. The Project Portfolio Manager explained that she had spoken to some of the councillors in the pilot wards, and it appeared from the feedback received, that the guide was helpful for new councillors. The views of the commission were also sought.

The following comments were made:

- The guide would be helpful for new councillors and useful at their induction.
- It would need updating regularly – perhaps by replacing a specific page as necessary rather than the whole guide. An electronic version would be helpful, particularly one which could be updated regularly for example by linking to a smart phone or the council's website.
- The guide was too generic and it would be useful to have more information specific to the relevant ward.
- The population overview was useful but it needed to be in the context of the rest of the city.
- The guide was not detailed enough.
- It would be useful to have a list of contacts, community services, neighbourhood officers and other key officers in the guide.
- It would be useful to have a ward map with key buildings/facilities in the ward highlighted.
- It might also be useful to have details of the costs to carry out work for minor jobs / improvements in the ward such as dropped kerbs and 'H' Marking.
- It would be helpful to have bullet points in the guide to make it easier to read and a little less 'wordy'.
- It would be helpful to have information on who to contact for languages translation.
- The guide included ideas for layouts for community meetings, but this was not necessary.
- In fairness to officers, any councillor guide needed to be led by councillors themselves.

RESOLVED:

that the comments of the commission be noted.

85. WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the scrutiny commission work programme and in particular the items for the February agenda. The Chair stated that she might explore some of the future items in the work programme, to add into the agenda.

RESOLVED:

that the work programme be noted.

86. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting finished at 7.15 pm.