



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: THURSDAY, 8 MAY 2014 at

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Cutkelvin (Chair)

Councillor Corrall Councillor Desai
Councillor Cleaver Councillor Naylor
Councillor Grant

In Attendance:

Sir Peter Soulsby - City Mayor

Councillor Russell – Assistant City Mayor (Neighbourhood Services)

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123. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gugnani, Councillor Bhatti, Councillor Sood (Assistant City Mayor for Community Involvement, Partnerships and Equalities) and Iris Lightfoote (TREC).

124. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they might have in the business on the agenda.

No such declarations were declared other than at a previous meeting Councillor Gugnani and Councillor Sood had declared their interests in the Voluntary and Community Sector Review item as they held very active roles in the Leicester Council of Faiths and that was the reason for their non-

attendance at the meeting today.

129. VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR REVIEW

The Chair explained the procedure to be followed in relation to the discussion of the item. Two organisations had sent representatives to speak, Mr Fayyaz Suleman, Vice-Chair for the Leicester Council of Faiths and Mr Surinder Sharma, Chair of The Race Equalities Centre (TREC) with Mr Chino Cabon, Senior Race Equalities officer (TREC).

In the interests of fairness the Chair also asked if there were others present at the meeting who wanted to speak on the item, no one came forward.

The City Mayor outlined a report to the commission that included the findings and proposals from the public consultation on the future model for the three strands of activity under a review relating to the Voluntary and Community Sector as follows:

- Strand 1 support for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS);
- Strand 2 working with the VCS to engage with key communities to support a cohesive Leicester;
- Strand 3 support for Volunteering in the City.

The commission were informed that:-

- Leicester City Council had a long and proud tradition of supporting the VCS who were often better placed and more appropriate to provide services to communities.
- Leicester City Council currently provided far more funding through and to the VCS than any other comparable authority within the UK.
- It was estimated that £18 million of the council's budget was spent on the VCS each year to provide a wide range of service.
- Most organisations within the VCS were subject to arrangements and agreements with various departments of the council and as part of that they were subject to the reviews that all departments of the council were undergoing as a result of the need to achieve substantial reductions to budgets.
- Systematic reviews had been undertaken across the council that looked at services and service impacts on users before any actions had been agreed or taken. The Council listened and responded to service users and providers before decisions were taken.
- Seven organisations were directly in the scope of the VCS review as set out in the report; the arrangements with these providers had been in place for a long time and the context of the city and the needs of the VCS had changed over time. Future arrangements needed to reflect those changes whilst meeting the needs of the VCS and the city's communities.
- With budget pressure in mind and the absence of any previous strategic review of the seven organisations a consultation had taken place over a

12 week period.

- No decision had yet been taken on the report to the executive and if a decision was taken as recommended there would still be provisions for the seven organisations to make proposals for future funding.
- The three strands reported on were wide ranging and within those were opportunities for organisations to make a case for funding.

In conclusion the City Mayor acknowledged this was a time of considerable uncertainty and funding had been extended to each organisation to the end of September so full consideration could be given to identify the best model for support of the VCS. The budget was a major consideration in this, £582,000 currently. The indicative new figure of maximum funding allocation would be £450,000 but as that was an indicative amount and further flexibility might become necessary the council would not be bound by minimum/maximum figures.

The Chair invited the public speakers to make their representations to the commission.

Mr Surinder Sharma, chair of The Race Equalities Centre addressed the commission and made a number of representations including the following:

- An outline of the role of TREC and the unique services it provided which included statistics of services users.
- TREC had been in the City since 1967 and there had been no increase in TREC's funding since 2007.
- The current budget figure of £582,000 was just 3% of the total spend on the voluntary sector, of that TREC funding amounted to 0.06% of the total spend.
- TREC offered advice, guidance and assistance to many people living below the poverty line or in high deprivation areas of the City.
- By definition anything outside the strands in the report was not eligible for funding.
- The purpose of the review had not outlined the community cohesion strategy; the question was posed "what aspect of the public sector policy could be referred to as a cohesion strategy?"
- The council had failed to be open and transparent, the 12 week public consultation was open to everyone wanting involvement but no demographic monitoring had been kept and the council was unable to say whether recognition had been given to race equality under the Equality Act or whether the Public Sector Equality duty was fulfilled.
- In relation to online responses there was no information on the extent of overlap between responders attending meetings and answering the questionnaire.
- TREC were not challenging the right of the council to review the VCS but they were challenging the way in which the review had been conducted.

The Chair thanked Mr Sharma for his representations and asked that a written

copy of his concerns regarding the consultation process be provided so that a full response from officers could be provided.

Mr Fayyaz Suleman, Vice-Chair of the Leicester Council of Faiths (LCOF) provided copies of his original letter submitted during the consultation period and made a number of representations including the following:

- The Leicester Council of Faiths (LCOF) had been incorrectly bundled alongside infrastructure support and there was a lack of recognition of the work the LCOF undertook.
- The LCOF were supportive of changes but this consultation didn't recognise the key work they did.
- The LCOF board composition was outlined which was representative of the faiths in the city.
- The LCOF had a wide representation from places of worship, faith denominations and faith umbrella groups and currently drew representatives from 17 organisations.
- The LCOF received 80% of its funding from the council and had done for the past 10 years. The funding was used to pay for rent of premises and all other costs.
- The LCOF had been founded over 25 years ago and events that LCOF put on promoted a cohesive society.
- The impact and role of LCOF should be recognised and the organisation strengthened and supported not undermined.

The City Mayor responded that it would not be appropriate to comment on the merits of each organisation. The suggestions about the process of review were welcomed and the representatives were invited to put those into writing so that a full response could be provided and copied to members of the commission.

The City Mayor stated that it was not appropriate in the current climate to give a grant guided only by broad criteria, there needed to be clear and specific terms. In reference to services outside the scope of the review he also commented that there were other opportunities to bid for funding for these sorts of advice, guidance and support services.

Members expressed their views on the report and the comments of the representatives of organisations affected. The ensuing discussion included points as follows:

- Members were concerned at the amount of change in funding and the process becoming more of a tender process.

The City Mayor responded that things had moved on and it would be expected that organisations would put in tenders. Organisations and attitudes had changed and the processes had to reflect that. The review was asking for organisations to put forward proposals so their needs could be responded to.

- The Chair queried whether other reviews of the council were under a

similar robust system as here; the City Mayor confirmed that other reviews had gone before commissions and the programme of reviews was on the website. Currently 18 reviews were being undertaken, some substantial, some specific and others wide ranging.

- Members were concerned that there should be more support and connection between groups in particular giving advice on how and where to obtain funding including external funding, officers should also be supporting and signposting to other funding options.
- Members expressed a concern about duplication of services from organisations in the VCS; both representatives submitted that organisations set out their priorities which were clear but also intertwined with partnership working. The City Mayor expressed there was a degree of overlap of some functions which was to an extent inevitable and maybe desirable if the activities complimented but it would be important for the review to examine that.
- The Chair referred to the comments in the report on Strand 2 and particularly any impacts on new arrivals including refugees and asylum seekers, was there a caution on the two year transitional period to have more support/advice for other service providers if that time may not be enough?

The City Mayor responded that it was important to note that the report contained recommendations and no decision had been taken yet and the City Mayor undertook to make careful consideration on that point.

The Chair summarised the discussions and welcomed the authority's philosophical commitment to the VCS and recognised it was a very difficult and uncertain time across the whole VCS. The review was not an easy process or decision for the authority. The Chair reiterated the fantastic contributions the seven organisations had given the city and hoped that would continue. It was essential that the committee went on to consider the outcomes of the review.

RESOLVED:

That the commission note the report and recommend that:

1. TREC and the LCOF have the opportunity to submit written representations to which a formal response is given by officers and shared with the commission,
2. officers to ensure that groups receive proper support as to funding outside of the authority,
3. the commission's concerns about the two year time frame in relation to the new arrivals (refugees and asylum seekers) is considered by the Executive and reviewed if possible,

4. the commission to continue to monitor the impact of the review once a decision has been made.