



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: MONDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2014 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Singh (Chair)
Councillor Bhatti (Vice Chair)

Councillor Dr Chowdhury	Councillor Gugnani
Councillor Corrall	Councillor Waddington
Councillor Desai	

In Attendance

Councillor Chaplin –	Member for Stoneygate Ward
Councillor Russell –	Assistant City Mayor (Neighbourhood Services)
Councillor Sood –	Assistant City Mayor (Community Involvement, Partnerships and Equalities)

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26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

28. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 8 September 2014 be approved as a correct record, subject to resolution 4) of minute 22, "Transforming Neighbourhood Services Programme – West Area", being amended as follows (new wording shown in italics):-

“That the Assistant Mayor (Neighbourhood Services) be asked to advise the Executive of the Commission’s comments, recorded above, on Phase 2 of the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme, stressing that the Commission ~~wants local community activities to continue at the centres under consideration~~ recommends that a condition of the transfer of community centres to other operators should be that communities local to those facilities should be encouraged to use those facilities and that this usage should be increased where possible”

29. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

30. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations or statements of case had been received.

31. CITY-WIDE STREET DRINKING ORDER

The Commission welcomed John Leach, the newly appointed Director of Local Services and Enforcement, to his first meeting.

The Director of Local Services and Enforcement submitted a report providing details of the work undertaken to establish a city-wide street drinking order. In introducing this report, the Assistant Mayor (Neighbourhood Services) reminded Members that the consultation on the introduction of this order had still been underway when the agenda had been despatched. The findings of the consultation therefore had been circulated separately.

It was noted that a final decision on whether this order should be introduced would be taken at the Council meeting to be held on 13 November 2014.

The Assistant Mayor explained that a number of Designated Public Places Orders (DPPOs), banning drinking in the street in small areas of the city, previously had been introduced. It was expensive to operate these and street drinkers merely moved to just outside the area(s) covered. The possibility of introducing a city-wide order therefore was being considered.

Considerable research had been undertaken to find precedents for this from other areas and to identify potential problems with this approach. This had enabled a robust proposal to be prepared. Initial government advice had been that a city-wide DPPO could be introduced, as this would be valid for three years and then would be replaced by a PSPO, so consultation on the proposal had been started on this basis. Subsequently, this advice changed, due to the announcement of new legislation, to say that a DPPO could not be used. The consultation period therefore was re-opened for a further four weeks, as the original consultations were considered to be still valid for the new legal framework proposals.

Under the new legislation, DPPOs were to be replaced with Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs). PSPOs did not prevent people from drinking in the street, but gave the Police additional powers within a designated area to tackle street drinking where there was associated anti-social behaviour.

PSPOs were not a solution to problems associated with street drinking, but provided a tool the Police could use, when resources were available, in conjunction with other powers, (such as those for dealing with abusive behaviour or stopping people urinating in the street). Other agencies also had relevant powers, such as the Council's City Wardens, who could issue Fixed Penalty Notices for littering.

The Commission noted that Leicestershire Police currently was being restructured. It was hoped that this would result in more Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) patrolling the streets, but the Council could not influence their deployment beyond making requests as a partner organisation.

The Assistant Mayor then made the following comments in response to questions and comments from the Commission:-

- The Council could not compel Police Officers to take specific actions or go to specific locations. However, requests for action would continue to be made at all levels. In addition, the number of Police Officers needed to be reduced, as financial savings had to be made, so it could not be guaranteed that the powers would be fully used;
- In order for the Police to make issues around street drinking a local priority, people needed to report problems to the Police, but it was recognised that people often preferred not to get involved in possible incidents. The Director of Local Services and Enforcement confirmed that the Police had advised that this could be embedded in local action plans as the force moved towards increased local policing. The Council also would maintain records, such as littering associated with street drinking;
- PCSOs had a new power enabling them to seize alcohol, but they still could not arrest people;
- The details of the proposed order had been fully discussed with the Safer Leicester Partnership, which was supportive of the proposals. The Council's Head of Community Safety was working with the Partnership to ensure that appropriate training was in place;
- It was recognised that some people felt that a city-wide order was not necessary, as one of the main problems was the availability of cheap alcohol, particularly high strength alcohol. Work being undertaken with retailers to encourage them not to sell high strength, low price alcohol was proving successful;
- Concern that some retailers were setting up unofficial seating areas for the consumption of alcohol, (for example, by setting crates outside shops),

were recognised. However, alcohol bought at an off-licence had to be consumed a certain distance away from where it was bought and retailers who did not discourage people from drinking it within that distance could have their licences reviewed. A separate briefing on this could be provided if required;

- A lot of time had been spent working with the Safer Leicester Partnership to identify possible unintended consequences of the proposed order. This included issues such as:-
 - The criminalisation of young people – work had been undertaken with Youth Workers to ensure that correct information was available and had been distributed;
 - The monitoring system – work with the Police was ongoing to identify where the order was implemented and to ensure that it was used in a fair and proportionate way; and
 - People not understanding the difference between not being able to drink at all and being able to drink if it did not cause disorder;
- Payment of any fine imposed would be made in the same ways as for any other financial penalty;
- A small number of individuals in the city had no home. However, a lot of street drinking was done by those with homes, but who chose to act anti-socially;
- All Councillors had a role in alerting the Police with concerns about particular areas. Front-line staff also potentially had a role in alerting the Police about anti-social drinking;
- The Council had used the experience of other authorities across the country to identify good practice. This included looking at the reasons why such orders were introduced, how they were consulted on and implemented, and what unintended consequences were identified; and
- It was hoped that the Police would be able to respond to public concerns and focus resources where problems were identified. This would not necessarily mean that the approach would be the same across the city, as some areas could need more resources than others. This illustrated the importance of monitoring to ensure that the Police response was appropriate to each case.

The Head of Community Safety advised the Commission that:-

- When the Police used these powers, they would monitor the individuals in relation to whom they were used. For example, their age, ethnicity and location would be recorded;

- The Police were involved in a project with hospital Accident and Emergency services to record injuries and/or violence attributable to alcohol;
- City Wardens would collate data on littering due to street drinking; and
- The Council would collate information from all sources on a regular basis, so that outreach work by the Council and its partners could be targeted effectively. In this way it was hoped that behaviour could be changed.

Councillor Chaplin, a Member for Stoneygate Ward, addressed the Commission at the invitation of the Chair, making the following points:-

- Street drinking was entrenched in Stoneygate Ward, so the city-wide approach being considered was welcomed, as it removed any ambiguity about what was covered;
- An important issue was where street drinkers, particularly those with an alcohol addiction, could go for help and/or support if the PSPO was made. Safe places needed to be made available to meet this need, to ensure that street drinkers were not harmed;
- Police powers were very limited, so it could be interesting to invite the Police to a meeting of this Commission to explain how they could implement the PSPO;
- It was hoped that people would feel that it was worth reporting incidents of anti-social behaviour caused by street drinking;
- Street drinkers in the Stoneygate Ward had indicated that one reason for their drinking was that they could buy high strength alcohol very cheaply in the area. Cumulative Impact Zones (CIZs) had made a difference in some areas, but it was recognised that limiting sales in one area could displace the problem to another area. CIZs and the PSPO therefore needed to be considered together;
- The two parks in Stoneygate in which drinkers gathered were maintained via Evington Park. That park was some distance from Stoneygate, so maintenance could be improved by managing maintenance via Victoria Park; and
- It would be useful for staff new to the Parks service to receive training on street drinking issues as part of their induction.

Alan Fox, Chair of HART, (a local residents' association in south Highfields), addressed the Commission at the invitation of the Chair. He explained that over two years ago evidence had been compiled to enable DPPOs to be introduced in Onslow Park and Cedar Park. However, they had not been introduced, as the focus changed to introducing a city-wide order. South Highfields was on the edge of the CIZ and the DPPO area, so drinkers were

funnelled in to the parks in the south Highfields area. This was aggravated by the parks being in poor condition, due to a lack of maintenance by the Council. Consequently, as well as drinking, anti-social behaviour was occurring, such as urinating, shouting and incidents involving drugs.

As a result of this situation, local people felt abandoned. Mr Fox therefore questioned why it had taken so long to introduce a way of curtailing the problems being experienced and why the Council had not been able to proceed on the basis of the evidence previously obtained.

In reply, the Assistant Mayor explained that CIZs could be introduced under licensing legislation. Outside of a CIZ there was a presumption of approval for licenses for on- and off-sales of alcohol, but within a CIZ there was a presumption that licences would not be approved. CIZs could only be introduced when there was sufficient evidence of crime and disorder problems associated with the premises in the area. This could mean that the broader the CIZ area, the more thinly the evidence would be spread. The CIZ in the city relating to off-licenses therefore had been kept to a reasonable size, so that the evidence would be as robust as possible if challenged.

With regard to addiction issues, the Assistant Mayor confirmed that a number of programmes had been run over recent years, (with mixed success), to try to get support for people. It was recognised that addiction often was one issue in a chaotic life-style and programmes addressing this were resource-intensive. The Anchor Centre was not closing, as some people thought, but would be temporarily moving to an alternative location while works were done on the building. This was a “wet centre”, so provided facilities for safe drinking.

The Assistant Mayor further advised that the Commission that the Council participated in a large programme of work with Public Health services to address addiction. She further advised that she was happy to provide additional information on this work if the Commission wished.

In summary, the Commission noted that there was compelling evidence that street drinking contributed to anti-social behaviour. It also was recognised that it added to the public’s fear of disorder. However, any response to this needed to be balanced with the needs of drinkers and needed to be a multi-agency response.

The Commission thanked all involved for their work on this issue.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That this Commission supports the implementation of a city-wide street drinking order, provided such an order is balanced with the needs of habitual drinkers;
- 2) That the Assistant Mayor (Neighbourhood Services) be asked to advise the Parks service of the concerns raised above about the maintenance of Onslow Park and Cedar Park;

- 3) That the Head of Community Safety be asked to provide regular monitoring reports on the implementation of the city-wide street drinking order; and
- 4) That the Assistant Mayor (Neighbourhood Services) be asked to advise the Commission of any response from the Executive to the implementation of a city-wide street drinking order.

32. UPDATE ON WARD COMMUNITY MEETINGS

The Director for Culture and Neighbourhood Services and the Director for Delivery, Communications and Political Governance submitted a report providing an update following the transfer of the Ward Community Meetings function to the Community Services section in April 2014.

In introducing the report, the Assistant Mayor (Community Involvement, Partnerships and Equalities), thanked all officers who had dealt with community meetings and grant applications over the years and made the following comments:-

- Some different forms of engagement with communities had been introduced, such as patch walks;
- There had been 24 community meetings held since April 2014. The agendas for these varied, due to the different issues in different wards;
- Ward funds gave invaluable support to a number of groups across the city, with over £172,000 already having been allocated this year;
- One problem that had been identified was that payments of grants could be received after the event to which they related had taken place. Community Services therefore were looking at how grant payments could be made more quickly; and
- It was anticipated that a report would be made to this Commission in March 2015 about the future development of Community Meetings.

The Head of Community Services confirmed that different ways of working with Ward Councillors to improve meetings and grant funding were being investigated. This would be done in conjunction with consideration of the impact of the forthcoming changes to ward boundaries.

Members expressed the view that they had received high quality support from Democratic Services, when they had responsibility for these services. Some problems had been experienced when the transfer of responsibility had taken place, but some very good Community Services officers now were in post. However, some Community Meetings had not been so successful, as attendances were lower than previously.

The Commission expressed some concern at the suggestion that greater use of social media be made to publicise Community Meetings, as many Members and residents currently had little knowledge of social media. It therefore was suggested that the use of publicity leaflets should not be discontinued until other methods of communication were in place that had proved to be effective. The Head of Community Services gave an assurance that this course of action would be followed, but noted that there would be a cost associated with this.

Some wards had chosen to use some of their budget to have additional leaflets delivered to advertise Community Meetings and it was suggested that each Community Meeting could provide £500 from its funding to be used for additional publicity. Other Wards had used their funds to provide a newsletter for residents.

Members noted that insufficient advertising was a recurring problem in some areas, as was advertising being done in a different part of the Ward to where the meeting was being held. Also, no reference to individual Community Meetings had been seen on the Council's existing social media.

The importance of holding a meeting to discuss the agenda of each Community Meeting was stressed, as this could be used to identify appropriate local publications for advertising, such as newsletters, and areas of the Ward on which to focus publicity.

In addition, it was noted that posters were displayed in community facilities, such as community centres and SureStart centres, and people were encouraged to provide e-mail addresses by which to receive information on meetings.

It was suggested that Community Engagement Officers could distribute information in streets from which it was known no residents attended Community Meetings. There would be significant costs associated with this, so an alternative could be to find local volunteers to make these deliveries.

The Head of Community Services confirmed that work on improving communication was ongoing. The venues used also could be a significant factor in attendance levels, so Member involvement in discussions on how to attract people to meetings would be welcome. Members remarked that, if people were not attending meetings, it raised the question of whether the meetings were serving their purpose, so additional expenditure could be needed to attract people.

Issues relating to grant funding also were considered:-

- Some Wards had a larger number of organisations than others, so received a greater number of applications, but all Wards had the same level of funding;
- As changes to ward boundaries would come in to effect in May 2015, it was not possible to accurately predict how many applications would be received

by each Ward in the future;

- Some continuous funding could be provided, (for example, for events put on by groups covering more than one Ward), although there was a danger that some small organisations could become dependent on Ward funding to continue to operate;
- The importance of Ward community funding was recognised, but it was suggested that, if the cost of administering the grants was too high, consideration should be given to whether alternative means of delivering the funding should be introduced, or whether it should continue;
- It was questioned whether it was fair to give every Ward the same amount of funding, or whether some Wards should get more, to reflect specific economic conditions;
- The funding should be used for Ward development, not just to support groups, many of which received repeat funding; and
- A consistent way of considering grant applications across the whole city was needed. This was particularly important when an application was to more than one Ward, as currently some such applications were supported by one Ward but not the other(s).

In reply to a question, the Head of Community Services reminded Members that reports previously had been made to the Commission on the outcome of the pilot project on Community Meetings. Efforts had been made to take the lessons learned through the pilot project and apply them across the city and this was reflected in the report under consideration.

The Head of Community Services further noted that all Community Engagement Officers were now in post and they, along with Neighbourhood Development Managers, would continue to support Community Meetings. However, all Community Services staff would be included in a staffing review anticipated to take place in 2015.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted; and
- 2) That the Director for Culture and Neighbourhood Services and the Director for Delivery, Communications and Political Governance be asked to:-
 - a) Consider whether all Community Meetings could each contribute £500 towards additional publicity for those meetings;
 - b) Continue the work being done to find improved ways of administering Ward community funding grants;

- c) Note the assurance given to the Commission that, while alternative communication methods are considered, current methods will continue to be used; and
- d) Consider the points recorded above in any review undertaken of Ward Community Meetings.

33. DATA CENTRE MOVE

The Director for Information Services submitted a report describing the recent data centre move. This included a summary of the work involved, the planning behind the activity, issues faced after the move and lessons learned.

In introducing the report, the Assistant Mayor (Neighbourhood Services) drew attention to the significant work required to complete such a complicated move. She noted the scale of the challenges faced and congratulated the team on how well the move had been carried out. This showed the important role that support services had in the Council.

The Commission also extended its thanks to everyone involved in the move and its appreciation of the way in which it had been carried out.

In response to questions, the Director for Information Services reported that:-

- The majority of services had been back on-line within 24 hours of the move. The remaining services had been back on-line within a week of the move; and
- The costs of the project were included in the budget for the New Walk centre relocation.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the details of the data centre move and the lessons learned be noted; and
- 2) That all involved in the data centre move be thanked for achieving a smooth transition with minimal problems.

34. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.29 pm