



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: THURSDAY, 7 JANUARY 2016 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Dawood (Chair)
Councillor Gugnani (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Corrall Councillor Hunter
Councillor Cutkelvin Councillor Khote
Councillor Halford

In Attendance:

Councillor Bajaj

Councillor Master, Assistant City Mayor – Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Waddington, Assistant City Mayor – Skills and Jobs

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38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

40. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 17 November 2015 be confirmed as a correct record.

41. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Commission noted that all actions agreed at the last meeting were progressing as agreed.

AGREED:

That the Scrutiny Policy Officer be asked to advise the Chair of this Commission if actions agreed at a previous meeting are not progressing as agreed.

42. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

43. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

44. TASK GROUP REVIEW OF WARD COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Councillor Master, Assistant City Mayor – Neighbourhood Services, updated the Commission on progress with the task group review of Ward Community Meetings.

Councillor Master drew particular attention to the following points:-

- Those undertaking the review had been very aware that different Wards currently had different approaches to Ward Community Meetings;
- It was proposed that each Ward should hold three engagement meetings per year, but that a fourth could be held if required. It was anticipated that the fourth one would be issue-based;
- The proposed three engagement meetings per year were not included in other issue-based work that Members could be involved in in their Ward;
- The proposals saw a move towards an on-line application system for Ward Community Grants, but there still would be the option of using paper-based applications for those not comfortable with applying on-line;
- Although applications for grants over £500 would be considered in three batches during the year, there was discretion to consider these applications at other times if required;
- A major change proposed was to the form that publicity for Ward Community Meetings would take, as canvassing would no longer be

undertaken; and

- Voluntary Action LeicesterShire had not had a profile at Ward Community Meetings, so consideration was being given to how this could be changed.

Some concern was raised that information on these proposals had only been tabled at the meeting, but it was noted that this was because the last meeting of the Task Group had taken place after the agenda for the Commission meeting had been circulated.

The following comments were then made in discussion on this item:-

- The requirement for recipients of grants to complete a monitoring form needed to be applied consistently;
- The proposal to produce an annual report was welcomed. As well as providing an opportunity to monitor the use made of Ward Community Grants, which currently was not done in all Wards, it would be a useful way of sharing good practice;
- It was anticipated that the first annual report would be produced in 2017;
- The annual report could be promoted through the Leicester Link magazine, including highlighting good news stories about what Ward Community Grants had been used for;
- There would always be a significant number of people who would not be able to complete on-line application forms for grants, so the facility to use paper applications needed to be kept;
- It would be useful if Community Engagement Officers could identify days when they would be in particular areas and available to help people complete application forms for Community Ward Grants;
- All front line staff at Council premises would be briefed on how to complete application forms for Community Ward Grants;
- The reduction in the number of Community Engagement Officers following the recent review of Neighbourhood Services was a concern, both in terms of their capacity to work with Ward Community Meetings and of the pressures that this would place on individuals;
- Residents' perceptions of the work that Community Engagement Officers would be able to undertake following the reduction in their numbers would have to be managed carefully;
- It was important to keep the facility to consider applications for grants over £500 at other times of the year than the three dates specified;

- Requiring officers to attend Ward Meetings was not always a good use of their time. Councillors therefore should be encouraged to take a more proactive approach to reporting on local issues;
- Voluntary Action LeicesterShire was a large organisation that could help grant applicants in various ways, such as assisting with setting up a bank account or writing a constitution; and
- Consideration could be given to requiring Voluntary Action LeicesterShire to visit each Ward a minimum number of times each year as part of the conditions of the annual grant it received from the City Council.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Assistant City Mayor – Neighbourhood Services be asked to consider the points raised above when finalising the recommendations of the task group review of Ward Community Meetings;
- 2) That the Assistant City Mayor – Neighbourhood services be asked to consider what aspects of the work that Voluntary Action LeicesterShire is contracted by the City Council to provide can be used to assist in Ward-based work, such as assisting applicants for funding from Ward Community Grants;
- 3) That Voluntary Action LeicesterShire be asked to submit a report to either the next meeting of this Commission or the one following that on the work that Voluntary Action LeicesterShire has undertaken over the last five years, to enable Members to scrutinise its association with the communities of the city;
- 4) That the Head of Neighbourhood Services be asked to provide this Commission with a review of the effectiveness of the new arrangements for Community Engagement Officers in six months' time; and
- 5) That the Assistant City Mayor – Neighbourhood Services be asked to provide this Commission with a review of the effectiveness of the new arrangements for Ward Community Meetings in 18 months' time.

45. EMERGENCY FOOD USE DRAFT ACTION PLAN

The Director of Finance submitted the draft Emergency Food Use Action Plan.

Members noted that this item would be deferred, as no officers were able to be at the meeting to present it.

Councillor Waddington, Assistant City Mayor – Jobs and Skills, suggested that the Plan needed clarification, particularly in relation to the dates identified. In

addition, when it was resubmitted, progress on the tasks could be included.

The Commission welcomed this and suggested that the resubmitted plan could identify the key areas where the Council could help in the development of a full Action Plan. For example, this could include mapping deprivation in the city, or food providers being encouraged to sign-post people to the correct services.

It also was suggested that a “traffic lights” system could be used to identify progress with the Plan and the inclusion of completion dates could make it easier to monitor progress.

Councillor Waddington concurred with these views, noting that the Food Welfare Support Group also was working to identify gaps in provision. These also could be reported when the Plan was resubmitted to the Commission.

AGREED:

That the Director of Finance be asked to resubmit the draft Emergency Food Use Action Plan to this Commission, taking account of the additional information requested above.

46. REPORT OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE PARTNERSHIP TO THE ASSISTANT CITY MAYOR RESPONSIBLE FOR ADVICE AND WELFARE REFORM

The Commission received a report prepared by the Social Welfare Advice Partnership (SWAP), providing information on the advice sector and risks that could threaten advice provision in the city.

Members noted that this item would be deferred, as no officers were able to be at the meeting to present it.

Councillor Waddington, Assistant City Mayor – Jobs and Skills, noted that the report was out of date, as it was completed in July 2015. However, she had asked for it to be presented to the Commission, as it highlighted some of the areas where problems had arisen as a result of the Government’s changes to the benefits system. In order for Members to gain a clearer picture of the situation, SWAP could be asked to provide an updated version of the report.

Members welcomed this suggestion, expressing concern that the information presented was out of date and a clearer objective for the report was needed. As such, when it was resubmitted, it would be useful to also receive information on how the Deputy City Mayor and officers had responded to it.

Members also suggested that it would be useful if a member of SWAP could be present when the report was next considered.

Councillor Waddington concurred with these views, suggesting that it could be useful for an overview of welfare advice needs in the current changing environment to be presented to the Commission with the revised SWAP report.

The Scrutiny Policy Officer reminded Members that the Housing Scrutiny Commission had been considering the role of credit unions, particularly in relation to the introduction of Universal Benefit. Members noted this and suggested that it be included in the discussion when the report was resubmitted.

AGREED:

That the Director of Finance be asked to liaise with the Head of Revenues and Customer Support and the Chair of this Commission to determine what information should be presented to the Commission on this matter and in what format this should be.

47. TASK GROUP REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF BETTING SHOPS ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES WITHIN LEICESTER

The Chair of the Task Group reported verbally that:-

- Two meetings of the Task Group had been held to date;
- The Assistant City Mayor – Jobs and Skills had welcomed the proposals for this review and had suggested that its findings be used to contribute to the local area profiles currently being prepared;
- The Task Group had met Dr Heather Wardle of Geofutures and felt that her work would be very useful to the review;
- Representatives of the Association of British Bookmakers had attended the Task Group's second meeting;
- It was recognised that not all Members were able to attend meetings of the Task Group, but the involvement of more Members would be welcome; and
- The next meeting of the Task Group would be held at 11.00 am on Thursday 14 January 2016 in Room 3.12 at City Hall.

The Scrutiny Policy Officer advised the Commission that a report of the findings of the review was being drafted. This included reference to:-

- a) Work done by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Council to try and use the planning framework to restrict the number of betting shops in its area. This had been unsuccessful, largely due to pressure from the betting industry;
- b) A consultation carried out by the Islington London Borough Council on creating a Special Planning Document. This included a lot of supporting evidence of the impact of gambling on vulnerable communities and the issue of community health; and

- c) Consideration of whether the licensing of gambling establishments could be addressed through the Local Plan that was currently being prepared.

The Commission noted that anecdotal evidence suggested that employees of betting shops were encouraged by their employers to identify properties in built up areas that could be used as betting shops. Anyone willing to provide evidence for the Task Group on this matter was invited to contact the Scrutiny Policy Officer.

Members noted that the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Association of British Bookmakers (ABB) had produced a framework for local partnerships on betting shops and it was suggested that the link to the website should be circulated.

The Scrutiny Policy Officer further advised that there was anecdotal evidence that gambling was a problem, but evidence of this had not been collated. One possible recommendation that could arise from this review therefore was that support groups could be asked to gather evidence, possibly with the Supporting Tenants and Residents group undertaking a trial of this.

Concern was raised that betting shops liked to locate near each other due to the limit on the number of betting machines that could be put in one shop. Clustering meant that income from these machines could be maximised.

Members were reminded that the Council supported the Local Government Association's recommendation to reduce the maximum bet on fixed odds betting machines to £2.00.

It was hoped that the next meeting of the Task Group would be attended by representatives of support groups for gamblers. A meeting also had been arranged for February, which it was hoped would be attended by representatives of the Social Welfare Advice Partnership. It was hoped that the final report of the review would be presented to the Commission in March 2016.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Scrutiny Policy Officer be asked to circulate the link to the Local Government Association and Association of British Bookmakers framework for local partnerships on betting shops to all members of this Commission;
- 2) That the Scrutiny Policy Officer be asked to circulate details of future meetings of this Task Group, and information associated with this review, to all members of this Commission;
- 3) That any members of this Commission interested in attending future meetings of this Task Group be invited to do so; and
- 4) That Members unable to attend meetings of the Task Group be invited to pass any comments to the Scrutiny Policy Officer for inclusion in the Task Group's discussions.

48. WORK PROGRAMME

The Commission received and noted its current work programme.

With regard to the proposed report updating Members on Channel Shift, it was suggested that the report should include information on where people could go in the community to access services such as payment facilities, as not all facilities could be accessed at all Council offices.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Scrutiny Policy Officer be asked to add the reports referred to under minute numbers 44, 45 and 46 above to the work programme; and
- 2) That the Director for Delivery, Communications and Political Governance be asked to include the information requested above in the proposed report updating the Commission on Channel Shift.

49. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair congratulated Adrian Wills, Head of Neighbourhood Services, on being awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours List.

50. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6.56 pm