



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: WEDNESDAY, 24 AUGUST 2016 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

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

Councillor Aldred	Councillor Halford
Councillor Dr Chowdhury	Councillor Hunter
Councillor Fonseca	

In Attendance:

Councillor Clarke, Assistant City Mayor – Energy & Sustainability
Councillor Master, Assistant City Mayor – Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor - Communities & Equalities
Councillor Waddington, Assistant City Mayor - Jobs & Skills

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17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence, although Councillor Waddington, (Assistant City Mayor with responsibility for Jobs and Skills), apologised that she would have to leave this meeting early.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dr Chowdhury declared an Other Disclosable Interest in agenda item 9, “Social Welfare Advice Procurement Options Paper 2017/22”, in that he worked in a voluntary organisation that provided welfare advice and had received a small grant to do so.

Councillor Fonseca also declared an Other Disclosable Interest in agenda item 9, “Social Welfare Advice Procurement Options Paper 2017/22”, in that a few years ago he had worked for three months as a volunteer with the Citizens

Advice service.

Councillor Aldred declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting, in that she was a volunteer at Thurncourt Community Centre and was Secretary of the Community Association.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillors' judgement of the public interest. They were not therefore required to withdraw from the meeting.

19. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Commission noted that minute 13, "Response to the Leicester Advice Sector: A Report Outlining the Risk and Demands in the City", stated that the Council had had a contract with the Social Welfare Advice Partnership (SWAP) for one year. This was inaccurate, as the Council did not have a contract with SWAP, but worked with the partnership to share good practice, including monitoring, in relation to advice provision.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission held on 6 July 2016 be agreed as a correct record, subject to the second bullet point of minute 13, "Response to the Leicester Advice Sector: A Report Outlining the Risk and Demands in the City", being amended as follows (new wording shown in italics):

- ~~"The Council had had a contract for the provision of advice services~~ *worked with the SWAP for approximately one year to share good practice on, and monitor, advice provision"*

20. PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AGREED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Commission noted that all actions agreed at its last meeting had been carried out.

21. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reminded Members that proposals for a revised Council Tax Reduction Scheme were being consulted on. The consultation was due to end on 28 September 2016.

A report on the outcome of the consultation would be made to the Commission before the Executive considered the proposals. A date for this had not been confirmed yet and it was possible that a Special Meeting would be arranged to consider the report.

22. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

23. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

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

24. THE FURNITURE BANK SCHEME: EVALUATION AND FUTURE OPTIONS

The Director of Finance submitted a report providing the Commission with an overview of the historical context of The Furniture Bank pilot scheme and advising of future sustainable options for awarding furniture for vulnerable low-income households in crisis.

The Head of Revenues and Customer Support introduced the report, reminding the Commission that the Furniture Bank scheme had been run as a pilot project for about 2 years. This had delivered 3,000 pieces of furniture to homes in the city and over the last year had avoided 77 tonnes of waste being sent to landfill.

However, the scheme was not sustainable in its pilot form, so the Leicestershire and Rutland Reuse Network (LRRN) had become the Council's new charitable partners. It was recognised that, in the current climate of making financial savings, support to households needed to be sustainable. This new venture therefore expanded on the current partnership arrangement. It also offered other charitable organisations in the city the opportunity to join the LRRN and help more households in need.

A dedicated webpage was being developed. This would list the current partners, (Sofa Loughborough, Work link project and React local), provide a contact telephone number and explain what sort of reusable pieces of furniture they accepted. It was anticipated that this website would be available from 23 September 2016.

Councillor Waddington, (Assistant City Mayor with responsibility for Jobs and Skills), noted that various issues had arisen in the running of the pilot scheme. Having considered options for the future operation of the scheme, the Executive had agreed that the most suitable option was to work with the voluntary sector. It also was recognised that people would like to be able to see the furniture before selecting it.

Councillor Waddington also noted that voluntary organisations did not provide items that were provided new, (such as white goods). These were sourced through existing Council contracts.

The Commission welcomed the proposals, but queried whether the LRRN would be able to meet demand, particularly if this rose. In reply, Councillor Waddington confirmed that analysis of items provided under the pilot scheme and what was likely to be needed in the future showed that demand would be met with the improved collection service to be offered.

The Head of Revenues and Customer Support confirmed this, explaining that previously there had only been a small team of people working on the pilot project. Staff absences had made it difficult to provide a full service at times, so little promotion of the scheme had been undertaken. It also had meant that it had only been possible to make approximately 30 collections of donated furniture per week.

Although it was anticipated that doing future collections of donated furniture through the Bulky Waste Collection service would be more productive, there would be a “soft” launch of this service, to enable the number of referrals received and the number of furniture donations made to be monitored. If the scheme was successful, a “hard” launch would be undertaken in 2017, probably involving sending information to households with Council Tax bills in the spring.

Currently, anyone referred to the scheme would be given a telephone number through which to contact the scheme. This number would go through to any of the participating charities, who would organise collection of the item needed and transfer it to the warehouse. As this was done by telephone, any of the participating charities could be a first point of contact, irrespective of their geographical location or core group of clients. The charity would then refer the case to the LRRN, who would deliver the item. In the future, donors would be asked to contact charities direct and anyone known to be in need of the items donated would be contacted by the charities.

Feedback from the pilot project showed that recipients would like to be able to see the items available and have an element of choice in what they received. There currently was no “showroom”, but the feasibility of providing one was being considered. At present, all available furniture was displayed on the LRRN website and choices were made from this.

In reply to questions, the Head of Revenues and Customer Support advised that:

- The revised scheme had been established through a procurement exercise. It therefore would operate under a contract with specific terms and conditions;
- The finding of volunteers for this scheme was not the Council's responsibility. The LRRN had a pool of volunteers they used;
- Items classed as luxury goods could not be supplied through this scheme. This meant that televisions could not be provided;

- Successes of the pilot project included the provision of three fully furnished homes in December 2015 for refugees to the city. This was achieved through close partnership working with LOROS furniture shops and other sources within the Council, (such as using items from care homes that were closing down); and
- The contract under which the Council obtained new items was separate to that for the Furniture Bank. A year on year increase in the amount available for the purchase of these items had been included in that contract.

In reply to questions from Members, the Waste Management Service Development Manager confirmed that improvements had been made to the IT infrastructure, to reduce problems such as slow internet access. However, without significant financial investment in to the IT system, the scale of improvements possible was limited.

The Commission confirmed its support for this project and suggested that Option 3 in the report was preferable, having the most sustainable delivery plan. However, Members felt that some element of choice and/or ability to upgrade the furniture received would benefit the scheme and the way in which it was perceived.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted; and
- 2) That a report on the operation of the revised Furniture Bank scheme be submitted to this Commission in one year's time.

25. SOCIAL WELFARE ADVICE PROCUREMENT OPTIONS PAPER 2017/22

The Director of Finance submitted a report providing an overview of social welfare advice and outlining options for the future procurement of this.

The Head of Revenues and Customer Support introduced the report, reminding the Commission that a number of social welfare advice contracts were due for re-procurement in March 2017. This provided an opportunity to review and rationalise the Council's approach to procuring advice services.

The Social Welfare Advice contract awarded to Citizens Advice Leicestershire already had been extended by one year, so work was underway on plans to re-procure the provision from 2017 onwards. The Head of Revenues and Customer Support stressed that the Council did not have a duty to ensure an advice provision was available beyond statutory services such as homelessness and community care. However, in undertaking this exercise it was assumed that the current areas of advice would remain the same. In addition, other contracts which mainly included advice had been considered and provisionally included in this planning exercise, as set out in the report

It was proposed to procure good quality general and specialist advice, with some outreach provision, with the aim of removing contract specification duplication that would deliver efficiency savings to the Council. The advice contract would include welfare benefits, community care, debt, personal budgeting support, housing and employment. Contract specifications potentially would include a three tier model of provision and providers currently were being consulted on these tiers.

To help understand the sector, the Social Welfare Advice Project Manager currently was undertaking an engagement programme. This launched on 1 August 2016, with a well-attended event open to all organisations providing information, advice and guidance services, (regardless of whether they were funded by the Council), and other interested key stakeholders. This event had been facilitated by Voluntary Action LeicesterShire.

The key messages from the event were that advice needed to be affordable and accredited, a holistic service was needed that met client needs, outreach services should be placed where they were needed most, a co-ordinated referral system and client journey was needed and commitment to partnership and collaborative working was required from advice providers.

Meetings were now being held with organisations in the city to map demand and need and to explore what good advice outcomes looked like. It was anticipated that this work would be completed in late September 2016 and would inform the procurement recommendations put forward to the Executive in early October 2016. Following this, the invitation to tender was likely to be published in mid-February 2017, with the commissioned service starting in the summer of 2017.

The Social Welfare Advice Project Manager advised the Commission that the agencies she had met with had identified an element of double counting of service users, as some people visited various agencies to seek help, or stopped engaging with one agency and sought advice from another. Despite this, all agencies had indicated that demand for social welfare advice was high and agreed that they needed to work in partnership with others in order to provide the advice services being sought.

Councillor Waddington, (Assistant City Mayor with responsibility for Jobs and Skills), stressed the intention to encourage agencies providing social welfare advice to work together. This would not preclude the identification of specialisms within individual organisations.

Councillor Waddington further stressed that the Executive had not made a decision yet on future arrangements for the provision of this advice and invited the Commission to comment on the options proposed.

The Commission expressed some concern that the contracts identified for possible inclusion in the scope of the new contract had significantly different rates. In reply, Councillor Waddington explained that this was largely due to these services having been procured by various parts of the Council. This had

meant that different organisations had been contracted to provide different levels of service.

The Social Welfare Advice Project Manager confirmed this, noting that the service required was not clearly defined in a significant proportion of the contracts. In addition, the contracts often did not contain sufficient provision for the monitoring of performance. For the purpose of this exercise, the value of each contract therefore had been calculated by dividing its value by the number of clients seen. This situation would be addressed in the new contract being considered.

In reply to Members' questions, it was noted that:

- It was intended that specialist services that would not be provided by all organisations would be specified within the contract. The market would then determine how best to provide these within the consortium model being proposed, if adopted;
- Experience showed that clients using advice organisations did not object to being referred to other organisations when specialist advice was needed;
- The current lack of uniformly robust outcome monitoring of advice contracts let by the Council meant that it was difficult to identify how organisations currently assessed the complexity of clients' cases. This would be addressed through the partnership approach being proposed; and
- The current review of Welfare Rights services would not affect the delivery of these services, so the services would remain unchanged.

Councillor Waddington suggested that, whichever option for re-procurement was adopted, a requirement needed to be included in the contract for the organisations providing the advice to have local knowledge and contacts. The Commission agreed that the value that would be added to the contract by this was very important.

Councillor Waddington left the meeting at this point (6.40 pm).

It also was agreed that it was important that the advice providers should be suitably qualified and appropriate, (for example, having community language skills). However, Councillor Sood, (Assistant City Mayor with responsibility for Communities and Equalities), felt that the aim included in the report relating to managing language and defining what level language should be provided was confusing.

In reply, the Social Welfare Advice Project Manager advised that this aim had been included as many organisations had highlighted that people were arriving in the city from a range of new countries. This was seen by those organisations as a risk to the services they provided, as the language needs of the city could change more quickly than the organisations could respond to those changes. It was suggested that this aim could be reworded, to make the

meaning clearer.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be received and welcomed;
- 2) That the Executive be asked to note that this Commission recommends the adoption of Option 2 of those set out in the report for the re-procurement of Social Welfare Advice, subject to it being ensured that:
 - a) the procurement exercise is weighted towards ensuring that the organisations providing the advice services have local knowledge and contacts;
 - b) the organisations providing advice services under this contract meet the existing and emerging multi-cultural needs of the city, especially in relation to language;
 - c) all advice providers are suitably qualified and appropriate; and
 - d) a clear framework is introduced for the monitoring of the contract;
- 3) That the Director of Finance be asked to reword aim number 8 of the Statement of Aims for the 2016/17 Advice Procurement (relating to meeting multi-cultural needs of the city by being responsive to existing and emerging communities, including managing language as a risk) to make its intention clearer; and
- 4) That all Councillors be asked to encourage any agencies providing social welfare advice with which they have contact to contribute evidence for the re-procurement exercise currently being undertaken.

26. GETTING THE MOST OUT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES - SCOPING DOCUMENT FOR PROPOSED REVIEW

The Commission received a draft scoping document for a proposed review entitled "Getting the best out of our neighbourhood services".

It was noted that:

- This review was not restricted to the Council's Neighbourhood Services division. As such, there would be more than one Executive Lead and Divisional Director involved in this review;
- The review would contain a number of work streams. Members could either participate in the whole review, or just in particular work streams;

- Site visits would be made as part of this review, to which all Members of the Commission would be invited; and
- Some customers could be asked to act as witnesses in this review, such as representatives of those who had been affected by the Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme.

AGREED:

- 1) That the title of this review be amended to “Getting the best out of our neighbourhoods”;
- 2) That Customers be included as witnesses from whom evidence should be gathered as part of this review;
- 3) That the scrutiny Policy Officer be asked to work with the Chair of this Commission and relevant officers to develop the scoping document for the review “Getting the best out of our neighbourhoods”.

27. WORK PROGRAMME

AGREED:

That the Scrutiny Policy Officer be asked to amend the work programme to include:

- a) an item on the whether the meat purchased by the Council for school meals is just Halal meat, or whether a mixture of Halal and non-Halal meat is bought;
- b) a report on the operation of the revised Furniture Bank scheme to be submitted to this Commission in one year’s time, as a greed under minute 24, “The Furniture Bank Scheme: Evaluation and Future Options”, above.

28. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6.53 pm

