

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 – COMMUNITY AND HOUSING HELD AT COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN AT 7.30 PM ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2003

Present:- Councillor A J Ketteridge – Vice-Chairman In the Chair.
Councillors M L Foley, M A Gayler, R T Harris, S C Jones,
A Wattebot and P A Wilcock.

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman:- Councillor D W Gregory

Officers in attendance:- S McLagan, I Orton and C Roberts.

S1.10 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Corke and A Row.

S1.11 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2003 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

S1.12 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM – DRAFT TARGETS

The Committee received a report of the Policy and Performance Manager that, arising from Best Value and Corporate Self Assessment requirements, the range of performance information and frequency of reporting should be strengthened. Officers had therefore submitted a comprehensive performance system with a range of performance measures, performance targets and a traffic light system to be approved for use in the piloting of the Performance Management System. Councillor S Flack had alerted officers to the incidence of colour blindness and additional alternatives to the colour coding system would therefore be investigated.

The Policy and Performance Manager described, with reference to the sickness figures, how the performance indicators could be used to improve the overall performance of the Council. He confirmed that comparison with other Councils would be an essential part of the process. He stressed also the importance of “reward culture” even if the reward were merely “well done”. It was hoped that the Council would become a “centre of excellence” as regards performance management. The cost of some improvements could outweigh their value, however, and much of performance management had to reflect common sense.

In answer to questions from Members the Policy and Performance Manager explained that customer care monitoring would be achieved by four major surveys carried out every three years. The findings of these would be reported to the Committee once “like on like” comparisons became possible.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that a further report incorporating comments from all committees be returned to those committees in the early New Year.

S1.13 **BEST VALUE REVIEW – DAY CENTRES**

Councillor D Gregory, the Chairman of the relevant Member Reference Group reported on progress to date with the Best Value Review of Day Centre Services. He explained that Members had considered:-

the food provided at each Centre
 cleaning contract responsibilities
 possible lowering of age limits to 55
 publicity leaflets
 problems of transport and workable access
 possible links with GP referral schemes
 and constitutions.

Unfortunately, it had proved impossible to find other District Council run Day Centres for the purposes of comparison. There had been much discussion at the Thaxted Day Centre about the Vicarage Mead proposals.

Councillor M Foley added that considerable alarm had been provoked by the way in which the Vicarage Mead possibilities had been made public. Many users of the Day Centre were most worried about the possible temporary or permanent loss of the Day Centre. The result had been that the District Council appeared cavalier and uncaring in its attitude to Day Centre users.

Councillor Gregory explained that housing officers had been as reassuring as possible. The Head of Leisure and Community Services added that one of the options excluded the Day Centre from any development. A report would be submitted to the Health and Housing Committee on 23 October 2003 and would be referred to the Scrutiny Committee for comments. The Member Reference Group had felt the Day Centre buildings were old and would need to be considered for refurbishment within the next ten years.

Councillor Gregory requested a copy of the draft report and asked that the Head of Leisure and Community Services would consult ward members on the content. The Head of Leisure and Community Services added that the issue would be referred to the Health and Housing Committee when any problems would be dealt with.

Councillor M Foley stressed that Members had found difficulty in obtaining information about this development. Local people had been more aware than the ward representatives. Great concern was caused when people were seen drawing in the area of the proposed development. The concern was about possible change without consultation. He suggested the Council should change its approach and consider counselling provision.

One Member suggested alternative uses for Day Centres, eg for young people and another Member asked for analysis of how many hours a week the Day Centres were used on average. The Head of Leisure and Community Services explained that information on these matters was not readily available from the volunteer staff. More consistency and a more structured approach to hiring would be necessary for officers to provide the data the Member asked for. In answer to a question she outlined the way financial arrangements worked. Councillor A Ketteridge pointed out that the Day Centres provided extremely good value for the money given by the Council. They were also an excellent example of partnership working. It would cost the Council a lot to run the Day Centres by itself. The Council should not therefore risk altering the working arrangements of the volunteers.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the progress made and the draft improvement plan.

S1.14 CALL IN PROCESS FOR SCRUTINY

Further to Members' request at the 18 June meeting, the Policy and Performance Manager submitted details of the call-in process linked to the scrutinising work of the Authority.

S1.15 SCRUTINY TRAINING FOR MEMBERS – TUESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2003

Members were informed that since many Members were unable to attend on 23 September, that session would be cancelled and a new one arranged for the second half of November.

S1.16 WORK PROGRAMME FOR SCRUTINY 1 COMMITTEE 03/04

The Policy and Performance Manager submitted a report showing details of the proposed work programme for Scrutiny 1 Committee for 2003/04 programmed so as to split the work between the remaining meetings of the Committee. He stressed that a work programme must be chosen to make the scrutiny process an impartial one.

Councillor M Foley referred to the demise of the Contracts Board and said he thought this was to the detriment of the Scrutiny Committee. The way contracts were monitored and reported required a link with Scrutiny which seemed to have gone.

The Policy and Performance Manager said that contract culture would be scrutinised at the 10 March 2004 meeting of the Scrutiny 1 Committee and at that stage Members would consider the wider impact of contracts rather than day to day detail.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme set out in paragraph 3 of the Report is agreed but that future adjustments are not excluded.

S1.17 LEISURE SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW – UPDATE

The Committee considered an update on progress being made towards the implementation of the improvement and action plans resulting from the Best Value Review of Leisure and Cultural Services. Members asked about the possibility of using units at Golds Nurseries for a Museum store and of obtaining grants for major refurbishment of the Museum rather than maintenance. The Head of Leisure and Cultural Services undertook to discuss these with the Curator.

In answer to questions from Councillor M Foley, the Head of Leisure and Cultural Services explained that the Council provided grants for outreach work and transport to get young people to venues. She suggested that if Councillor Foley could name a contact in Thaxted who would make the Sports Development Officer aware of groups requiring transport, the necessary action and co-ordination could be taken on-board and incorporated into the Leisure and Cultural Strategy subject to the agreement of the Community and Leisure Committee. She informed the meeting that a new web base was being created for tourism and museum matters.

RESOLVED that the progress made towards the improvement and action plans arising from the Best Value Review of Leisure and Cultural Services be noted.

S1.18 PFI – UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the progress of the PFI project. Councillor S Jones congratulated the Head of Leisure and Community Services on the completion of the PFI project within the time allocated by the contract.

S1.19 HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE – 4 SEPTEMBER 2003

The Committee considered the decision list of the meeting of the Health and Housing Committee on 4 September 2003. A Member endorsed the concern of the Health and Housing Committee to protect Stanley Wilson Lodge from disposal to the independent sector.

Arising from the item on erection of radio antennae on flats at Wagon Mead, a Member asked that the Council investigate how it could encourage access by radio to “Broadband”.

The meeting ended at 9.32 pm