

EXTRAORDINARY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 1 NOVEMBER 2010

Present: Councillor A Dean (Chairman)
Councillors D M Jones, H S Rolfe, G Sell, S V Schneider and A M Wattebot.

Also present representing the Management Committees of Uttlesford Day Centres:- Wendy Baron and Gwyn Davies (Dunmow), Daphne Cornell, Marjorie Edge, Joan Hoadley and Roger Mead (Saffron Walden), Cat Lupton (Stansted Mountfitchet), and Carolyn Fitzgibbon, Charles Wilkinson and Mick Williams (Takeley).

Officers in attendance: R Harborough (Director of Public Services), S Martin (Head of Customer Support and Revenue Services), L Milns (Project Officer), C Roberts (Democratic Services Officer), N Shepard-Lewis (Tenant Participation Officer), and B Tice (Project Officer).

SC16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor A C Yarwood.

SC17 REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF UTTLESFORD SCRUTINY MEMBER TASK GROUP ON DAY CENTRES

The Committee considered the report of the Scrutiny Committee member task group which had completed a review of the operation of day centres in the district. The task group comprised Councillors Chambers, C M Dean, Jones and Rolfe. The group had consulted the Management Committees of the five day centres in the district located respectively in Dunmow, Saffron Walden, Stansted Mountfitchet, Takeley and Thaxted, and had visited the centres to observe activities. Representatives of the Management Committees had attended meetings of the Scrutiny Committee at which progress of the review had been discussed. Essex Social Services, Age Concern and other bodies had been consulted during the investigation. The task group had also met key council officers concerned with day centres.

The Chairman of the Committee welcomed all present. He referred to the report on day centres submitted to the previous meeting of the Committee which members had agreed to revise. He stressed that the new report now before the Committee presented alternatives so that discussion could be taken to the next stage, and that the decision of the Scrutiny Committee would be further reviewed by other committees

which had power to decide on the matter and on provision of necessary funding.

The Chairman drew attention to conclusions A-E of the Task Group set down as possible pointers for action. He stressed however that it was not the job of the Scrutiny Committee to deal with matters of detail, such as the need to regularize ownership of the Stansted day centre. In answer to a question from Councillor Schneider he added that the Parish Council's ownership of the premises ought to be recognised and responsibility for maintenance settled.

Councillor Sell declared a personal interest in so far as he was the Chairman of the Stansted Parish Council and he commented that since discovering the position regarding ownership of the day centre, the Parish Council was content that the ownership remain as at present.

In answer to a question from Councillor Wattebot the Chairman said that it was not essential that the coordinator/manager should be full time.

Councillor Rolfe suggested that the Council should learn from the model operating at Stansted Day Centre, which was self-sufficient and owned by the parish council. The Chairman felt this was not part of the Scrutiny Committee's function.

Councillor Rolfe referred to the recent government comprehensive spending review which required cuts in local government spending in the order of 28%, and suggested it was important to maintain and extend the work of the day centres, e.g. by taking on advice and/or administrative roles.

Members considered what the right spending priorities for the day centres were. In response to questions, representatives of the Saffron Walden and the Stansted day centres indicated that they wanted more staff support than the twelve hours per week provided at Stansted day centre.

Members invited the views of representatives from Dunmow Day Centre, who informed the meeting that the management committee did not support the proposal that the day centres should jointly fund a coordinator from lettings income.

Options were considered, such as the possibility of appointing someone to drive up income; permitting day centres to retain their income; or providing a tapering grant, which would ultimately be phased out.

Councillor Rolfe suggested that in the current climate grant aid was very unlikely and support must be sought, e.g. from the voluntary sector.

Councillor Sell suggested holding a business reception to promote the day centres.

The Chairman asked for views from the representatives of the management committees. The Dunmow, Takeley and Stansted representatives felt that there was no room for fundraising from further letting of their facilities. In answer to a question from Wendy Baron, the Chairman said that the Council would not immediately be divesting itself of maintenance and upkeep of the day centres, although this couldn't be guaranteed indefinitely.

Carolyn Fitzgibbon asked whether it was envisaged that one coordinator would serve all five day centres and the Chairman answered that this was a matter of prescriptive detail which was not for the task group to address. He added that he could see no alternative to a grant.

Councillor Schneider thought that the parish councils could precept for this sort of arrangement and the Chairman thought this could be part of the ongoing discussion.

A question was raised why the Saffron Walden Town Council had not taken over the running of the Saffron Walden day centre.

Discussion also took place about the sort of characteristics and experience needed in a coordinator. Mention was made of ability to obtain grants and specific technical and administrative skills. Business development and management support were also regarded as important.

In the light of the extensive discussions during the meeting and input from the representatives of the day centre management committees, members whilst noting the content of the report and in particular its conclusions nevertheless decided not to accept the recommendation set out in the report; a revised recommendation was agreed and accepted by them as follows:-

RESOLVED

- 1 The Scrutiny Committee acknowledges the valuable role of the day centres in the district. In recognition of their unique position within the community, it is recommended to the Community and Housing Committee that the financial model adopted at Stansted Day Centre is explored with a view to further developing technical support and collaboration across the whole district.
- 2 Management agreements should be reviewed and the status of the ownership of the Stansted centre should be regularised.
- 3 Other findings of the task group should be addressed, as appropriate, respectively by the Council and/or the management committees.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm.