

## **COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY 9 JANUARY 2003 AT 2.00 PM**

PRESENT: Councillor Knapton (Chairman), Councillors Aldersey (as substitute for Councillor G Hodgson), Atkinson, Boaden, Morton, Mrs Parsons, Mrs Pattinson and Mrs Prest (as substitute for Councillor Mrs Fisher)

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Ellis (Portfolio Holder for Community Activities)

Sergeant Andy Baines – in respect of the item of business relating to the Community Safety Best Value Review.

### **COS.1/03 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Fisher and G Hodgson.

### **COS.2/03 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The Minutes of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 21 November and 3 December 2002 (special meeting) were agreed as a correct record of the meetings and signed by the Chairman.

### **COS.3/03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING DECLARATIONS OF 'THE PARTY WHIP')**

There were no declarations of interest affecting any item on the Agenda.

### **COS.4/03 CALL IN OF DECISIONS**

RESOLVED – That it be noted that there were no matters which had been the subject of call-in.

### **COS.5/03 THE FORWARD PLAN – ITEMS RELEVANT TO COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager presented report LDS.6/02 highlighting the Forward Plan (1 January 2003 to 30 April 2003) issues which fell within the ambit of this Committee. He outlined the present position on each matter for the benefit of Members.

RESOLVED – That the issues contained within the Forward Plan for 1 January 2003 to 30 April 2003 and which fell within the ambit of this Committee be noted.

## **COS.6/03 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager presented the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2002/03, which took into account matters scheduled to be dealt with by this Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee was undertaking the scoping of the Democratic Engagement Best Value Review and it was hoped that that exercise would be completed at the next meeting of that Committee. The Overview and Scrutiny Manager recommended to Members that they should be proactively involved in that Review, and in all such Reviews, and an item would be included on the Agenda of all future meetings of this Committee.

As regards Performance Monitoring, it was anticipated that a progress report on Crime and Disorder Performance Indicators would be submitted to the March meeting of this Committee, at which time the Police statistician would be in attendance to answer Members' questions.

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager reminded Members that the next step as regards the Theatre/Arts Centre Review was consideration of the feasibility study on the Lonsdale Trust, but it was not yet clear when that document would become available.

During consideration of the Crime and Disorder Draft Action Plan Members had previously asked that representatives of the Youth Offending Team and Probation Service be invited to attend a future meeting of this Committee. The Overview and Scrutiny Manager indicated that a scheme to address the issue of prolific offending was now coming through and he therefore thought it prudent to wait and see how that progressed before inviting those agencies to a future meeting. The Community Safety Co-ordinator indicated his agreement to that course of action.

A Member queried whether a report had been submitted on drug addiction on housing estates and drugs in the City Centre.

The Community Safety Co-ordinator advised that the Crime and Disorder Strategy had been presented to Council and copies placed in all Group Offices. He could, however, provide copies should Members so wish. He added that it was intended that problem solving exercises would be conducted on each theme identified under the Strategy for 2002-2005 and that the Strategy alluded to all areas of Cumbria.

A Member questioned whether the Drug and Alcohol Advisory Group was involved and the Community Safety Co-ordinator confirmed that it was and that he was a member of that Group.

**RESOLVED – That the Work Programme be noted.**

## **COS.7/03 FOOD SAFETY PERFORMANCE**

Pursuant to Minute COS.151/02(a), the Head of Environmental Protection Services presented report EP.04/03 concerning the City Council's performance on Food Safety Inspections.

The Head of Environmental Protection Services reminded Members of the background to the matter, when it had been made clear that the Food Safety Team's ability to meet targets

set internally as well as by external agencies, such as the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Health and Safety Executive, relied upon the Team having an adequate number of suitably qualified staff at all times i.e. four qualified Officers.

Since the last meeting of the Committee in November 2002, another member of staff had left the Council's employment as a result of which it had been necessary to redirect the workload to high risk premises. Consequently during the period October - December 2002 performance in respect of planned inspections was:

80.7% high risk premises

16.6% others.

As regards performance, the Head of Environmental Protection Services considered 85% - 87% to be a legitimate target figure. Neither the FSA nor himself believed it to be physically possible to reach the 100% inspection rate claimed by certain Local Authorities and those Authorities were now subject to audit.

He then outlined a number of options designed to maintain and improve performance levels in the future, namely:

- The FSA and Local Authorities Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) were currently considering alternative enforcement strategies for those food businesses which posed the lowest risk to public health. The aim was to free up Officer time to concentrate on higher risk businesses.
- Implementation of any of their suggested strategies at Carlisle would remove less than 4 businesses per month from the Inspection programme and would therefore have a minimal effect on available resources. Resources would still be required to deal with these businesses by alternative enforcement options.
- Additional suitably qualified staff within the Team would help ensure that higher levels of performance could be achieved. That would apply to both statutory food safety and health and safety enforcement activity. Importantly it would also allow resources to be used in the Council's development, co-ordination and implementation of Health and Well Being Strategies within the community and the public health agenda of the Primary Care Trust.
- Suitably qualified staff may be either Environmental Health Officers (EHO) capable of carrying out the full range of Environmental Health duties, or Technical Officers who may be less well qualified and therefore only able to inspect low risk food businesses or carry out more routine tasks.
- Nationally there was a diminishing pool of EHOs and falling numbers of students enrolling on Environmental Health degrees. Until recently, Carlisle regularly sponsored a student EHO and had usually been able to offer them a full-time post at the end of their four year training. Funding for that had been removed two years previously.

The Head of Environmental Protection Services indicated that the cost of the above options, based on current salary levels and inclusive of on costs, would be:

Additional EHO (SO 1/2)) £30,000 per year

Technical Officers (AP 4/5) £22,000 per year

Student EHO £10,000 per year (for 4 years)

Each of the options would, however, have to be funded by way of a budget bid/supplementary estimate as the existing resources of Environmental Protection Services were inadequate to cover such an expansion in personnel.

In considering the matter, Members raised a number of issues to which the Head of Environmental Protection Services responded:

*What would the impact be of one additional Technical Officer as opposed to two student EHOs?*

As regards food, a student could not legally undertake inspections until they were fully qualified and therefore that avenue would not resolve the day to day inspection issues. However, if Carlisle gained a qualified student and a vacancy arose it would be possible for that person to take up such a post, thus removing the need to go through an advertisement/selection process.

Ideally, I would be looking for a Technical Officer, together with the reintroduction of student sponsorship.

*To what did the increase in workload relate - Foot and Mouth or number of new premises for example?*

There had been a large increase in food outlets from 1,100 - 1,400. The most significant increase, however, related to increasing regulations from the FSA, particularly three monthly inspections of meat cutting premises.

*What needed to be done to meet the Council's statutory obligations, and was the Council meeting the same?*

The FSA had not clarified their expectations of Local Authorities, but it was believed that an 87% inspection rate would be satisfactory. The FSA was in the process of undertaking a large audit programme and Carlisle expected to be audited shortly.

Clearly the Council must undertake inspections to satisfy the requirements of the FSA and, should it fail to do so, the Agency could remove the enforcement role, commission consultants to undertake the same, and charge the Council accordingly.

As stated above, during the period October - December the inspection rate for high risk premises was satisfactory, but had dropped as regards other premises, and that was cause for concern.

*Would it be possible to redirect staff from the other two Sections to maintain food safety inspection performance?*

There had also been significant increases in workload in these areas e.g. as regards abandoned vehicles, contaminated land, air quality monitoring, etc. The Sections were therefore severely stretched as it was.

*Was it not a question of prioritising the workload?*

The Health and Safety Executive was concerned at the failure of Local Authorities nationally as regards health and safety inspections and therefore the Council was trying to address that area which involved 1,400 premises.

*Was it easier to recruit Technical Officers as opposed to EHOs, could Technical Officers become EHOs and was there merit in supporting people through such a training process?*

Whilst that had been done in the past, experience showed that once a person became a qualified EHO they became increasingly marketable and often moved on. If, however, a Technical Officer extended their knowledge it could prove to be more applicable to the Carlisle area.

Members then suggested that the Executive be asked to look at the issue in detail, in particular, possible funding of a Technical Officer and sponsorship of a student EHO. Further the Head of Environmental Protection Services be asked to stress to the Executive the implications for the Council of staffing shortages in that area.

A Member sought clarity on this Committee's remit, commenting that he understood that to be the highlighting of problems associated with food safety inspection performance. He added that that performance was acceptable when the Food Safety Team had a full complement of staff, with problems occurring only when vacancies arose.

A Member added that if this Committee was concerned at the current staffing situation within the Team that should be flagged up to the Executive with a view to implementing the best way forward.

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager suggested that a progress report should be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee and the Head of Environmental Protection Services advised that six months time would be an appropriate period.

RESOLVED – (1) That this Committee's concerns as regards the staffing levels within the Food Safety Team be conveyed to the Executive.

(2) That the Head of Environmental Protection Services be requested to submit a progress report to this Committee in six months time.

### **COS.8/03 COMMUNITY SAFETY BEST VALUE REVIEW**

The Community Safety Co-ordinator presented report ECD.02/03 enclosing a draft report prepared by Nacro Crime and Social Policy, a firm of consultants commissioned to assist the City Council in the development and completion of its Best Value Review of Community Safety, together with a draft Action Plan.

The report detailed the work undertaken to date on the Best Value Review which had been based upon the four 'Cs' of best value - challenge, compare, consult and compete.

The Community Safety Co-ordinator outlined the content of the Consultant's report and the recommendations contained therein, which related closely to the scope of the Review.

The overall assessment was that Carlisle City Council provided a good service that would develop and improve in the short-term provided those recommendations were fully implemented. Some progress had been made during the process of conducting the Review in that there was now a joint CDRP with Eden District Council and some of the issues exposed during the Review process had been identified within the Carlisle and Eden Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy.

Partnerships should develop a strategy for communicating with local people, paying particular attention to those living in areas of greatest need and/or who were most vulnerable, to ensure they could make people aware of attempts to reduce anti-social behaviour, including progress and successes.

The Council was working well with other partners to reduce crime with some worthwhile initiatives and crime levels were falling in line with national trends. However, the Council was not joining up the work of its internal services sufficiently to deliver on corporate or local strategy aims in reducing crime.

Throughout the consultation process it was apparent that anti-social behaviour was the primary concern of those who were consulted. The success of Carlisle and Eden's joint Crime and Disorder Strategy may depend on the partnerships' ability to effectively tackle that issue and be seen to be doing so. A clear definition of anti-social behaviour needed to be developed and communicated, agencies needed to be clear what it did and did not constitute.

The Review supported the intention to appoint a dedicated Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator as indicated within Carlisle and Eden's Crime and Disorder Strategy and the decision to incorporate community intelligence into the decision making process. The newly appointed co-ordinator, in a dedicated role, would be in a position to devise a Strategy to ensure that aim was developed and actively applied.

The City Council had made a number of service specific improvements, including conducting a consultation process with residents to engage them in Community Safety issues. However, internal consultation with service departments proved difficult and raised the question of how high profile the issue of community safety actually was across the organisation.

The Review recognised the level of expertise that existed within the City Council and sought to use and build upon it during the course of the Review. The Review must also take into account the views of service users and the resulting recommendations sought to balance organisational aims and objectives with operational needs and requirements. By progressing the recommendations of the report there would be a more efficient and effective Community Safety function over time.

The Community Safety Co-ordinator then introduced Sergeant Andy Baines who worked in the Best Value Office and was a member of the Best Value Review Team.

In considering the matter, Members raised the following issues to which the Community Safety Co-ordinator and Sergeant Baines responded:

*The Consultant's report is difficult to follow and includes a great deal of repetition.*

That was acknowledged.

*At Recommendation 6 it states that "Elected Members must challenge any cursory reference to community safety within future committee reports to assist the mainstreaming of community safety into corporate business." The reality was that all Departments need to look at that on a day to day and strategic basis also.*

*6.1 Action raised the issue of training. What would that entail?*

Training would not necessarily be a major issue, but rather a change in the way of thinking. Work was being done on a continuous County wide training programme. It should be noted, however, that the scope to undertake training for all staff depended upon the level of funding which could be obtained during the financial year 2003-04.

*Concern existed around the labelling of areas as hotspots which may stigmatise them and worsen their prospects. The effectiveness of the Hotspots Task Group was also an issue.*

"Hotspots" was an overused phrase. The challenge for the Review had been to implement a structure which made reference to hotspots and worked to reduce offences in these locations without tightly defining them.

Hotspots were now looked at on a six monthly basis and based on selecting the top one or two locations according to Police incident data. Currock and Upperby were the first areas selected for priority under the Review.

*Who will feed in data as regards Drugs and Alcohol for the rest of the County?*

The Council was not solely responsible for drugs and alcohol on estates. It was part of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership which was reviewing how these issues were tackled and the manner by which data was collected. A lot of good data was available via the Website.

Members then expressed their appreciation of the considerable amount of work undertaken by the Community Safety Co-ordinator and Sergeant Baines, and looked forward to monitoring the Action Plan in due course.

Sergeant Baines added that people acknowledged that the Community Safety Co-ordinator and himself worked together and the City Council's commitment to Community Safety was recognised regionally as good practice.

RESOLVED - That the draft report and draft Action Plan on the Community Safety Best Value Review be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, for onward transmission to the Executive and Council subject to that Committee's agreement.

### **COS.9/03 REVIEW OF ADVICE AGENCIES**

Pursuant to Minute COS.160/02, the Head of Community Support presented a revised report of the Town Clerk and Chief Executive (TC.224/02) which considered options for making budget savings on Advice Services. Appended to the report were notes of a meeting with the Legal Services Commission which had taken place on 3 December 2002 by way of consultation as part of the review process.

The Executive had considered the matter on 19 December 2002 and a copy of their decision had been circulated, namely:

"That the Town Clerk and Chief Executive's report and the notes of the meeting with the Legal Services Commission be noted and considered as part of the deliberations on the Budget".

For completeness, the Overview and Scrutiny Manager advised that the Executive's draft Budget Resolution provided no savings against Advice Agencies during forthcoming year (2003/04), but £80,000 in the years 2004/05 and 2005/06.

A Member sought clarification of the position as regards the provision of adequate notice of changes in funding.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Portfolio Holder for Community Activities confirmed that the Council had previously entered into three year funding agreements with the Law Centre and any budgetary decisions would not break previous agreements. No such agreements were in place as regards the other Agencies.

The Member further queried therefore whether the threat of savings remained as far as the other agencies were concerned.

The Portfolio Holder reiterated that only the Law Centre had such an agreement and Members would be aware when a decision was reached on the matter.

A Member then stressed that there were linkages with the Customer Services Best Value Review.

A Member further noted that the service provided by the BAC had changed recently by converting the drop in sessions to appointment based sessions, and queried what level of saving would be achieved thereby.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the change had been purely administrative and undertaken quite correctly by the Manager.

RESOLVED – That the report and additional information provided be noted, together with the response of the Portfolio Holder to questions by Members of this Committee.

[The meeting ended at 3.20 pm]