

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**THURSDAY 6 JUNE 2002 AT 2.00 PM**

PRESENT: Councillor Knapton (Chairman), Councillors Boaden, Crookdake (substitute for Councillor Parsons), S Fisher, T G Hodgson, Morton, Pattinson and C Watson (substitute for Councillor Atkinson).

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors Bloxham, Ellis and L Fisher attended the meeting as observers.

COS.72/02 WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting six students from the Cumbria Institute of the Arts who were present to observe the proceedings of the meeting.

COS.73/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Atkinson and Mrs Parsons.

COS.74/02 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meetings held on 21 and 26 February, 21 and 26 March and 4 April 2002 were signed by the Chairman as a true record of the meetings.

COS.75/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING DECLARATIONS OF 'THE PARTY WHIP')

There were declarations of interest affecting any item on the Agenda.

COS.76/02 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

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

COS.77/02 MONITORING OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy presented Report TC.106/02 highlighting the Forward Plan (1 June to 30 September 2002) issues which fell within the ambit of this Committee.

Following a request from a Member, the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy undertook to liaise with the relevant lead Officers on the Forward Plan key decisions relating to the

Review of Hostel Provision and the Housing and Supporting People Strategies, in order that this Committee could be included in the consultation process.

RESOLVED – That the issues contained within the Forward Plan for 1 June to 30 September 2002 and which fell within the ambit of this Committee be noted.

COS.78/02 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy submitted the initial Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2002/03, which took into account matters scheduled to be dealt with by this Committee.

He indicated that the programme for this Committee would be developed at a workshop session to be held after this meeting to decide upon review/inquiry areas for 2002/03.

In addition, items for consideration under Best Value Reviews and Performance Monitoring would be developed in consultation with the relevant Officers.

RESOLVED – That the initial Work Programme be noted.

COS.79/02 CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

THE CONSTITUTION

Pursuant to Minute COS.61/02, a copy of the Executive's response to this Committee's request that an appropriate timescale be identified in which to undertake a full review of the City Council's Constitution, with a view to recommendations being made to the Annual Council Meeting in May 2003, had been circulated.

The Executive had indicated that they were willing to review the Constitution in the current municipal year, the scale of the Review to be agreed.

RESOLVED – That the position be noted.

COS.80/02 BEREAVEMENT SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Director of Leisure and Community Development submitted a comprehensive report on the Best Value Fundamental Performance Review in respect of Bereavement Services. The report identified the key service issues arising from the Review and included an Action Plan for improvement.

Members gave detailed consideration to the key service issues and Action Plan items arising from the Review. The Corporate Best Value Officer was present at the meeting and submitted her observations on the various issues.

The main points arising were:

(a) Service Standards

On Grounds Maintenance, the Best Value Officer considered that

- i. there was a need for formal consultation with Carlisle Works to develop working relationships;

- ii. cost comparisons for the Grounds Maintenance aspect of the service should be undertaken with other Local Authorities. Information could be sought through the Institute of Burial Authorities or the City Council's family group of comparator Authorities;
- iii. in order to satisfy the competition element of the Review, consideration needed to be given to market testing the Grounds Maintenance aspect of the Bereavement Service.

The Director of Leisure and Community Development indicated that action could be taken to carry out the cost comparisons. He did point out that the standards of maintenance at Carlisle were very high and comparisons with other Authorities' services may not always be on a like for like basis. With regard to the possibility of market testing the Grounds Maintenance element of the Bereavement Service, he considered that this had broader issues for the Local Authority as a whole as to how the City Council wished to market test a range of services in the future.

The Best Value Officer indicated that, in the Improvement Plan, there were specific targets to reduce dog fouling in the cemetery and to reduce the volume of plastic flowers in the cemetery by a specific percentage over three years. She considered that measuring performance in these areas would be difficult, and that further thought should be given to how these issues could be best addressed in the Improvement Plan.

(b) Environmental

Proposals to introduce a scheme to recycle wreath components were supported by Members.

(c) Financial

Members noted that, in the light of "The Price is Right," the Council had already adopted a policy of increasing charges for Bereavement Services above the rate of inflation to reach a position over time where the real costs of service provision are more closely matched by the charges levied. It was noted that the Executive had, at their meeting on 27 May 2002, further indicated that options be investigated to bring into balance the income and expenditure of the Bereavement Services over the course of the next few years. Members considered that the timescale for doing this would be significant for people just above benefit levels who would be affected most if charges were increased sharply over the next couple of years.

Members asked the Director of Leisure and Community Development to include further detailed information on the future use of the Capital Fund.

Members also considered that there should be information included on the support and grants available for people on lower incomes in relation to arranging funerals.

(d) Asset Management

With regard to the period of grave rights, it was noted that public opinion was divided on the issue of reducing the term of grave rights from 50 to 25/30 years with a substantial minority (39%) believing that the cost of this should continue to be borne by the Council Tax. Members considered that investigations could be made into a lesser reduction in the term of grave rights and the possibility of differential pricing for various terms. Any re-testing of public opinion on this issue would need to identify those people who did not agree with any reduction in the term of grave rights from 50 years.

With regard to potential income streams, the Director of Leisure and Community Development was asked to investigate whether other Local Authorities operated any schemes which may be suitable for operation in Carlisle.

(e) Operational

The Best Value Officer indicated that the Carlisle Works Ground Maintenance Team and the Bereavement Services Team operated separately, which meant that there was no joined up service for users. Investigations should be made into formal negotiations with Carlisle Works to improve the service.

With regard to options for service provision, the Best Value Officer indicated that a number of other Local Authorities had chosen to deliver Cemetery and Crematorium services through the private sector. Questionnaires had been sent out to certain Local Authorities which had gone down this route in order that comparison information could be obtained. However, there had been a poor response to the questionnaire.

Whilst Members did not believe that the City Council wished to outsource the Bereavement Services, it was agreed that, for the sake of completeness in the Best Value Review, comparison information should be sought.

Members supported proposals to improve publicity for the Bereavement Services.

(f) Funeral Service Provision

Members considered that it was worth exploring the development of a Quality Assurance Scheme to develop a local charter mark on quality criteria for the provision of funeral services. The possibility of transparent pricing and the level of service which could be expected from a Funeral Director was supported. It would be important to ensure that the City Council was seen to be endorsing quality standards and not particular Funeral Directors, and that joining any scheme was voluntary.

The Best Value Officer indicated that there was also an issue in the provision of funerals for people with certain religious beliefs where there was a requirement for burial to take place within 24 hours. If this meant that a weekend service was required then the costs charged by the City Council were greater than for a weekday service. The Director of Leisure and Community Development undertook to investigate how other Local Authorities approached this issue.

It was agreed that detailed information on arranging funeral services should be distributed to Advice Agencies and Solicitors' offices.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the Director of Leisure and Community Development be requested to consider the issues raised above, and submit a final draft report on the Bereavement Services Best Value Review to a future meeting of this Committee.

COS.81/02 DRAFT COMMUNITY SPORTS DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Director of Leisure and Community Development submitted Report LCD.16/02 containing the Draft Community Sports Development Plan which flowed from the Leisuretime Best Value Review which recognised the need to develop sports activities for young people in the community (rural and urban) in addition to the central facilities. The document was a draft costed plan for the delivery of that programme and it was anticipated that implementation would be funded from savings arising from the Leisuretime tender.

The Principal Sport and Recreation Officer attended the meeting and gave a presentation to Members on the content of the Plan and answered Members' questions.

RESOLVED – That the Draft Community Sports Development Plan be noted so far as this Committee is concerned.

COS.82/02 SPORT AND RECREATION SECTION SERVICE PLAN

The Director of Leisure and Community Development submitted the Service Plan for the Sport and Recreation Section.

The Principal Sport and Recreation Officer gave a presentation to the Committee on the content of the Plan and answered Members' questions.

RESOLVED – That the Service Plan for the Sport and Recreation Section be noted.

(The meeting ended at 3.43 pm)