

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SPECIAL)

WEDNESDAY 24 OCTOBER 2001 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Ellis (Chairman), Councillors Boaden, Collier (substitute for Councillor Toole), S Fisher, Knapton, J Mallinson, McMillan and Weber.

ALSO PRESENT: Mr Robin Macleod (Chief Executive of the North Cumbria Health Authority);

Councillor Bloxham (Executive Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing);

Councillor G Prest (Executive Portfolio Holder for Infrastructure Environment and Transport).

Councillors Firth, Geddes, L Fisher, Jefferson, Mitchelson, J Prest and Pattinson attended the meeting and were allowed to ask questions in relation to the discussion under Minute No COS.22/01.

COS.20/01 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Toole.

COS.21/01 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING DECLARATIONS OF "THE PARTY WHIP")

There were no declarations affecting any item on the Agenda.

COS.22/01 SHIFTING THE BALANCE – NHS REFORM

Referring to Minute COS.12/01 of 11 October 2001, the Committee met Mr Robin Macleod, Chief Executive of the North Cumbria Health Authority who had been invited to attend the meeting to give the Health Authority's perspective on the Department of Health consultation document "Shifting the Balance of Power in Cumbria and Lancashire".

Mr Macleod indicated that the proposals in the consultation document formed part of the modernisation of the NHS and which aimed to shift the balance of power from the centre to local people. He indicated that existing Health Authorities would be dissolved on 31 March 2002 and be replaced by larger Strategic Health Authorities which would lead the strategic development of the local health service and performance manage Primary Care Trusts and NHS Trusts.

He indicated that the Government was consulting on a proposal to merge the existing North Cumbria Health Authority with the Morecambe Bay Health Authority and three Health

Authorities in Lancashire to form one of the new Strategic Health Authorities.

He further reported that existing NHS Trusts would continue to provide most secondary care and specialist services working within delivery agreements with Primary Care Trusts.

Three Primary Care Trusts had been set up locally, covering Carlisle and District, West Cumbria and the Eden Valley. The Primary Care Trusts would become the lead NHS organisation in assessing health needs on a local level and have funding to secure all health services and to promote health improvement programmes. They would also provide most community services and lead on the development of all primary care services. Primary Care Trusts would be expected to forge new partnerships with local communities and lead the NHS contribution to joint working with Local Government and other partners.

With regard to staffing issues, Mr Macleod indicated that, locally, 90% of existing staff had been already been transferred to one the Primary Care Trusts to ensure continuation of employment after 31 March 2002 when the Health Authority would be dissolved.

Mr Macleod stressed that the long standing clinical relationships between North Cumbria and the North East would continue and that patients from North Cumbria would still be referred to hospitals in the North East for specialist treatment.

With regard to the proposed new Strategic Health Authority for Cumbria and Lancashire, Mr Macleod indicated that it seemed likely that the Headquarters of the new Authority would be in the Preston area.

Members then asked Mr Macleod a number of questions and the following points emerged:

(a) The North Cumbria Health Authority had made representations for North Cumbria to be linked to a Strategic Health Authority which covered the North East rather than Lancashire, particularly given the existing and long standing clinical arrangements between North Cumbria and specialist hospitals in the North East. However, this argument had not been accepted by the Government who were looking to base Strategic Health Authorities on existing Local Government regional boundaries.

(b) Regarding the siting of the Headquarters for the new Strategic Health Authority, Mr Macleod understood that a strong business case would be made for Preston.

(c) Mr Macleod confirmed that it would be a matter for the Primary Care Trusts as to where specialist services were bought in from. He understood that there was no change proposed to existing practice to source specialist services from the North East.

(d) There was a myriad of arrangements being proposed in relation to patient involvement and which would replace existing Community Health Councils. Mr Macleod considered that it was difficult to see how the new arrangements would improve on the existing Community Health Councils.

(e) It was understood that the three Primary Care Trusts in North Cumbria would remain separate until 2004 at least. There was currently no optimum size for a Primary Care Trust although the Government was currently looking at this issue. This may lead to the real possibility of merges eventually.

(f) Members considered that the public health function needed to be adequately resourced.

(g) Members considered that it was important for North Cumbria to be properly represented with a "strong voice" on the Strategic Health Authority, particularly if Preston is chosen as the Headquarters.

The Chairman thanked Mr Macleod for attending the meeting and for his informative comments.

A letter from Wetheral Parish Council indicating their views on the consultation document had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED – (1) That the following observations of this Committee be forwarded to the Executive for consideration when formulating a response to the consultation document:-

(a) Strategic Health Authority boundaries should be broadly in line with clinical networks, basing them on artificial Regional Government boundaries was not considered to be appropriate. This Committee strongly believes that North Cumbria should be linked to the North East at Strategic Health Authority level.

(b) All options for change in the consultation documents are considered to be retrograde and it is difficult to see users gaining anything from them.

(c) The maximum number of non-Executive Members should be sought for North Cumbria on the Strategic Health Authority to ensure that the views and interests of the people of North Cumbria are properly represented. This was seen as particularly important if the Headquarters of the new Authority is in Preston.

(2) That the letter from Wetheral Parish Council be noted.

COS.23/01 LEISURETIME DRAFT REVISED IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Referring to Minute COS.19/01 of 17 October 2001, Councillor Bloxham, Executive Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, and Councillor G Prest, Executive Portfolio Holder for Infrastructure Environment and Transport, attended the meeting to answer questions from Members of the Committee in relation to various aspects of the Leisuretime Draft Revised Improvement Plan.

Members of the Committee were invited to put questions to Councillor Bloxham.

A Member referred to paragraph 3.5.4 of the Revised Improvement Plan document (page 23 refers) under the Sports Facility Strategy which stated "Enhance and promote Carlisle as a venue for county, regional and national competition".

The Member then referred to the Policy Statement of the Executive which had been reproduced on pages 31 and 32 of the Revised Improvement Plan document and which stated the principles the Executive would have regard to when formulating the Council's budget for 2002/03. He drew attention to the fact that next year's budget would be one of consolidation and that the Executive intended to pursue no other major capital projects in excess of £50,000 unless an appropriate alternative method of funding could be identified.

Given these financial constraints, the Member asked how it was intended to deliver paragraph 3.5.4 of the Sports Facilities Strategy to enhance and promote Carlisle as a venue for county, regional and national competition.

Councillor Bloxham indicated that the Executive Budget principles had been referred to Overview and Scrutiny Committees for comment. The Leisuretime Improvement Plan document had been written by the Director of Leisure and Community Development in response to a Best Value Inspector's initial comments on a Best Value Review of Leisuretime services. The Improvement Plan document had yet to be considered by the Executive.

Councillor Bloxham indicated that a decision on budgetary requirements to provide funding to implement all or part of the Action Plan for Leisuretime would need to be taken by the Executive. Alternative funding sources, such as Lottery Bids and working with external partners, would also be pursued.

A Member sought clarification with regard to the Executive's budget principles on spending bids under which Officers were required to identify a potential saving equivalent to each new spending bid they proposed. The Member asked where the savings were expected to come from.

Councillor Bloxham indicated that equivalent savings would need to be made across the service area as long as those savings were realistic and deliverable.

Members were then given the opportunity to put questions to Councillor G Prest in relation to the current charging policy for car parking at The Sands, given the implications for users of the Centre.

Councillor G Prest reminded the Committee that the car park at The Sands was a public long stay car park and not specifically a Sands' users car park. There had been an ongoing issue over the use of the car park since The Sands Centre had been opened. Approximately 3 years ago, a scheme had been introduced whereby users of the Centre were recompensed 30p of their car parking fee when parking in The Sands car park. Councillor G Prest indicated that he had met Officers to investigate options to improve the current position for Centre users and would be arranging for a report to be submitted to the Executive in due course.

A Member considered that this issue should be looked at corporately. He considered that if car park charges were discouraging people from using The Sands Centre, then this was a false economy for the City Council.

Councillor G Prest indicated that he was investigating this issue corporately. He understood that an average of 37 people a day claimed the 30p refund on car parking fees at present. He pointed out that this car park was the nearest long stay car park to the centre of Carlisle and provided £183,000 income to the City Council per annum. He pointed out that whilst there was a frequent argument that parking was free at private health clubs, there was a significant membership fee to pay whereas The Sands activities were on a pay as you go basis.

A Member considered that any financial implications of changes to the arrangements to assist Sands users should fall upon the management of The Sands and not be a general subsidy with the burden falling on the Council Tax payer.

A Member asked whether consideration could be given to improving public transport access to The Sands.

Councillor G Prest indicated that he had raised this issue in the past with Stagecoach but they were not enthusiastic as it would add to their running times. He would raise this issue

again at a future meeting with Stagecoach representatives.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Leisuretime Best Value Fundamental Performance Review Revised Improvement Plan document be commended to the Executive and their comments be awaited.

(2) That it is noted that the Executive would be exploring ways around the financial limitations of the Executive's Budget principles in order that improvements proposed in the document's action plan can begin to be implemented.

(The meeting ended at 3.30 pm)

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