

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2002 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Ellis (Chairman), Councillors Boaden, Mrs Fisher, Knapton, McMillan, Mrs Prest (as substitute for Councillor Mallinson J) and Mrs Southward (as substitute for Councillor Weber).

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Bloxham attended the meeting as an observer.

COS.27/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Mallinson, Toole and Weber.

An apology for absence was also submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Rutherford, Chairman of the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in respect of Agenda item A.5 – Smartcards Review.

COS.28/02 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meetings held on 8 and 10 January 2002 be noted, subject to noting that under Minute COS.11/02 the possibility of issuing commemorative coins to children to mark the occasion of the Queen's Golden Jubilee had not been resolved, but rather suggested by a Member and it had been asked that that suggestion be recorded.

COS.29/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING DECLARATIONS OF "THE PARTY WHIP")

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

COS.30/02 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

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

COS.31/02 MONITORING OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy presented report TC.45/02 highlighting Forward Plan (1 March to 30 June 2002) issues which fell within the ambit of this Committee.

He informed Members that the Bereavement Services Best Value Review Action Plan and the Adoption of a Cultural Strategy would be presented to this Committee in April and May respectively. In addition, the Council's draft Corporate Plan would be brought to Overview and Scrutiny by way of a Workshop for Members.

With regard to the Bereavement Services Best Value Review Action Plan, a Member commented that the Forward Plan showed that the decision was due to be taken between 12 March and 31 March 2002 and queried whether that was in fact correct. The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy indicated that it appeared to be incorrect and that he would take the matter up with the Leader and the Director of Leisure and Community Development.

RESOLVED – That the issues contained within the Forward Plan for 1 March to 30 June 2002 and which fell within the ambit of this Committee be noted, subject to the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy clarifying the position with regard to the Bereavement Services Best Value Review Action Plan.

COS.32/02 WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy submitted an Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2001/02, which took into account matters scheduled to be dealt with by this Committee.

RESOLVED – That the 2001/02 Work Programme for the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

COS.33/02 REFERENCE FROM THE EXECUTIVE – CARLISLE SOUTH SURE START – INTERIM STEERING GROUP

Pursuant to Minute COS.4/02, copies of the Executive's response to this Committee's comments regarding the Carlisle South Sure Start – Interim Steering Group had been circulated.

RESOLVED – That the response of the Executive be noted.

COS.34/02 SMARTCARDS REVIEW

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr John Littleton from Newcastle City Council and Chairman of North East Regional Smartcard Consortium (NERSC) which was currently running a development project concerning Smartcards.

Mr Littleton then gave a presentation to Members. He commented that Smartcards were multi-functional and, in practical terms, allowed the user to prove identity and have access to a range of services, converted a service user into a customer, and could be used to sustain e-Government and e-Commerce.

The Government was committed to delivering e-Government and improved customer service, and Smartcards were seen as a key enabler in the modernisation process. To that end the Government was now producing a White Paper on usage/deployment of card technology. In a recent statement the DTLR commented that "Local Authorities are expected to work in partnership with each other, other local public services and with the private sector to offer joined-up services and meet the challenge of the e-revolution cost effectively." By implication that meant that if authorities wished to secure Government sponsorship they must work on a partnership basis to provide citizen centric solutions.

Mr Littleton outlined the background to and makeup of NERSC. He commented that its

objectives were to provide a citizen centric regional Smartcard and provided details of the outline Business Case to achieve the same.

The North East was looking to plan major roll out by September 2003, subject to achieving the right level of sponsorship via Government, RDA and private sector investment. The best form of integration was felt to be with transport, but would also introduce school management systems and Local Authority leisure centre management.

Mr Littleton provided details of the procurement process, commenting that it was likely to be a company limited by shareholding because of the potential of business benefit. Card issuing stations and a regional Centre of Excellence may not be included.

NERSC's Implementation Plan included:

- the appointment of financial advisers January 2002
- the introduction of pilot schemes February – March 2002 (Government money had been secured to support the same and 10,000 cards had been issued)
- the production of business plans and financial strategy June 2002
- the issue of OJEC notice (to commence procurement process) July 2002
- the roll out of the major scheme (1.75 million cards in the North East) September 2003 and
- the formation of a Centre of Excellence (further planning and development of the regional scheme) October 2003.

Mr Littleton indicated that Associate Membership of NERSC enabled organisations to be stakeholders in planning and development, have access to Outline Business Case results, access to pilot software (avoiding further procurement) and the use of back office systems, the cost of which was £2,000 per annum to be reviewed each year. He added that East Ridding had taken up such membership.

Mr Littleton then tabled Pilot Project Cost Estimates based on 10,000 cards, together with copies of his presentation and sample cards.

In response to Members' questions, Mr Littleton commented that –

The unit cost for the issue of 2 million cards (covering transport, schools and leisure) together with the infrastructure required to sustain them would total £2m per year. That figure did not, however, include Officer time. Since the development of Smartcards was a prime target set by the Government to Local Authorities, it was anticipated that it would be possible to attract 50% capital investment from the Government. Local Authority, RDA and private sector investment would also be required. The procuring body would sell advertising space and, if rolling out vast numbers of cards, would look to attract national organisations. Cards would be issued free of charge to users with the service provider bearing the cost. It would be necessary to issue children's cards as they grew and that would be reviewed annually.

As regards data protection, it should be noted that card technology was secure and the Centre of Excellence/controlling body would deal with that issue and be able to allay any

fears relating thereto.

The technology was already in place and there had been no hardware problems to date. The challenge may be getting people and particularly children to value the cards. However, since all children had access to concessionary travel which would be linked, it was hoped that that would be enough to get them to value their cards.

There was no limit to the range of services which could be included. Cards could be used to store credit and be recharged whenever necessary. There would be a variety of social benefits e.g. cards could be used as a form of banking for those who did not have bank accounts and, because they were discrete, could remove the stigma associated to free school meals.

Although early reactions had been favourable, careful planning was required and staff must be available to deal with problems. Carlisle could develop its own scheme but if the Council chose to become an associate member of an alternative scheme costs would be shared. For a small investment it would be possible to undertake a pilot scheme and make a judgement based on the success/problems arising therefrom.

The Chairman thanked Mr Littleton for his informative and interesting presentation.

The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy indicated that Southampton City Council was also running a development project based on a city card and that may be more applicable to Carlisle. He suggested that he and the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer should produce a comparative analysis of that project and the North East scheme and Members welcomed that course of action.

RESOLVED – (1) That the presentation be noted.

(2) That the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy and the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer be requested to submit a report to the next meeting of this Committee providing a comparative analysis of the Southampton and North East Smartcard development projects.

COS.35/02 COMMUNITY SAFETY BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Community Safety Co-ordinator was present at the meeting and explained to Members that the Crime and Disorder Audit document had been delayed and it had not therefore been possible to submit it to this meeting. The Audit would, however, be available to the public within ten days and he would make it available to all Members as soon as possible.

The Community Safety Co-ordinator indicated that he could give a presentation on the draft Strategy to Members at the special meeting to be held on 26 February 2002 and Members welcomed that course of action.

RESOLVED – That the Community Safety Co-ordinator be requested to give a presentation

on the draft Strategy to Members at the special meeting of this Committee to be held on 26 February 2002.

COS.36/02 STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR RAFFLES ESTATE

The Head of Housing Provision presented report H.19/02 concerning strategic planning for the Raffles Estate. He indicated that the report had been compiled in consultation with the Raffles Steering Group, comprising organisations working on Raffles. It was further informed by the recent Raffles Residents Survey which highlighted the needs of the Raffles community.

The Head of Housing Provision summarised the history of the estate. He then provided details of proposed actions by which the Council could more fully contribute to sustaining the Raffles community.

Further to the review of community buildings on Raffles, undertaken by Len Cockcroft and Joan Ellis Consultants, the Head of Community Support provided detailed recommendations on the future use of each of those buildings for consideration by Members. He then outlined the financial and staffing implications emanating from those arrangements and asked that Members confirm their agreement and recommend the Executive to approve the actions outlined.

The Head of Housing Provision, Head of Community Support and Head of Tenancy Services then responded to Members' questions.

In considering the matter, Members welcomed what was a very good report.

RESOLVED – (1) That report H.19/02 be noted.

(2) That this Committee agrees the proposed actions as detailed in sections 2 and 3 of the report and recommends that the Executive approve the same.

COS.37/02 BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HOUSING DEBT RECOVERY – ACTION PLAN PROGRESS

The Head of Tenancy Services presented report H.13/02 concerning the implementation of measures to allow continuous improvement of the service to prevent, manage and recover rent arrears from Council tenants.

The Head of Tenancy Services commented on the background to the matter, together with progress to date in achieving the aims of the Action Plan which were to be implemented over an 18 month period. He then outlined the revised Plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report and responded to Members' questions.

RESOLVED – That progress achieved to date be noted and the revised Action Plan and

Timetable, attached at Appendix 1 to report H.13/02, be approved.

COS.38/02 RENT ARREARS RECOVERY – POLICY STATEMENT

The Head of Tenancy Services presented report H.9/02 providing a formal policy statement on the recovery of rent arrears from current Council tenants, the requirement for which had been highlighted under the Best Value Review of Debt Recovery. That need had been further reinforced by good practice guidelines issued by the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Federation of Housing Associations, together with a joint report produced by Scottish Homes and the Accounts Commission in Scotland.

The Head of Tenancy Services indicated that the evidence led the Review Team to conclude that the rent arrears prevention and recovery service provided by the Housing Management Section should be led by collection and not by arrears.

He outlined the recommended policy statement, copies of which had been circulated to and discussed with the Carlisle and Rural Tenants Federation who were in agreement with the aims and objectives contained therein. In addition the City Treasurer and Carlisle Citizens Advice Bureau had confirmed their agreement.

The Head of Tenancy Services then responded to Members' questions.

RESOLVED – That this Committee would recommend the adoption of the Rent Arrears Policy – Current Tenants, as appended to report H.9/02 to the Executive.

COS.39/02 "LISTENING TO THE RURAL VOICE" – A STRATEGY FOR RURAL CARLISLE

Pursuant to Minute OSM.19/02, copies of the Head of Economic Development's report EDU.2/02 containing a Strategy in response to the Rural White Paper and the findings of the "Rural Voice" consultations held in 1999 and 2000 had been circulated. The specific comments of Overview and Scrutiny Committees were sought for consolidation by Officers and submission to the Chairman of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee for final approval and onward transmission to the Executive.

The Economic Development Manager attended the meeting and presented the report which was written as a Delivery Plan of Carlisle City Vision and showed how the aspirations in City Vision could be taken forward in rural Carlisle.

The Economic Development Manager referred to the sections of the Strategy on developing the vision for communities in rural Carlisle in section 6 of the report and asked that Overview and Scrutiny Committees provide responses to the bullet points in that section. He stressed that any proposals which were omitted now would not be included in the Action Plan.

The Economic Development Manager then responded to Members' questions.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

[The meeting ended at 4.05 pm]