

SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 15 AUGUST 2007

Present: Councillors Mrs W Metherell (Chairman); A Carrol; G Garrity; F Gleaves; F Heathcote; J Jackson; J Kane; J Park; W Southward; P Watson; M Woodburn.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor E Eastwood, G Scurrah.

Also in attendance: Councillor P Tyson.

Officers: J Carrol, Waste Services Manager; T Magean, Open Spaces Manager; N White, Scrutiny Support Officer.

SSC 07/07 Rural Transport Grants

The Committee noted that it had an item on its work plan relating to Rural Transport Grants.

The Committee were informed that Cumbria County Council had been invited to give a presentation to the Committee on these grants. However the County Council's review of these grants was taken longer than anticipated and it would be premature to have a presentation at this stage.

RESOLVED – that the County Council presentation Rural Transport Grants be made to a future meeting.

SSC 08/07 Mystery Shopping

The Committee considered the results of a mystery shopping exercise by a sub group of members.

The Committee considered the recommendations from the mystery shopping exercise in detail. It noted the comments from the Council's Waste Services Manager that the items raised by the sub group had now been resolved. Furthermore the Council's service had recently received a number of compliments.

The Committee further considered that in light of these comments and that the public conveniences were regularly cleaned there was no need for the Council to set a new vision or improvement plan for this service.

The Committee however looked at the overall provision of public conveniences in Whitehaven and felt that there was a need for greater provision than just St James Street particularly in the harbour area. It agreed that the Council should consider all possible external forms of

funding and should open negotiations with all relevant bodies to seek the provision of an additional public convenience in Whitehaven.

RECOMMENDED – that the Council be requested to open negotiations with all relevant bodies to look at the increasing the provision of the public toilets in Whitehaven particularly in the Harbour area.

SSC 09/07 **Enforcement Performance Sub Group**

The Committee considered the notes from the first meeting of the Enforcement Performance Sub Group.

The Committee noted that in June 2007 there was 27% sickness within the unit which resulted in 46% of the available staffing hours being lost to the unit. The Committee agreed with the Sub Group's recommendation that this should be drawn to the attention of the Executive as this could result in the ability of the enforcement unit to meet its targets within the financial business model.

The Committee also considered and agreed that in light of the enforcement work done by the council that there should be greater emphasis given to educating potential offenders before enforcement was undertaken.

RECOMMENDED – that (A) the Enforcement Performance Sub Group be part of the evaluation process for the market testing of off-street car parking and markets management and administration,

(B) the Executive's attention be drawn to the level of current long term sickness within the unit which and this could result in the ability of the enforcement unit to meet its targets within the financial business model.

(C) Parish Councils be given a list of prices for domestic waste collection so that the Parish councils could publicise these in their area, and

(D) there should be greater emphasis given to educating potential offenders before enforcement was undertaken.

SSC 10/07 **Work Plan**

The Committee considered its current work plan.

The Committee expressed its concern at the level of grass cutting that had been achieved in some parts of the borough and agreed that on the council's policies on grass cutting be submitted to its next meeting.

RESOLVED – that a report on the council's policies on grass cutting be submitted to its next meeting.

SSC 11/07 **Community Legal Services**

The Committee considered the recommendations of the sub group looking into the funding requirements for the Community Legal Services for 2008-09 and beyond.

The Committee considered the recommendations from the sub group in detail. It noted that following the hearings further work had been done and it was found that charitable organisations may be granted, in addition to 80% mandatory rate relief, a further 20% discretionary relief. The Council's current policy (which was last reviewed by the Executive on 21 February 2006) was that Charities receive 80% mandatory rate relief only; they did not receive a discretionary top-up.

The Committee were advised that if this discretionary relief was granted to the Citizens Advice Bureau the Council could find that other charities would seek the same relief at a cost to the Council of up to £96,000. In light of this the Committee agreed that this recommendation should not be pursued.

The Committee further noted the requirement within the service level agreements the council had with the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Community Law Centre for an annual presentation on the work they had undertaken in the previous year. The Committee agreed that this presentation should be made to the council as soon as possible.

RECOMMENDED – that the Executive be recommended that:

(A) the Revenues and Benefits Service Manager be requested to organise a meeting with relevant welfare advice and funding organisations to explore ways in which all available funding streams for welfare advice in Cumbria could be maximised,

(B) the work by the Citizen Advice Bureau and the Community Law Centre to work more closely together be welcomed and the organisations be encouraged to continue to do this,

(C) the Council continues to support these organisations for whom some contribution to core funding costs allows considerable further funding to be levered in from other sources,

(D) the level of funding for the next three years, in principle, be £32,000 plus the cost of living increase for Copeland Citizens Advice Bureau and £15,000 plus the cost of living increase for the Community Law Centre,

(E) it should be noted that the funding level in (D) above may have a detrimental effect on the ability of the organisations to provide outreach appointment sessions in some areas of the borough, and

(F) the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Community Law Centre be requested to undertake their annual presentation as required within their service level agreements with the council as soon as possible.

The Meeting Closed at 15:35pm

Signed:.....

Date:.....