

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

30th August, 2006

Members Present:- Councillor Asif
Councillor Crookes (Substitute for Councillor Ridge)
Councillor Mrs. Dixon (Substitute for Councillor Sawdon)
Councillor Duggins
Councillor Lee
Councillor Mutton
Councillor Williams

Co-opted
Member Present:- Councillor Clifford

Cabinet
Members Present:- Councillor Foster (Cabinet Member (City Services))
Councillor H. Noonan (Cabinet Member (Community Services))

Other Member Present:- Councillor Lakha

Employees Present:- L. Bull (Community Services Directorate)
J. Jardine (Chief Executive's Directorate)
C. Steele (Chief Executive's Directorate)
C. Swann (Legal and Democratic Services Directorate)
A. Townsend (Legal and Democratic Services Directorate)
A. Wills (Community Services Directorate)

Apologies:- Councillor Ridge
Councillor Sawdon

40. **Appointment of Chair**

RESOLVED that, in the absence of the Chair (Councillor Sawdon), Councillor Williams be appointed to Chair this meeting.

41. **The Future of Top Ups to Concessionary Fares Passes for People with Visual Impairments**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Community Services, which had previously been considered by the Cabinet Member (Community Services) (their Minute 11/06 refers) and had been 'called-in' by Councillors Clifford, Batten and Lakha. The validity of the 'call-in' had been confirmed by the Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee, in consultation with Director of Legal and Democratic Services (4.5.25.4).

The report sought approval for changes to be made to the City Council's practice in relation to concessionary fare 'top ups' for public transport in order to bring it in line with the City Council's Eligibility Criteria. The Cabinet Member had decided to approve the adjustment to the criteria for the issuing of 'top ups' to concessionary fares passes in line with the Council's Eligibility Criteria and statutory guidance

relating to that Criteria. It was also noted that the money saved in this manner, which could be up to £26,000, would be reinvested in the Sensory Impairment Team in order to reduce the current waiting list for specialist assessments from a Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Officer.

The Committee noted that the reason for the 'call-in' was to better understand the robustness of the consultation process used and to ascertain whether the appropriate organisations, such as those representing the blind and blind deaf (i.e. the RNIB and Guide Dogs for the Blind) had been asked for their views and, if so, what was their response. The Members calling in the report and the Committee questioned the Cabinet Member (Community Services), who had attended the meeting for the consideration of this item, and the relevant officers on various aspects of the consultation process. It was confirmed that a comprehensive consultation process had been undertaken, which had included all 89 people in the City who are registered blind and currently receive a 'top up' to their passes to allow them to travel free before 9.30 a.m., in order to establish the impact of the proposals. These 89 recipients had been invited to attend a public meeting and to complete and return a questionnaire. The responses to the questionnaire suggested that only two of the 40 respondents made regular journeys by public transport prior to 9.30 a.m. which did not primarily involve travelling to either work or to attend medical appointments. The Committee also noted that all the respondents were in receipt of allowances that were specifically targeted at meeting additional transport costs.

It was stressed by the Cabinet Member and the relevant officers that the proposal had not been made merely as a cost saving exercise, but to meet the requirements of the City Council's Eligibility Criteria in terms of treating all those entitled to adult care services in the City, in the same way and to comply with relevant statutory guidance.

During the debate, attention was drawn to the apparent high cost of the 'top ups' (£380 per person per year, with the total annual expenditure on these passes, approximately £26,000) compared to the value derived from users, especially as most bus services in the City did not operate before 6.30 a.m.) The appropriate officers agreed to raise this issue with CENTRO.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) The Committee concur with the decision of the Cabinet Member.**
- (2) In view of the thoroughness of the debate at this meeting, the matter need not be referred to the appropriate Scrutiny Board.**

42. Call-Ins Stage 1

The Committee noted that no call-ins had been received and that there had been no Cabinet/Cabinet Member meetings held during the week commencing 21st August, 2006.

43. **Report Back on Conference etc.**

The Committee noted a report of the Lord Mayor (Councillor Ahmed) summarising the outcomes and benefits of his Civic Visit to the International City Forum "Culture and Economy", held in Kiel, Germany from the 16th to the 18th June, 2006.

44. **Outstanding Issues**

The Committee noted that there were currently no outstanding issues.

45. **Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2006/2007**

The Committee considered the latest version of their Work Programme for 2006/2007.

RESOLVED that Councillor Mutton be invited to attend all future meetings of Scrutiny Board (1) for the consideration of progress reports on Coventry Direct.