
Report to
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

25th October, 2006

Report of
Councillor Kevin Foster – Cabinet Member (City Services)

Title
Report Back on the Work Of Outside Bodies – Coventry Law Centre

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 At their meeting on 10th May 2005, the Cabinet approved a process of reporting back to the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee on the work of those outside bodies appointed to by the City Council. This reports sets out details of the work of Coventry Law Centre over the preceding twelve months and details of attendance by the City Council's representatives.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Council should continue to nominate two elected members as its representatives on the Coventry Law Centre due to both the nature of it's work and the level of financial support received from the City Council.
- 2.2 Scrutiny Co-Ordination Committee notes the forthcoming review of the role of members of the Coventry Law Centre.

3 Information on Work of Outside Body

- 3.1 The Coventry Law Centre describes it's purpose as "*To fight Social exclusion in communities and to effect change in society by increasing rights awareness and using legal processes to fight poverty, inequality and discrimination*". The Law Centre employs professional, legally qualified staff to deliver it's work and prides itself on a high standard of advice.
- 3.2 The Law Centre provides legal advice in the areas of Community Care and Mental Health, Welfare Rights, Immigration, Housing & Employment. The Coventry Law Centre in common with similar centres specialises in many areas of law that private legal firms do not practice.
- 3.3 In the year 2005/2006 the Law Centre received £455,576 in grant funding from the City Council. The Law Centre also received £272,429 from the Legal Services Commission. The Councils grant allows the Law Centre to provide aid and assistance to some clients who do not qualify for Legal Aid, but do not have the resources to pursue their cases privately.

During the year the Law Centre managed to recover on behalf of it's clients £851,986 in arrears of benefit and compensation and weekly increases in benefit totalling £1,101,814

- 3.4 The Law Centre produces an Annual Impact Report and the 2005/2006 report will be available for public inspection. It will also be discussed at the AGM. The report details examples of cases that the Centre has dealt with over the last year.
- 3.5 Over the last year the Law Centre has been involved with a number of initiatives to improve access and knowledge of legal rights including taking part in a major campaign aimed at improving awareness of discrimination.
- 3.6 As part of a wider involvement with the community it serves, the Director of the Law Centre is currently the Chair of the Coventry Partnership.
- 3.7 The role of the "members" of the Law Centre was set to be reviewed over the last year, but due to other pressures has not been progressed. The Law Centre wishes to review how it can get the members of the centre (of which 2 are from the City Council) more informed about the running of the centre and their support in it's daily business.

4 Benefits to the City Council of the Appointment

- 4.1 The benefits to the City Council of this appointment is that members are able to set the direction for the centre and are able to scrutinise the annual accounts. Members of the Law Centre are also responsible for electing the Trustees who make up the Management Committee of the Law Centre.
- 4.2 The Law Centre is currently reviewing the role of the members of the centre to enable them to get a greater understanding of the Centre's work and to be more involved.
- 4.3 In addition to being one of the Council's members Cllr Foster was elected as a Trustee of the Law Centre in November 2004. Cllr Foster sits on the Management Committee of the Law Centre in that capacity. Cllr Foster is due for re-election as a Trustee at the Law Centre's AGM in October.

5 Attendance Record and Remuneration for the Appointment

- 5.1 The only formal requirement is for members to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Law Centre that will be held on 26th October 2006. Whilst all elected members are invited only the nominated members have a vote on certain items of business. Last year both Cllr Bigham and Cllr Foster attended the AGM (Cllr Lakha attended as an observer).
- 5.2 Members of the Law Centre receive no remuneration for their appointment.

List of background papers

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Papers open to Public Inspection

Description of paper

Location CH 61

Schedule of City Council Appointments to Outside Bodies
