

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE

3rd October, 2007

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee	Councillor Arrowsmith (Chair)
Members Present:-	Councillor Charley (Substitute for Councillor Ridge)
	Councillor Duggins
	Councillor Ms. Hunter
	Councillor Lee
	Councillor Maton
	Councillor Mutton
	Councillor Williams
Co-opted Member Present:-	Councillor Clifford
Other Scrutiny Member Present:-	Councillor Skipper
Cabinet Member Present:-	Councillor Sawdon (Cabinet Member (Culture, Leisure and Libraries))
Employees Present:-	J. Bolton (Director of Community Services)
	S. Brake (Community Services Directorate)
	A. Davey (Community Services Directorate)
	R. Hughes (Head of Corporate Policy)
	J. Jardine (Chief Executive's Directorate)
	C. Steele (Chief Executive's Directorate)
	D. Taylor (Customer and Workforce Services Directorate)
	A. Townsend (Customer and Workforce Services Directorate)
Apologies:-	Councillor Ridge

44. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

45. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the item of business referred to in Minute 50 below headed "Much Park Street: Site Disposal for Development" on the grounds that this item involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of that Act.

46. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 18th and 25th July and 8th August, 2007, were signed as true records.

47. **Call-In Stage 2 – Proposed Fees and Charges for Culture, Leisure and Libraries 2007/2011**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Community Services that had previously been considered by the Cabinet (their Minute 82/07 refers) and had been called in by Councillors Mutton, Duggins and Skipper. The report sought approval for proposed fees and charges for Culture, Leisure and Libraries for the period 2007/2011.

As part of the City Council's annual budget setting process income targets had increased, however, many areas of Culture, Leisure and Libraries had not increased charges to respond to this, the result was pressures on budgets where income was not achieved and charges not being maintained at comparable rates to other councils. The Audit Commission publication "The Price is Right - Charging for Public Services" recommended that a planned and strategic approach should be taken to the setting of fees and charges. This guidance had been interpreted into a charging strategy for the service area which had been approved by the Cabinet Member (Culture, Leisure and Libraries) at his meeting on 22nd February, 2007 (his Minute 25/06 refers). The key principles of the charging strategy that influenced the review were that cost recovery should be as near to 100% as the market would bear and that subsidy should be targeted to those known to be on low incomes. A consistent approach to the review of charges had been adopted via the Charging Strategy, this had included consideration of the following areas:-

- Objectives
- Context
- Benchmarking
- Stakeholder Information
- User Information
- Financial Analysis
- Charging Objectives

The Committee questioned the Cabinet Member and officers on aspects of the report, in particular concerns that the report indicated that a consistent approach had been taken to the review but that cost increases were not consistent, for example charges for football pitches and changing rooms were now proposed to increase by 25% for adults but in excess of 50% for juniors and the Lunt Roman Fort which it was proposed to increase charges for school groups by from 100% to 150% depending on the number of students in the group. The officers explained that the methodology utilised for the review was based on benchmarking as recommended by the Audit Commission, they highlighted that some charges had not been reviewed for some time therefore benchmarks were important to enable reasonable charges to be identified. It was noted that the City Council's best value partner, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, had been asked to comment on the work and that they had been satisfied with the application of the methodology and the outcome.

The Cabinet Member emphasised that this was a radical review and acknowledged that it was possible that there could be some inconsistencies; he indicated that if after implementation it became apparent that some charges were not working they would be reviewed. The Committee were concerned that the increases could price some

young people out of sport particularly those families with more than one child. There was concern that if children were not able to participate in sport they could become susceptible to anti-social behaviour.

There were concerns that the document was substantial and may not be in the most accessible format for members of the public. It was noted that all price increases would be advertised prior to them coming into effect; the method of advertisement would be varied to suit each site and users. The officers emphasised that price should not be a deterrent from involvement.

The Committee accepted that the review was required and that the starting point was not helpful to the work, however, they were concerned that the report stated that user groups would be notified prior to the changes coming into effect and that charges would increase in September, 2007 but that the report had still not cleared the political process as at 3rd October, 2007. The officers confirmed that the increase had not taken place in September and that as indicated above, all price increases should be advertised before coming into effect. The Committee went on to enquire as to the effect of the increase on block bookings, there were concerns that there was a potential breach of contract if charges were increased part way through a booking. The officers confirmed that block bookings would be honoured at the price they originally were quoted and that price increases would only take effect at the date of any renewal.

There were concerns that the Audit Commission document was a recommendation rather than a requirement, that the City Council was not obliged to make changes to fees and charges and that this review was a short term response to budgetary pressures rather than a strategy. The officers responded by indicating that work on this issue had commenced in excess of one year ago and that the report brought forward in February, 2007 identified the work that was taking place setting out a strategy, direction and methodology for the review. The Director indicated that it was expected that all managers would be undertaking this type of work to ensure that budgets were robust; this review was not a response to budgetary pressures.

The Cabinet Member pointed out that this report had been considered by Scrutiny Board (4) at their meeting on 8th August, 2007, and that none of the issues raised today had been discussed at that meeting; it was acknowledged that consideration of the report by Scrutiny did not preclude the calling in of a report. The Cabinet Member indicated that he would be prepared to look at issues and disparities and confirmed that he would be prepared to consider the child and adult charges for pitches and changing rooms and the charges at the Lunt Roman Fort for groups.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee concur with the decisions of the Cabinet.**
- (2) That the Cabinet Member be requested to reconsider the proposals for increasing charges for child and adult pitches and changing rooms and for group admission to the Lunt Roman Fort.**

48. Call-In Stage 2 – Cultural and Events Strategies

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Community Services that had previously been considered by the Cabinet (their Minute83/07 refers) and had been

called in by Councillors Skipper, Maton and Duggins. The report sought to outline the development process for the Cultural Strategy and set out its priorities and delivery plans.

The Cultural Strategy for the city had been developed using Department for Culture, Media and Sport guidance. Its strategy was key for the city as it was known that culture (including sport) was at the heart of development and tended to attract both business and residential interest. It was also known that many aspects of cultural provision contributed across the range of local government priorities such as improving social cohesion, economic vitality, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, reducing health inequalities and supporting educational achievement. A previous Cultural Strategy for Coventry has not been developed within the guidelines of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and was not developed with the full support of the cultural partnership for the city. This strategy addressed those issues and had been developed by and was supported by the key cultural agencies in the city. The strategy had been considered by Scrutiny Board (4) on 27th June, 2007 (their Minute 4/07 refers).

The Committee questioned the Cabinet Member and officers on aspects of the report, in particular:-

- How the initiatives within the strategy would be delivered in priority areas.
- Data and consultation processes used in drawing up the strategy.
- Targets.
- Concerns of delivery bodies regarding the content of the strategy.
- How the strategy responded to economic development.
- How young people had been engaged in the consultation process.
- City Council facilities for cultural activity.

The officers explained that the household survey had been used to measure participation rates in cultural activities. It was noted that awareness was often a key reason for non-involvement in such activities. Officers acknowledged that there was a need to broaden participation and narrow the gap of inequality in terms of cultural participation across the city, this would be addressed by Initiative 9 of the strategy. The Committee noted that the strategy was not currently supported by the type of robust performance framework that was present in other service areas, this was being developed and clear measures around social inclusion were critical for this. Members were concerned that some of the delivery bodies had expressed concern over the content of the strategy. The Cabinet Member and Officers were unaware of these concerns and suggested that the organisations be asked to contact the Officers and Cabinet Member directly. The Committee noted that it was hoped to be able to organise a conference in early 2008 to bring together the cultural partnership and other relevant organisations who could assist in delivering targets.

With regard to creative industries the Committee were concerned that the benefit of locating creative industries within the city had been known for some time and it was suggested that this should be acknowledged within the strategy. It was noted that City Development Directorate had considered the report as part of the consultation process and that creative industries were getting involved.

With regard to performance management, the officers indicated that those parts of the strategy that were assigned to the City Council would be monitored as part of the relevant Cabinet Member Plan; all Scrutiny Boards received six monthly updates on the progress of Cabinet Member Plans.

RESOLVED that the Committee concur with the decisions of the Cabinet.

49. Call-Ins Stage 1

The Committee noted that no call-ins had been received yet for that week. The deadline for call-ins of Cabinet and Cabinet Member decisions made during the week commencing 24th September, 2007, was 9.00 a.m. on Friday 5th October, 2007. Any call-ins received after this meeting and before that deadline would be considered for validity by the Chair of the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee in consultation with the Director of Customer and Workforce Services (Paragraph 5.4.5.25.4 of the City Council's Constitution refers).

50. Report on Item of Urgent Business – Much Park Street: Site Disposal for Development

The Committee considered two reports, one in public and one in private, on the above matter which had been considered as an item of urgent business by the Cabinet at their meeting on 25th September, 2007 (their minute 89/07 refers). The reason for urgency was to avoid unnecessary delay in completing the disposal of the land in order to tie in with the decision making programme of the other party concerned.

The Committee noted that it was intended that 190 of the car parking spaces proposed for the office occupiers' initial use would return to public use in the future, subject to conditions outlined in the private report. There were concerns that if the organisation were not able to persuade their employees to use alternative forms of transport and that ultimately these spaces would not be returned to public use. It was suggested that the relevant Scrutiny Board should, in the short term, be asked to monitor the impact on car parking during construction when the entire car park was removed from the car parking stock and in the long term to examine how the spaces were being used when the building was operational, in particular how many spaces were being offered to the public.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee note the above report and the reason for urgency.**
- (2) That the relevant Scrutiny Board be requested to monitor the issues outlined above.**

51. Schedule for Reporting Back on the Work of Outside Bodies

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Customer and Workforce Services that set out a timetable for receipt of reports on the work of outside bodies by this Committee.

RESOLVED that the Schedule for Reports Back on the Work of Outside Bodies be approved as submitted.

52. **Outstanding Issues**

The Committee considered and noted a report of the Director of Customer and Workforce Services that identified those issues on which further reports had been requested in order that Members could monitor progress.

53. **Work Programme 2007/2008**

The Committee considered and noted the Work Programme for the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee for the 2007/2008 municipal year.

54. **Other Business**

There were no other items of public or private business.