

SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE**21st November, 2007**Scrutiny Co-ordination
Committee Members

Present:-

Councillor Arrowsmith (Chair)
Councillor Charley (Substitute for Councillor Williams)
Councillor Crookes (Substitute for Councillor Ridge)
Councillor Duggins
Councillor Ms. Hunter
Councillor Lee
Councillor Maton
Councillor Mutton

Other Scrutiny

Members Present:-

Councillor Mrs. Bigham
Councillor Nellist
Councillor O'Boyle

Cabinet Member

Present:-

Councillor Matchet (Cabinet Member (Neighbourhoods and
Community Safety))

Employees Present:-

P. Barnett (Chief Executive's Directorate)
Claire Campbell (Customer and Workforce Services
Directorate)
J. Nicholls (Head of Neighbourhood Management)
J. Parry (Chief Executive's Directorate)
A. Townsend (Customer and Workforce Services Directorate)
A. West (Chief Executive's Directorate)

Apologies:-

Councillor Clifford
Councillor Ridge
Councillor Williams

77. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

78. Call-Ins Stage 2 – Petition Concerning the Future of WATCH

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Neighbourhood Management that had previously been considered by the Cabinet Member (Neighbourhoods and Community Safety) (their Minute 33/07 refers) and had been called in by Councillors Nellist, O'Boyle and Windsor. The report responded to a petition signed by 476 residents calling for the City Council to provide funding and support to gain additional funding to enable WATCH (Working Actively to Change Hillfields) Limited to continue its operations. In approving the report the Cabinet Member had agreed a one off grant of £30,000 to support WATCH up to March, 2008.

WATCH had been established in 1996 with the overall aim to improve conditions in Hillfields and was a Company Limited by Guarantee, a Registered Charity and a Registered Development Trust. The organisation had a membership drawn from the local community (residents, businesses, voluntary and community organisations) and was managed by an organising committee made up of 15 local people.

Councillor Nellist briefly explained that the problems at WATCH had become apparent at the beginning of the year and were attributable to changes in funding and income streams. It was expected that the organisation would be on a better footing in the 2008/2009 financial year. Councillor Nellist indicated that he believed that the £30,000 grant being made to the organisation was too low and explained that the organisation needed to maintain a minimum level of reserves to secure its operation, this was considered to be between £95,000 and £105,000; previously reserves had been healthy but had been eaten into in recent months. Councillor Nellist suggested that Scrutiny should examine the position with WATCH and establish if an additional £20,000 was required to lift the organisations reserves to a safe level, making appropriate recommendations to the Cabinet Member.

The Cabinet Member briefly outlined the process that had been followed at his meeting and emphasised that he had listened carefully to all the arguments in favour of providing grant funding to WATCH. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that the organisation did a lot of good work but emphasised that it was not the City Council's job to run such organisations and that there were many organisations in a similar financial situation. He indicated that the City Council would, as far as possible, align their work with WATCH, but that it was not their job to run the organisation. The Committee noted that the £30,000 grant was a one off, intended to tide the organisation over financially until the new financial year. The Cabinet Member accepted that the £0,000 grant was the minimum required by the organisation but emphasised that this was all that could be afforded. The Cabinet Member was keen to put pressure on organisations such as Job Centre Plus to work with WATCH and suggested that there was a need for the City Council to encourage voluntary organisations to join together in consortiums so achieving economies of scale. The Officer briefly explained that WATCH had been successful with a Big Lottery Fund bid that would bring the organisation's level of reserves within the required parameters; a decision on a Deprived Area Fund Bid should be known the following day, if this was successful then two additional new posts would come to the organisation. The Officer did not believe that WATCH required any additional grant funding but accepted that Officer support was needed to get them on a sound financial footing with a robust business plan for the future.

The Committee questioned the Cabinet Member and Officer on aspects of the report, in particular past and potential redundancies at WATCH, the LEGI support that was

provided in kind to the organisation, the sufficiency of the £30,000 grant and the potential of the organisation to work with organisations such as Job Centre Plus. It was noted that some of the work that was undertaken by WATCH would be work that the local Authority would otherwise be expected to undertake and fund if WATCH did not exist. It was suggested that often money coming into the city was awarded due to the presence of organisations such as WATCH and that often this was not acknowledged.

The Cabinet Member explained that many voluntary organisations were funded in an uncoordinated manner, It was agreed that it would be useful for Scrutiny to undertake a holistic review of WATCH and other similar voluntary sector organisations in the City including how their long term sustainability might be ensured and how national organisations such as Job Centre Plus might be encouraged to work with them. In the meantime the Committee asked the Cabinet Member to reconsider the grant of a further £20,000 to the organisation to ensure financial stability.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Committee concur with the decisions of the Cabinet Member.**
- (2) That the Cabinet Member be requested to give consideration to a further grant of £20,000 to WATCH.**
- (3) That Scrutiny Board (4) be requested to undertake a holistic review of WATCH and similar voluntary sector organisations within the city to ensure their long term sustainability.**

79. Call-Ins Stage 1

The Committee noted that no call-ins had been received yet that week. The deadline for call-ins for Cabinet and Cabinet Member decisions made during the week commencing 12th November, 2007, was 9.00 a.m. on Friday 23rd November 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).

80. Report Back on the Work of Outside Bodies – Governing Body of Henley College

The Committee considered a report of Chris Hinde detailing the work of the Governing Body of Henley College over the previous 12 months and included attendance records for the City Council's representative at meetings of the Governing Body as well as the Finance and Policy Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee recommend that the City Council continue to nominate to the Governing Body of Henley College.

81. Report Back on the Work of Outside Bodies – Belgrade Theatre Trust

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member (Children, Learning and Young People) that detailed the work of the Belgrade Theatre Trust over the previous

12 months and included attendance records for the City Council's representatives at meetings of the Trust Board.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee recommend that the City Council continue to nominate to the Belgrade Theatre Trust.

82. Report Back on the Work of Outside Bodies – Coventry Law Centre

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member (City Development) that detailed the work of the Coventry Law Centre over the previous 12 months and included attendance records for the City Council's representative at meetings of the Board and Audit Committee as well as the Annual General Meeting.

RESOLVED that the scrutiny Co-ordination Committee recommend that the City Council continue to nominate to the Coventry Law Centre.

83. Report Back on the Work of Outside Bodies – Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Sub-Group

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) that detailed the work of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) Sub-Group over the previous 12 months and included attendance records for the City Council's representatives at meetings of the Sub-Group.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee recommend that the City Council continue to nominate to the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Sub-Group.

84. Report Back on the Work of Outside Bodies – West Midlands Regional Flood Defence Committee

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member (Climate Change, Housing and Sustainability) that detailed the work of the West Midlands Regional Flood Defence Committee over the previous 12 months and included attendance records for the City Council's representative at meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee recommends that the City Council continue to nominate to the West Midlands Regional Flood Defence Committee.

85. Report Back on the Work of Outside Bodies – Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Sub-Regional Forum

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) that detailed the work of the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Sub-Regional Forum over the previous 12 months and included attendance records for the City Council's representatives at meetings of the Forum.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee recommends that the City Council continue to nominate to the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Sub-Regional Forum.

86. Report Back on the Work of Outside Bodies – Birmingham International Airport Board of Directors

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) that detailed the work of Birmingham International Airport Holdings Limited Board of Directors over the previous 12 months and included attendance records for the City Council's representative at meetings of the Board.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee recommends that the City Council continues to nominate to the Birmingham International Airport Holdings Limited.

87. 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.

88. Work Programme 2007/08

The Committee considered and noted the Work Programme for the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee for the 2007/08 Municipal Year.

89. Whistle Blowing Policy

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Customer and Workforce Services that was scheduled to be considered by the Standards Committee at their meeting on 28th November, 2007 and set out a proposed Whistle Blowing Policy for implementation. The Committee noted that the Standards Committee would receive an annual monitoring report on the use and application of the Whistle Blowing Policy in April each year.

As part of the Corporate Performance Assessment the external auditors had identified that the Council did not have a Whistle Blowing Policy document. The Council had a Whistle Blowing Procedure that provided a framework within which employees could raise concerns either internally or externally regarding concerns about bad practice; the procedure had not been reviewed for a number of years. In drawing up the policy document good practice models had been used including documents from CIPFA, Public Concern at Work Best Practice Guidance, Committee on Standards in Public Life and established policy documents from other Local Authorities. The Whistle Blowing Policy was an employment policy document for which Human Resources were responsible for the maintenance, communication and dissemination although it was necessary to identify links with services supporting children and services supporting vulnerable adults as well as clear links with the Council's Fraud and Corruption Policy.

The Committee went on to give consideration to the policy which was appended to the report submitted. The Committee were concerned that the policy should provide the maximum safeguard for staff who legitimately take advantage of the Whistle Blowing Policy and that every protection should be afforded them if they were brave enough to come forward and report concerns. In particular there was concern with regard to Section 6.2 of the Policy which used language which was considerably weaker than that used in Paragraph 6.1:-

Section 1 contained the phrase "The Council **will** not tolerate harassment or victimisation and **will** take action to protect individuals where ever possible"

Whereas, Section 2 stated "... the Council **would** seek to ensure that the individual is not victimised in any way".

The Committee were concerned that the current wording did not give staff confidence regarding protection against potential victimisation for whistle blowing.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee note the report and that Officers be requested to forward the comments set out above to the Standards Committee at their meeting on 28th November 2007.

(NOTE: This item was considered at the meeting as an item of other urgent public business, the reason for urgency being to allow Scrutiny to have an input into the report prior to its consideration by the Standards Committee at their meeting on 28th November, 2007.)