

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.00 am on
Wednesday, 8 October 2014

Present:

Members: Councillor T Skipper (Chair)
Councillor J Clifford
Councillor G Duggins
Councillor R Sandy
Councillor B Singh
Councillor K Taylor
Councillor S Thomas

Other Members: Councillor A Gingell, Cabinet Member (Health and Adult Services)

Employees (by Directorate):

G Holmes, Resources Directorate
L Knight, Resources Directorate
Dr J Moore, Chief Executive's Directorate
T Richardson, Chief Executive's Directorate
T Savill, Resources Directorate
A West, Resources Directorate

Other representatives: Sue Bent, Coventry Law Centre
Martin Buxcey, Department of Works and Pensions
Daniel Conteh, Celestineceleste Community Organisation
Janet Gurney, Coventry Law Centre
Daksha Piparia, Citizens Advice Bureau
Virginia Ringane, Celestineceleste Community Organisation
Mary-Ann Stephenson, Warwick University

Apologies: Councillors J Blundell and J Innes

Public Business

17. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared.

18. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3rd September, 2014 were signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

19. Overview and Scrutiny Management

The Committee noted that a report of the Executive Director, Place headed 'Draft Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) – Technical Evidence Paper' had been considered by the Cabinet Member (Business, Enterprise and

Employment) at his meeting on 11th September, 2014. The Committee noted that Councillor Skipper, Chair of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee had attended the meeting and agreed that the decision was urgent and that call-in should not apply.

In accordance with Part 3E, paragraph 19.4 of the Council's Constitution, the report was presented to Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee to inform them of the reason for urgency. The reason for urgency was that the publication of the draft Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) update formed an integral part of the Local Plan public engagement process, which commenced on 12th September, 2014. This was particularly in relation to the Duty to Cooperate and the Council's on-going engagement with its neighbouring authorities in relation to housing need and supply. The SHLAA was also a technical evidence paper, which would help inform local communities and stakeholders about the Council's housing land supply and allowed for consultation feedback to be collected and used to help inform the final version of the document. As such, it was urgent that the draft SHLAA was made available alongside the Local Plan paper to support the public engagement process.

20. **Welfare Reform - The Impact of Benefit Sanctions on People in Coventry**

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and two presentations concerning the impact of benefit sanctions on people in Coventry. Sue Bent and Janet Gurney, Coventry Law Centre, Martin Buxcey, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Daksha Piparia, Citizens Advice Bureau and Mary-Ann Stephenson, Warwick University attended the meeting for the consideration of this matter.

The briefing note referred to the partnership working of the Working Together on Welfare Reform Group which continued to meet to discuss common issues, share knowledge and work together to tackle problems arising from the wide scale changes to the welfare system. Both Coventry Law Centre and the Citizen's Advice Bureau had recently worked with Coventry Women's Voices and the Centre for Human Rights in Practice at the University of Warwick on a research project looking at the impact of sanctions and how to address some of the issues. A copy of the report was attached at an appendix to the briefing note. The findings of the project strongly supported the findings of national research and research conducted locally elsewhere in the country.

Mary-Ann Stephenson, Warwick University gave a presentation which set out the background to the research project and highlighted the new sanctions. The methodology was explained and reference was made to two national studies undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Mathew Oakley. The problems with the sanctions process were explained along with the negative impacts including the impact on job seeking behaviour. The conclusions of the project were:

- (a) The sanctions process did not meet standards set out in the Oakley review
- (b) Sanctions were having a serious negative impact on individuals and families in Coventry
- (c) Sanctions were making it harder to look for work.

Attention was drawn to the meeting of the 'Working Together' Group with Martin Buxcey, DWP, which had already agreed a number of actions as a result of these findings. These included working to develop a local protocol that could be used to

escalate to DWP concerns about individual case; having a single point of contact at DWP; and joint training between DWP and partners to focus on early intervention and prevention so that consistent advice and support was provided. The two main recommendations of the report were (i) change was needed in the sanctions policy at a national level and (ii) even within the existing policy there was significant scope for improving practice.

Tim Savill, Head of Revenues and Benefits, gave a presentation on the work of the 'Working Together' Group which detailed the challenges to be faced; informed about the monthly meetings; the positive outcomes; and what this partnership working had achieved. Copies of the presentation slides and the Groups' strategy and key priorities were set out at appendices 2 and 3 of the briefing note.

Members questioned the officers and representatives on a number of issues and responses were provided. Matters raised included:

- The potential impact of the report
- How the findings of the report would be publicised
- How national policies impacted on local decisions
- The negative viewpoint created by the media towards benefit claimants
- The intention for lessons to be learnt from the individual case studies
- Further details about the personalisation of job seeking agreements and the training provided for employees at DWP
- Clarification about the timeframe for initial interviews and the timescale for the hearing of appeals

RESOLVED that:

(1) The continued work of the Working Together on Welfare Reform Group be supported.

(2) A further report on progress with the actions agreed to address concerns about sanctions be submitted to the meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee scheduled for 4th February, 2015 and all members of the Council be invited to attend.

(3) Cabinet be asked to consider whether there are any further practical steps that the local authority can take to mitigate the serious problems arising for Coventry residents as a result of welfare benefit sanctions.

21. Female Genital Mutilation

The Committee considered a report and presentation from Councillor Gingell, Cabinet Member (Health and Adult Services) on the issue of Female Genital Mutilation (FMG) in Coventry. Daniel Conteh and Virginia Ringane, Celsetineceleste Community Organisation attended the meeting for the consideration of this item.

The report provided an outline of what Female Genital Mutilation was; the legislation in relation to FMG; the implications of the practice on women and the outcomes for survivors; the prevalence of FMG and details of local actions so far. It also informed of the national recommendations to eliminate the practice of FMG

and set out the local recommendations which were to be submitted to the Health and Well-being Board.

The presentation highlighted the prevalence of FMG in Coventry. UHCW midwifery had reported 34 women affected by FMG between April and August 2014. Data from West Midlands Police indicated that for 2014 to date there had been 84 referrals, 48 of which were from Coventry. Attention was drawn to the FMG conference to be held in Coventry on 13th November, 2014.

The representatives from the Celestine Community Organisation, a group who provided support and education to those who were victims of or were at risk of FMG, informed of their current work and the attitudes towards FMG from different communities. The Committee placed on record their appreciation for their attendance at the meeting and for the work they undertook.

The Committee questioned the Cabinet Member, the officers and the community representatives on a number of issues and responses were provided. Matters raised included:

- Cultural acceptance
- The different roles of men and women within the African communities where FMG was practiced, both in supporting and challenging the practice
- The difference between a medical model and a cultural or social model that could be used to address the issue
- The barriers to schools for providing education programmes
- The positive role that UHCW plays in identifying and reporting cases of FMG
- The view of the United Nations

The report set out the following proposals for action:

- a. A multi-faceted awareness campaign is implemented targeting health, education, social care, voluntary sector, practising communities and other relevant professionals.
- b. Further partnership work between the Council, Coventry University and the Voluntary Sector to effectively engage with communities to ensure the Female Genital Mutilation campaign is successful
- c. The implementation of training programmes across Coventry for professionals and communities.
- d. Coventry should strive to prevent Female Genital Mutilation through Law Enforcement. Professionals and Communities need to continue to support the Police to enforce the law against parents / guardians who permit Female Genital Mutilation and the practitioners who carry it out and prevent women and girls being taken out of UK legal jurisdiction with the intention of carrying out Female Genital Mutilation.
- e. All suspected cases should continue to be referred as part of existing child safeguarding obligations. Information and support should be given to families to protect girls at risk. Better awareness of Female Genital Mutilation and the law amongst professionals should be implemented as part of a specialised training programme.

f. If a child has already undergone Female Genital Mutilation she should be offered medical help, psychological support and counselling. Action should be taken to protect any female relatives who are at risk and to investigate possible risk to other children in the practicing community

g. Key stakeholders support UHCW in their work to offer women access to a specialist Female Genital Mutilation midwife or consultant through the provision of dedicated clinic time.

h. Community based clinics and primary and secondary care professionals should ask individuals if they have undergone Female Genital Mutilation or if themselves or members of their families are at risk.

i. Data gathered should be shared across all agencies to ensure Coventry has a clear as possible picture of the prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in Coventry. Share that information systematically: Develop protocols for sharing information about girls at risk of – or girls who have already undergone Female Genital Mutilation with other health and social care agencies, education and the police.

j. Implementation of a Project Manager.

The Committee noted that they would receive a progress update at a later date.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The proposals for action detailed above be supported and the Coventry Health and Well-being Board be recommended to accept these proposals.

(2) Consideration be given to alternative educational approaches for dealing with the issue of Female Genital Mutilation which will encourage local schools to engage in raising pupils' awareness of FGM.

22. **Outside Bodies - Reporting Arrangements 2014/15**

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator concerning the reporting arrangements for outside bodies to Scrutiny during 2014-15. Details of the proposed reporting routes were set out at an appendix attached to the note. A draft report template highlighting the content and requirements was set out at a second appendix.

The briefing note indicated that it was a constitutional requirement for the Committee to decide at the start of the municipal year which outside bodies it wished to receive reports from. The criteria currently applied to determine consideration was set out along with several proposed changes. In particular, the approach to secondary school governing bodies, trusts and foundations had been inconsistent and it was recommended that these did not report to Scrutiny unless requested by the Chair of Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2).

The Committee discussed whether it was good value to continue to receive such reports. There was an acknowledgment that if there was an issue with a particular organisation then the onus would be on the member to report back with their concerns.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The Committee to receive report backs from the eight organisations who receive financial assistance from the City Council.

(2) A letter be sent to all Councillor representatives on the other organisations part way through the year asking if there are any issues that require consideration by the Committee.

(3) The content and requirements of the report template be approved.

(4) Officers be requested to timetable the required outside bodies reports on the Committee's work programme.

23. Civic Visit to Kiel Germany for 132nd Kieler Woche

The Committee considered a report of the Lord Mayor, Councillor Hazel Noonan concerning her civic visit to Kiel, Germany from 20th to 23rd June, 2014 for 132nd Kieler Woche.

The Lord Mayor took part in a programme of events hosted by Kiel City Council to mark the formal opening of Kieler Woche. This was the largest summer festival in northern Europe and the largest sailing sports event in the world. The report detailed both the costs and benefits of attendance.

RESOLVED that the report of the Lord Mayor's civic visit to Kiel and associated Kieler Woche celebrations be endorsed.

24. Outstanding Issues

The Committee noted that all outstanding issues had been included in the work programme for the year.

25. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2014/2015

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, appended to which was the 2014/15 work programme.

It was recommended that Child Sexual Exploitation to be considered at the meeting scheduled for 10th December, 2014 and Welfare Reform be considered at the 4th February, 2015 meeting.

RESOLVED that the work programme be updated as indicated.

26. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.40 pm)