

MINUTES**Meeting: Communities Department Briefing****Date: 15 January 2008**

Present:

Councillor Steve Carroll (Chair)	Councillor Brian Wombwell
Councillor Glynn Gilfoyle	Councillor Mick Storey
Councillor Keith Girling	Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts
Councillor Martin Brandon-Bravo	Councillor Lynn Sykes
Councillor Sybil Fielding	Councillor Reg Adair
Councillor Jen Cole	Councillor Michael Cox
Councillor John Stocks	Mick Burrows
Councillor Chris Winterton	Steve Calvert
Councillor Helen Holt	Bob Hart
Councillor John Knight	Richard Hodge
Councillor Pat Lally	Jas Hundal
Councillor Peter Barnes	Caroline Agnew

Minutes: Val Stubbins

1. Welcome and Introductions

Councillor Carroll welcomed everyone to the meeting and was pleased to see such a good attendance.

2. Apologies

Apologies received from Councillor Stella Smedley, who was in London at a meeting with the Rail Minister, Tom Harris MP.

3. Minutes of previous meeting held on 10 October 2007

There were no comments on the minutes, which were approved.

4. Communities Department Review

Mick Burrows spoke to his report referring to the consistent work throughout 2007 in maintaining and improving key performance targets and looking at priorities for 2008, after consultation with the Leader, Deputy Leader, management and staff. He agreed there were still communication problems to sort out but there was a heavy emphasis on service delivery. He advised Members that the Department had been short-listed for two Beacon awards and that the presentations had taken place in London last week. He said he was optimistic of winning one of the Beacons.

He referred to an excellent performance score of 4 and was confident of keeping this, but not complacent about things. There were still problems with NJE and major concerns on learning and development.

MB expressed great credit to Bob Hart for the best result in terms of work in the Highways area. The new LAA is now regarded by GOEM as the best in the Region. Continuing to drive on the cultural change programme. A lot of ownership, customer expertise and a lot of pride.

Councillor Smedley was in London supporting the lobby on the Robin Hood Line Sunday service.

Councillor Carroll thanked MB for his report and said that he and Councillor Gilfoyle were supporting the wide range of work in Communities and hoped that Members would attend the forthcoming Library and Sports briefing.

DISCUSSION

Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts:

- We are good at delivering the big services but criticised for not doing the small things, eg a bus shelter, cycling proficiency.
- Not good at consulting members of the public.
- Tend to say 'no' rather than trying to do something.
- Must not lose sight of the small things and also not forget to ask the Members for their views on how things are working.

Councillor Jen Cole:

- Need to keep Members up-to-date on what is happening in their patch and what is going to happen in the future.
- Underline the importance of front-line staff.
- She endorsed what Councillor Cutts said in that members of the public often only see what Council operatives are not doing rather than what they are doing.

MB:

- Realises there are always a lot of things awaiting response and action.
- Recognises the authority faces a real challenge in the next 12 months and we are going to be challenged very much about joining up in certain areas. "You and Your Community" will help some of this.
- Agreed it is important to keep Members informed.

Councillor Martin Brandon-Bravo

- Pleased there is now a monthly reporting schedule but cannot understand why when someone phones up, the name of the complainant cannot be given.
- Emphasised that the Members need to know the names and addresses and suggests the monthly schedule shows these.

Councillor Keith Girling

- Felt it was not always about communication, sometimes about protocol - for example, a ceremony happening in his patch to which he was not invited. As the local champion, he should be and we need to look at protocols, not just communication. (This was not an event related to Communities Department.)

Councillor Bruce Laughton

- Felt we are hiding behind criteria. It does not help to turn round to people and say it does not fulfil the criteria
- What the public want is their village sorting out in respect of footpaths, pedestrian crossings, etc. They do not want to know about the difficulty of doing things, they just want something done.
- Suggests the criteria are thrown in the bin and officers listen to the local Members, because he is very tired of giving excuses all the time.

Councillor Gilfoyle:

- This is something we all have to put up with and he understood what Councillor Laughton was saying but if we had the money we could say yes to everything but because we don't, we have to have criteria. All we can do is prioritise in the right area and use the criteria correctly.

MB:

- Very sensitive issue and very pertinent to this department. He would like to find a way through it but it will not be easy.
- Need to improve officer/Member relationships and communication but also need to be aware that Members don't always see the accolades that we do get from people expressing their thanks.

MB:

- In response to Councillor Girling's request, MB agreed that Members should always be invited to ceremonies in their patch and he will try to ensure this happens.

Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts:

- Believes that some decisions are made on the hoof, giving an example of a sod-cutting ceremony.

Councillor Chris Winterton:

- Felt we needed to work harder. He referred to old problems that have still not been resolved, eg Mansfield rail trail, which goes back 12 years and still has not resolved the litter picking situation.
- Also mentioned street lighting. There are long term issues still needing attention.

5. Review of Sub National Economic Development and Regeneration

MB presented the report; Caroline Agnew also attended. MB explained what the Sub National Review was about, namely 7 different dynamics with the Districts and a large one with the City.

He gave an illustrative presentation, listing the dynamics to be considered, an overview of Nottinghamshire's skills, qualifications and knowledge, and the County's position on the SNR and the LAA

DISCUSSION

Councillor Helen Holt:

- You talked about lack of ambition and referred to the 2012 Olympics. How are we going to maximise our opportunities, especially for rural market towns like Mansfield?

Councillor Carroll:

- Responded that he was quite keen to work with sporting organisations to gain a capital fund and referred to Home Pierrepont being maintained as an excellent sporting centre.

MB:

- Sports teams have been working with schools and other partners to outreach people.

Councillor Helen Holt:

- What about the economic benefits to be gained from it?

MB:

- The Big Lottery was the last chance we had to win big money.

Councillor Martin Brandon-Bravo:

- Referred to the funding for 14-19 year olds which Government is talking about, but was puzzled as to why local authorities had abandoned middle schools.
- In terms of the economic strategy and the role of the new Minister for the Region, he asked what the powers of the new Minister will be and where our Regional Association fits in.
- In referring to paragraph 8 of the report, he asked how the integrity of the Parish Council would be protected and if the City want West Bridgford, they would have a fight on their hands!

MB:

- Said maybe Roy Hays could give an update on the 14-19 year olds.

Councillor Mick Storey:

- Sits on the LSC, and the money for up to 16 year age group is passed straight on to the schools.
- If the money goes straight to the local authority from the LSC, how do we control the money?

Caroline Agnew:

- It is the responsibility of the RDA to devolve funding.

MB:

- There is a lot of debate at the regional level, and further guidance is awaited.

Councillor Chris Winterton:

- Welcomes a single authority for Nottinghamshire in terms of economic regeneration.
- Explained that they could not keep middle schools in Mansfield because they could not recruit.
- The Learning and Skills Council have not performed and we will be blamed unless we put money into the area of skills. We are still at the bottom.

Councillor Peter Barnes:

- It is important that we get the City on board and bring everybody in one voice.

Councillor Kay Cutts:

- Referred to the map of Nottinghamshire and the 7 Districts. Big businesses base themselves near to junctions with the motorway. The City make people move out.
- Should not lump market towns like Newark. They are different. Urban areas like the City are becoming a destination area. West Bridgford is not a destination area but Newark is.
- Considers it is not 7 different Districts but that it is the County providing 7 different things for 7 different purposes.

MB:

- Agreed skills were an important issue, and referred to Capital One's decision to base themselves in Nottingham.
- Sheffield has done so well because of the access to the M1 corridor and thus there are big businesses and warehouses.
- Although the role of the Regional Minister is not yet clear, what it has done is to profile the work we have done in Nottinghamshire, and thus Gillian Merron wants to come to our next Partnership summit.
- Hazel Blears is standing firm on not enforcing a partnership but saying it is up to us. We cannot have a fall out between the County and the City. We are working well together on all things such as trams, transport, etc, but unfortunately the Districts each have their own perspective at present.

Councillor John Knight:

- Referred to Ashfield, which looks good but they take up a massive amount of floor space to employ low paid people and these will be the first to go.

Councillor Carroll:

- There is a large warehouse and building setting up near Junction 28.

Councillor Kay Cutts:

- Solicitors and accountants are moving out and the City is strangling itself.

Councillor John Knight:

- Mentioned West Notts College, which will be in Ashfield, and the fact that they come to Ashfield because they get a cheap area and cheaper labour.

Caroline Agnew:

- Floor space is increasing but the value is falling.

Councillor Barnes:

- We have 2 universities and we should be trying to keep those skills in Nottinghamshire and providing jobs.

MB:

- Mentioned the Graduate Recruitment programme previously set up. Businesses could not afford to recruit graduates but the Government are now putting money into this and helping firms take it up.

6. Sherwood Living Legend: Next Steps

Steve Calvert presented his report on the Sherwood Living Legend: Next Steps, confirming that, as most people knew, the County was unsuccessful in its lottery bid. His view was that we were very let down by the Lottery Fund and ITV. Sustrans obviously has a large catchment all over the country.

He felt there were many positives, though. The Sherwood Living Legend Project Management Board, which includes Councillors Carroll, Smedley and Baron, has commissioned a study to look at the potential of a Regional Park. SC then gave a presentation detailing the next steps.

Councillor John Knight:

- Commented on the stupid way the bid was dealt with – likening it to ‘X Factor’. He felt we should be writing to the Big Lottery to express our views not to allocate public money in this way.

Councillor Winterton:

- One of the things we should learn from this is to ask the people of Nottinghamshire why they did not vote for the Sherwood Living Legend project.
- Need to consider the benefits of the project and whether we could put in a bid for a heritage project based somewhere in the East Midlands.

Mick Storey:

- Felt that even the Members had doubts about some elements of the bid.
- Could tell the Lottery Fund what we think but we have to move on and we have good working relationships with lots of partners.

- Need to build on what we have in Nottinghamshire and build on the Regional Park in Sherwood.
- Members should be asked what they want to see in this area and we must ask “why do we need a visitors’ centre?”
- And if we want a Regional Park, is the current location right for all partners?

SC:

- The tree design was a partnership exercise, but if we are to have a new visitors’ centre, it would be up to Members to make that decision.

Councillor Carroll closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. He confirmed that he would like to bring the library and arts topics to future briefings.