


FORM S & PP 3

	REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY ORGANISATION, LEISURE AND CULTURE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL.	DATE: 23 March 2005 REF. NO:
TITLE OF THE MATTER CALLED-IN: Neighbourhood Resource Centre DATE CONSIDERED BY CABINET: 2 MARCH 2005 CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Councillor Adrian Andrew DATE OF SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL MEETING: Friday 18 March 2005		
Grounds under which the matter was called in for scrutiny: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Decision taken on a report containing inaccuracies2. No consultation with Local Neighbourhood Partnerships, Community or Neighbourhood Resource Centres involved.		
Record here the Scrutiny and Performance Panel's conclusions and proposals: <p>The meeting was attended by approximately 20 members of the public in addition to members who called in the decision and the portfolio holder for regeneration.</p> <p>There was an introduction and explanation of the call-in procedure and reason for this call-in by Councillor Ian Shires (Chairman).</p> <p>The Regeneration Environment Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel received written and verbal representations from interested parties, who represented the resource centres and members of the community:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Lorraine Smith, Willenhall Local CommitteeTony Steadman, Moxley Local CommitteeElaine Rowbottom, Goscote Resource CentreJoyce Price, North Walsall Resource CentreStella Petiffer, Harden Resource CentreHaden Ross, Ryecroft Resource Centre <p>There was a period of questioning following the representations to enable panel members to clarify matters raised by the speakers.</p> <p>Members who had called in the decision of Cabinet were invited to speak. The following members gave verbal representation:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Councillor Ian RobertsonCouncillor Rose BurleyCouncillor Rob Robinson		

Councillor Angela Underhill

Members of the panel asked questions for clarification.

The portfolio holder, Councillor Andrew, addressed the panel. Jason McGlip, Assistant Director and Julie Ball, Head of Neighbourhood Management gave the Councils representation in the form of a presentation. Members of the panel asked questions stating clearly whether questions were to the portfolio holder or officers. Interested parties were given opportunity to ask questions and points of clarification to the portfolio holder and officers.

Following all evidence gathering, panel considered the grounds under which the decision relating to Neighbourhood Resource Centres was called in, taking into consideration the written and verbal information received.

The following issues and concerns were discussed:-

- Funding to set up NRC's came from Government. The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund was aimed at areas of need. No money was allocated to maintain the centres by government.
- The centres receive no funding allocation for day to day running costs or maintenance from the council. NRCs have no money for staffing costs, many workers are volunteers.
- NRCs raise funds by carrying out activities in the centres and applying for funding. Members considered the representations made relating to ability to raise funds for the lease payments which would commence 1 April 2005. Concerns about passing the cost onto the community and reducing the available funds for activities in the community, and concerns about possible closure.
- Neighbourhood Resources Centres need a 21 year lease to be able to apply for a range of external grants, many NRCs fail to get funding because they do not meet the requirement.
- Leading up to this point, two consultants have been commissioned. The resolution of Cabinet is different to recommendations made in the first consultants interim report, in which, recommendations on the exit strategy for NRCs included reference to a 21 year lease and leases starting at a peppercorn rate.
- Debate relating to lack of consultation did identify that some consultation had taken place, every centre had received a visit, but representations made at the meeting disputed this and indicated to members that little or no meaningful consultation had taken place with LNPs, the community or NRCs.
- Concern that when agreeing the merge of two separate communities into one resource centre within the same LNP district , the physical and community barriers had not been addressed.
- Harden Neighbourhood Resource Centre had been demolished 2-3 months ago and was referred to in the report to Cabinet.
- Members were concerned that the reason that 50% of market value had been agreed as the lease rate was that it was for simplicity.
- The Cabinet member had informed the panel that income raised from lease payments would be ring fenced for Community Association

funding. However officers advised that the current position is that all income goes into the central pot as part of medium term financial planning. Members highlighted that the issue of ring-fencing funding was not in the report to Council and therefore was not part of the decision.

In summing up the debate the following comments were made:-

Members supported the role played by Neighbourhood Resource Centres within their communities. They recognised the hard work put in by many of the volunteers and that access to funding was an issue for all Neighbourhood Resource Centres.

Questions by members drew out the following points:-

1. The item first showed on the Forward Plan in September 2004
2. Information on the forward plan did not indicate the reasons for the report on Neighbourhood Resource Centres being requested.
3. Agreed by all that it would have been more productive for scrutiny to have been in the loop prior to the report going to Cabinet
4. If 3 above had been the case then a task and finish group could have been set up which would have probably have removed the need for this call-in.
5. The portfolio holder indicated that the executive was working on a policy to ring fence money from the leases with a view to it being retained for community use.
6. This implied that there was a link between Neighbourhood Resource Centres and Community Associations in which case this issue cuts across two portfolios. If this is so it was felt that the executive had not looked at the bigger picture

During decision making Councillor Robinson moved a resolution which was seconded by Councillor Coughlan:-

The Regeneration Environment Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel accepts that to impose 50% commercial leases and 10% repair levy onto some Neighbourhood Resource Centres (NRCs) from 1st April 2005 will cause some to close and ask that Cabinet reconsider their decision of 2nd March 2005 and consider the following options:

- Grant, within one month, NRCs a 21 year lease to allow these centres to apply for a range of external grants. This lease to place responsibility of day to day running costs with the NRC and external major maintenance with the Council.
- Fix the lease costs at a peppercorn rate for 5 years with a full review after 5 years.

Any future charging policy to be related to ability to pay and with recognition of the value added to the community and to the vision 2008 of this Council.

Following discussion an amendment to the motion was moved by Councillor Shires and seconded by Councillor Yasin:-

The Regeneration Environment Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel accepts that to impose 50% commercial leases and 10% repair levy onto some Neighbourhood Resource Centres (NRCs) from 1st April 2005 will cause some to close and ask that Cabinet reconsider their decision of 2nd March 2005 and consider the following options:

- Grant, within two months, NRCs a 21 year lease to allow these centres to apply for a range of external grants. This lease to place responsibility of day to day running costs with the NRC and external major maintenance with the Council.
- Fix the lease costs at a peppercorn rate for 1 year with a full review after 1 year.

Any future charging policy to be related to ability to pay and with recognition of the value added to the community and to the vision 2008 of this Council.

On being put to the vote the amendment was carried 8 members voting in favour of the amendment and one against. The amendment became the substantive motion.

Members voted on the substantive motion 8 members voting in favour and one member against.

Record here the specific recommendations of the Scrutiny and Performance Panel:

The Regeneration Environment Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel accepts that to impose 50% commercial leases and 10% repair levy onto some Neighbourhood Resource Centres (NRCs) from 1st April 2005 will cause some to close and ask that Cabinet reconsider their decision of 2nd March 2005 and consider the following options:

- Grant, within two months, NRCs a 21 year lease to allow these centres to apply for a range of external grants. This lease to place responsibility of day to day running costs with the NRC and external major maintenance with the Council.
- Fix the lease costs at a peppercorn rate for 1 year with a full review after 1 year.

Any future charging policy to be related to ability to pay and with recognition of the value added to the community and to the vision 2008 of this Council.

Explain here how the proposals/recommendations of the Scrutiny and Performance Panel differ from those of Cabinet:

Regeneration Environment Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel do not agree with the resolution of Cabinet in relation to the terms of the lease, specifically:-

- The duration of the lease should be 21 years to enable Neighbourhood

Resource Centres to apply for external funding.

- Initially there should be a peppercorn rate to enable Neighbourhood Resource Centres time to complete a business plan and identify funding for the lease payments. The duration of the peppercorn rate to be 1 year and a full review at years end.

This form provides an accurate record of the meeting of the above named Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Chair of Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Councillor I Shires



Signature: _____

Date: 21 March 2005