

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

22nd March 2010

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), and Councillors K Banks, G Chance, W Norton, J Pearce, D Taylor and D Thomas

Also Present:

Councillors M Braley, C Gandy, N Hicks and M Shurmer and M Collins (Vice-Chair, Standards Committee)

Officers:

A Heighway, M Bough, C Felton and S Hanley

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley, J Divala and I Westmore

210. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors R King and Smith.

211. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

Councillor Thomas declared a personal interest in Item 3 (Voluntary Sector Grant Applications 2010/11 – Call-in) as detailed separately at Minute 212 below.

212. VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANTS APPLICATIONS 2010/11 - CALL-IN

The Committee considered the call-in of the decisions taken by the Executive Committee at its meeting of 10th March 2010 in approving the recommendations of the Grants Panel in respect of the Voluntary Sector Grants Applications 2010/11. The call-in had been instigated by Councillors Thomas, Banks and Pearce.

Councillors Thomas and Pearce had detailed a number of concerns prior to the meeting and these were outlined within the report attached to the agenda. To assist the Committee in its deliberations Officers circulated a timeline for the adoption process for the

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Chair

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revised Grants Policy and correspondence between the Grants Panel and Third Sector organisations outlining these new arrangements.

Councillor Thomas expressed her disappointment at the apparent delay in implementing the new Shopping, Investing and Giving Policy as recommended by the Third Sector Task and Finish Group in 2008, of which she had been the Chair. In particular, there was concern that the Shopping element had not been brought into effect as this potentially represented the most significant proportion of the funding available to the Third Sector. The five organisations which had previously been core-funded by the Council had been provided with written notice that their funding was not guaranteed from April 2010 onwards.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Gandy, referred to the timescales within which the Policy had been adopted and whether any unreasonable delay had occurred. It was noted that the Shopping element had been subject to further consideration during the second half of 2009 following proposals to revise the Policy that had been made by the relevant Portfolio Holder. Under these circumstances, Officers were not in a position to implement the Policy until it had been fully approved. Capacity issues in terms of Officer support had been recognised, leading to measures being taken to provide additional support, but this had not been a significant issue in respect of the Shopping element of the Policy.

The scoring criteria upon which the individual grants applications had been assessed was discussed. There was a degree of confusion as to the content of the agreed Policy in this regard and Officers apologised for an error in both the application guidance and in the Executive Committee report which suggested that only new projects not previously funded by the Council had been considered for funding. Officers clarified that the Council's adoption of the Shopping, Investing and Giving model provided the latitude for the authority to shop, invest or give without a commitment to do all three and with no particular allocation to the three strands. Without the prioritisation to or allocation of money for the three strands the Council had chosen not to shop for 2010/11.

Councillor Pearce raised the issue of the correspondence between the Council and the five previously core-funded organisations, the expectations that could have arisen as a result of this communication and the requirement to treat Third Sector organisations equitably. Representatives of the Grants Panel explained that its communication with the five organisations had the intention of mitigating the risk to those organisations and the Council, but that they had been scored against the same criteria as

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all other applicants for funding and had achieved the five best scores overall. Properly audited accounts had been provided for each of these organisations and it was made clear that Officers had made every effort to encourage local third sector organisations to apply for funding. It was confirmed that the proper policy, as it existed at the time, had been applied, although it was conceded that the policy required review to ensure that it might better assist the process and those applying for grant funding.

It was noted that no concerns had been raised in December 2009 / January 2010 when the intention to not undertake the Shopping element of the overall Policy had been agreed. It was also noted that none of the specific grants agreed at the meeting on 10th March could reasonably be questioned given the explanation provided by Officers and Members involved in the Grants allocation process. However, it was accepted that there were issues around the grants process that required further consideration outside of the present meeting. It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had an important role to play in monitoring the implementation of recommendations that it made to the Executive. It was also requested that Members receive additional training on the call-in process and the conduct of meetings convened to consider matters that were the subject of call-in.

RESOLVED that

no further action be taken in respect of the call-in of the decisions taken on Voluntary Sector Grants Applications 2010/11 by the Executive Committee on 10th March 2010.

(Prior to consideration of this item, and in accordance with the requirements of Section 81 of the Local Government Act 2000, Councillor Thomas declared a personal interest in view of her employment by Redditch Carers' Careline.)

The Meeting commenced at 7.00pm
and closed at 8.30pm

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Chair