



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.30pm – 6.55pm

5 July 2012

Present: Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Manning (Vice chair), Bradford, Brimblecombe, Button, Galvin, Lay, Lubbock, Rogers, Sands (M), Stonard and Storie

Apologies: Councillor Gee

1. MINUTES

Subject to a minor drafting change to resolution 2 minute recommendation number 3 to amend the minute to;

‘be pro active in identifying and modelling appropriate housing, in any sector, for older people’.

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 31 May 2012.

2. WORK PROGRAMME

The chair reminded members to use the request form if they wanted to raise an item for scrutiny review. The form would help to clarify objectives and the desired outcomes.

RESOLVED to note the scrutiny committee work programme.

3. FOOD BANKS

The chair introduced two representatives from the Norwich Foodbank network, Grant Habershon and Colin Gillett who were invited to give a presentation to the committee. She explained that the purpose of the presentation was to inform members of the work being undertaken by the Foodbank as part of the scrutiny committee’s work in gaining an overview, and before considering where to focus future work. It was hoped that the scrutiny committee’s review would assist the council’s future involvement with partners and commissioning of services.

The committee was reminded that this had become a topic on its work programme as a result of a member request for scrutiny from Councillor Alan Waters.

In the presentation members were informed that demand on the Foodbank was increasing because more people were being referred to them via other local support agencies, such as the CAB.

The Foodbank was accessed by individuals or families that were in receipt of vouchers handed out by these various agencies in times of crisis. This was usually necessary when people had a sudden change of circumstance and was intended to cover the basic needs of those in crisis caused by any time gap in provision before relevant supporting agencies could assist. People were assessed and referred to the Foodbank, with only those in desperate need receiving a voucher. The voucher was then exchanged for enough food to last for three days.

The committee wished to know what happened when people were referred to the Foodbank on multiple occasions, and what was the risk of a dependency situation arising? In response members were informed that if a person or family were referred with food vouchers on three separate occasions, then extra questions were asked to understand why a crisis was continuing and what could be done to help. Grant Habershon, stated that, between April 2011 and March 2012, there were 3,300 people recorded as receiving help. He was now finding people's periods of crisis were lasting for longer periods of time and this seemed to be due to the ongoing tough economic circumstances. Members felt that it would be important for them to find out if there were particular reasons for why there was a trend for people's periods of crisis to increase in time. It was noted that peak demand was usually in July and August when free school meals stopped for children due to the summer break and of the 3,300 people recorded as receiving help, 1,100 were children.

In response to members' questions, benefit delays (37% for Norwich against a national figure of 29%) and low income were cited as the two biggest reasons for why it was necessary for vouchers to be given out in 2011 to 2012. Other factors included, refusal of crisis loans, debt, benefit cuts, employment changes such as decreased hours and unemployment. It was explained that the Norwich Foodbank worked with other local supporting organisations and there were always experts on hand at the distribution centres. They are there to listen and help sign – post to other professionals who would be able to assist with underlying problems that might be causing the crisis.

A recent client dealt with by the Foodbank had been in receipt of eleven vouchers. The committee noted that the individual was someone who had their benefits stopped and it had taken a number of weeks before a review found that the benefits should not have been stopped. This was an extreme case but it was feared that the problem was growing with more and more people presenting on three or more occasions, which was unheard of a few years ago. In response to questions, members were concerned to learn that this June; around 450 people in crisis were getting vouchers for food and the numbers for May were the highest monthly figures experienced by the Foodbank to date. There had been an increasing trend ever since they first opened. Some of this may have been due to more awareness. Grant Habershon said that the Foodbank needed to be ready to cope with the growing numbers of people being referred and that they were expecting to have to feed 5,000 people in the next 12 months.

Members were informed that the Foodbank was a purely voluntary group, which had expanded from beginning with two distribution centers in 2010. This year the Foodbank was aiming to be able, through the public's and local

business/organisations generosity, to gather more than 40 tonnes of food or £55,000 worth. There were now 10 distribution centres around Norwich.

With regard as to how food was collected and donated to the Foodbank, it was explained that items were donated at collection points and at supermarkets. In the last 12 months, 31.2 tonnes of food had been donated which in monetary terms equaled around £43,000 worth.

Responding to questions around the kind of people that were now being referred to the Foodbank, Grant Habershon explained that he was seeing a lot of people who thought that they would never have needed to use a Foodbank. Some members wondered if there had always been a need for foodbanks even though it is only recently that one has been set up in Norwich. Grant Habershon said that he felt there had always been a need for assistance as there has always been a 'hidden hungry' in Norwich, as anywhere else and always will be people in need. Members felt that the need for foodbanks may be symptomatic of the broader problem of deprivation.

On behalf of the committee the chair thanked Grant Habershon and Colin Gillett for attending the meeting and giving the presentation. She said that the next phase for the scrutiny committee was to decide how best to develop this review in the context of government policies and cuts to support services. At some stage the committee wished to look at the benefit services to see if anything further could be done to help reduce the number of cases that could be attributed to benefit delay. It was agreed by the committee, that by gaining a further overview of the contributory factors and effects and in talking to relevant partner organisations, the scrutiny committee would be able to make recommendations from an evidence based position.

It was **RESOLVED** to -

- a) receive further information from the Foodbank, that breaks down the reasons for people presenting for three vouchers or more
- b) to carry out further scrutiny work to gain an overview picture of the deprivation, inequality and welfare issues that Norwich residents experience
- c) give consideration to involving other relevant agencies with the further scrutiny review

4. NOMINATION OF A MEMBER TO THE NORFOLK COUNTY COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY PANEL

Voting 6 in favour and 4 against it was;

RESOLVED that Councillor Jo Storie be appointed the council's representative to sit on the Norfolk county community safety scrutiny panel

Voting unanimously in favour it was;

RESOLVED that Councillor Lucy Galvin be appointed as the council's substitute member on the Norfolk county community safety scrutiny panel

CHAIR