



## Lewes District Council

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### Scrutiny Committee

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes** on **Thursday, 20 November 2008** at **1.30pm**

**Present:**

Councillors E E J Russell (Chair), M A Cutress, D M Gray, T M Hawthorne, P A Howson, C S Lambert, C R O’Keeffe, J V S Page, D O Rogers OBE

**Officers Attending:**

O Clifford, Community Services Manager  
D Kemp, Community Engagement Officer  
L Lacon, Communications Manager  
D Feintuck, Committee Officer/Scrutiny Secretary

**Also Attending:**

Mr J H Webber, Chair – Lewes Town Partnership

### Minutes

**15 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**16 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Hawthorne declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Item 7 on the Agenda, Cost Benefit Analysis – Area Partnership Development Workers, as he had been Chair of Rural Voices, Rural Choices. Councillor Cutress declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the same item as she was acting Chair of Rural Voices, Rural Choices. Councillor O’Keeffe declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the same item as she was a member of the Lewes Town Partnership. Councillor Russell declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the same item as she was a member of ReGen. Councillor Howson declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the same item as he was a member of ReGen. Councillor Lambert declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the same item as he was a member of the Seaford Town Partnership.

**Action**

## Action

**17 Work Programme 2008/2009**

The Committee considered Report No 24/08, its Work Programme 2008/09 which detailed work in progress, work to follow and on-going matters.

**18 Cost Benefit Analysis – Area Partnership Development Workers**

The Committee considered Report No 225/08 which included a cost benefit analysis prepared by the Community Services Manager and representations on the contribution of the Development Workers from South Downs Council for Voluntary Services (SDCVS) and Rural Voices, Rural Choices.

Points raised during the discussion included:

- Variations in funding over the years were due to the other precepting authorities withdrawing their support of funding for the Local Strategic Partnership; the Council had agreed in 2007 to fund the one year gap and in 2008 to fund for one further year only.
- The low gain for Lewes Town Partnership in Table 2 of the document was explained by efforts being directed into the Market Towns initiative.
- Methodologies were available for measuring social returns of an intangible nature in case of the need for any future cost benefit analyses.
- In purely financial terms, there had been a return of grant funding that exceeded the Council's financial contributions.
- Should the Council decide not to fund the Development Workers from spring 2009, while SDCVS would do all they could to continue the work, the expertise and experience of the Development Workers would be lost.
- The returns for Newhaven as detailed in Table 2 had been cost effective and provided excellent benefits for a large number of beneficiaries.
- It was not possible to put a financial price on the benefits that the transport group and the use of the SID machines had provided.
- Continued financing of the Development Workers was consistent with the Council's Community Engagement agenda which included an obligation to work with the Local Strategic Partnership including the third sector.

**Action**

- It would be inconsistent policy for the Council not to provide the Development Worker grants under such an obligation, in particular when such professional and expert service had been provided.
- Peacehaven councillors present were not convinced that the activities described on page 16 of the SDCVS submission had been effective; any such spending, however, was not from the Development Worker funding.
- Towns and parish councils worked closely with the Area Partnerships to obtain funding unavailable to councils.

Recommended:

- 18.1** That funding for the Area Partnerships Development Workers be included in the 2009/10 budget up to £35,000 per year, potentially for three years, with an annual review and subject to a Service Level Agreement being put in place.

**19 Community Engagement White Paper**

The Committee considered Report No 226/08 which included the summary of the Community Engagement White Paper together with notes from a Department of Communities and Local Government presentation on that subject and the relevant Cabinet Minute 101 and Report No 173/08. The Cabinet had requested that the Scrutiny Committee consider including any of the White Paper recommendations in its Work Programme with a view to making suitable recommendations to Cabinet.

The Community Services Manager explained that community engagement was part of the ongoing Government agenda of improved democracy and local participation in the democratic process leading to community empowerment and engagement. There may be potential duties placed on councils should some of the recommendations in the White Paper be enacted. Moves towards local accountability tied in with the Government's emphasis on Local Area Agreements and the forthcoming Comprehensive Area Assessments, the focuses for which in East Sussex would be authorities' responses to environmental issues and to equality and diversity issues. There were no new suggestions within the White Paper which the Council was not already considering.

Crime Reduction Partnership activities were of priority and the Community Engagement Officer explained how the 'face the people' session had improved on traditionally bespoke meetings between councils, the police and the public. These meetings now produced better attendance and information for future agenda and included street briefings from which issues such as litter and dog fouling had been prioritised.

**Action**

Neighbourhood panels were to be trialed at Telscombe and Ringmer to include all the relevant authorities, third sector representatives, police, business representatives and the public. These panels would work with the Local Action Teams and consultation could affect outcomes in, for example, making positive changes to the proposed Seaford parking scheme. While councillors were aware that it was beneficial to have policy prioritised according to public concerns, a process which partially happened already, they were also aware that decisions taken by non-elected bodies might undermine the democratically elected councillors' role.

Councillors believed the White Paper reflected local activity on the ground with emphasis on the undoubted importance of third sector participation. Councillors noted that only a small fraction of tax collected was available for spending by local authorities, an especially small proportion in the South East. Lewes District benefited from being entirely parished. Issues such as localised ward councillor budgets could prove problematic to a small authority such as Lewes District Council.

The Communications Manager pointed out that it was the Council's duty to involve the public and explained that the Council was continually reviewing its communications policy and access to information and was considering working with other councils in determining how the public could better influence decisions made.

**Resolved:**

- 19.1** That it is not necessary to include any aspect of the Community Engagement White Paper in the Committee's Work Programme for 2008/09; and
- 19.2** Any issues arising from future legislation could be considered by the Committee if necessary.

**20 Date of Next Meeting**

The next Committee meeting was scheduled for 22 January 2009 at 9.30am in the Warren Room, Lewes House.

The meeting ended at 2.45 pm