

Committee	Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee	Item no.	2
Title	Minutes of meeting held on the 11 th December 2008		
Contributors	Scrutiny Manager		
Class	Part 1	Date	29 th January 2009

In attendance: Councillors Parmar (Chair), Walton (Vice Chair), Stamirowski and Till

Apologies: Councillor Addison
Geeta Subramaniam, Head of Crime Reduction & Supporting People

Also present: Gary Connors, Strategic Community Safety Services Manager
Andreas Ghosh, Head of Personnel & Development
Dave Kingdon, Interim Elections Manager
Barrie Neal, Head of Corporate Policy & Governance
Joel Hartfield, Scrutiny Manager

1. **Declarations of Interest**

1.1 There were none.

2. **Minutes of the meeting held on 13th November 2008**

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 13th November 2008 were agreed as a true record.

3. **Community Payback Scheme**

3.1 Gary Connors, Strategic Community Safety Services Manager, introduced the report. The following comments and queries were raised and responded to:

3.2 Cllr Till asked whether all the work carried out by offenders was manual work, as this would not be suitable for all people. Gary Connors replied that so far all the work had been manual, and this was unlikely to change. In response to a further question from Cllr Till about the budget for Community Payback, Gary Connors explained that the costs of equipment (including safety equipment) would be met from the £4k budget. This budget will not be sufficient, however, for further expansion of the service in the future.

3.3 Cllr Walton queried why work approved for the scheme could not include "work that would normally be done by paid employees", and in which case, why work in libraries and community halls was included when the council was responsible for upkeep of both. Gary Connors replied that this was to ensure that offenders were not denying non-offenders employment opportunities. Several members agreed that depending on the restrictions of Ministry of Justice criteria, Community Payback could be better used to help alleviate some of the cost pressures currently being experienced by the council and community. Gary Connors explained that the Scheme is due to be evaluated in April 2009 and the criteria for accepting work would be examined then.

- 3.4 The Chair relayed feedback that there was little awareness of the scheme among the public (although it was pointed out that awareness would be raised by the requirement to wear fluorescent jackets). The Chair also pointed out that he had had feedback in the past from the Probation service that Lewisham did not use the Scheme as much as other boroughs. He asked whether a list of the work carried out in Lewisham as part of the Scheme could be provided to members.
- 3.5 AGREED: Gary Connors to provide a list to the Scrutiny Manager of work carried out in Lewisham as part of the Community Payback Scheme, for circulation to the Committee.

4. Lewisham Council Employee Profile 2007-08

- 4.1 Andreas Ghosh, Head of Personnel & Development, introduced the report.
- 4.2 Cllr Stamirowski asked what measures had been introduced to tackle staff sickness absence. Andreas Ghosh replied that work is carried out with managers to try and reduce sickness absence across the council, including the requirement to carry out back-to-work interviews for all staff. The Council also offers an employee assistance programme, and in extreme cases is able to dismiss staff. However, dismissal is rare and more effort is targeted at preventing short-term absences, as a form of early intervention.
- 4.3 In response to a question from Cllr Stamirowski, Andreas Ghosh said that despite recent age discrimination legislation, no staff over the retirement age had yet been recruited. However, this may change in the future. In response to a further question from Cllr Stamirowski, Andreas Ghosh explained that poor feedback from staff around council benefits was probably down to the council not promoting benefits more, in particular the pension scheme.
- 4.4 Cllr Till asked about the amount of job sharing at the council; the response was that the numbers had gone down in recent years, and there were relatively few now. Cllr Till also queried whether the majority of disabled staff at the council were physically disabled; Andreas Ghosh replied that most were, but the number also included those with mental or psychological disabilities, including stress.
- 4.5 Cllr Walton asked why no information was available on staff's sexual orientation or religion. Andreas Ghosh replied that monitoring would be introduced from April 2009 when a new payroll system is implemented. Staff will be asked to provide information on their religion and sexual orientation, and this will provide a benchmark to compare progress against in future years.
- 4.6 In response to a question from the Chair, Andreas Ghosh confirmed that where grades are downgraded through implementation of Single Status, salaries would be protected for two years. Where a salary increase resulted, this would be backdated to 1st April 2007. In response to a further question from the Chair, he explained that research had previously been carried out at other local authorities into the reasons for BME staff being over-represented in disciplinary procedures. Representation needs to be monitored by grade and work area to place the statistics in context. The ethnicity of staff involved in disciplinary procedures is closely monitored in Lewisham and investigated where there are major variances.

4.7 The Chair asked what the main reason was for the numbers of people requesting early retirement. Andreas Ghosh replied that the main reason was a desire for a change in lifestyle. A panel was in place to consider all requests both in terms of service needs as well as an employee's preference. Many requests are not granted.

4.8 The Committee thanked the officer for the presentation.

5. Review of Voter Turnout – final report

5.1 Joel Hartfield, Scrutiny Manager, introduced the final report for the review.

5.2 Cllr Walton asked how budget matters for electoral services are dealt with, bearing in mind that electoral matters are not a function of the executive. Barrie Neal, Head of Corporate Policy & Governance, replied that these would be made through the usual budget procedures for growth proposals.

5.3 AGREED: that the report would be referred to the Elections Committee for further consideration.

6. Select Committee Work Programme and Forward Plan

6.1 Joel Hartfield introduced the work programme. An additional item on the Grants Process will be added to the January meeting.

6.2 In addition, Joel Hartfield explained to the Committee that planning for next year's work programme would start earlier this year to ensure that the first meeting of 2009-10 is not solely used for consideration of the work programme. Any suggestions for future scrutiny items should be made to the Scrutiny Manager ahead of the next meeting.

6.3 Cllr Walton suggested that provision of legal services should be scrutinised by the Committee in light of the decision last year to withdraw funding from the Lewisham Law Centre. The scrutiny would focus on how funding from the Legal Services Commission had been used to meet the needs of groups such as new immigrants or asylum seekers.

6.4 AGREED: that an email would be sent to members of the committee asking for suggestions for scrutiny items for 2009-10. It was also agreed that officers would be asked to provide further information at the January meeting on provision of legal advice in the borough.

7. Items referred to Mayor and Cabinet

7.1 There were none.

The meeting ended at 8.20pm.

Chair:

Date: