

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SPECIAL)

25th April 2012

PRESENT:-

Conservative Group

Councillor Mrs. Plenderleith (Chairman), Councillor Atkin (Vice-Chairman) and Councillors Mrs. Hood and Mrs. Patten,

Labour Group

Councillors Bambrick, Mrs. Mead and Pearson.

OS/37. **APOLOGY**

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Bell (Labour Group).

OS/38. **FUNDED VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION REVIEW**

Following on from the earlier presentations, the purpose of this Special Meeting was to receive a presentation from Sharpe's Pottery and written submissions from the remaining voluntary organisations that received funding of less than £25,000 per annum.

A presentation was made by Tony Hurrell, Chairman of Sharpe's Pottery and Museum. Initially, he reminded Members of the developments that had taken place on-site since 1997, when a study was commissioned and bid was prepared to preserve the industrial heritage and create a community resource. In 2003, the Centre opened after the completion of a £1.7m project and details were given of the initial uses of the premises. Subsequent developments included the Tourist Information Centre being co-located at Sharpe's in 2006, the strategic re-vamp in 2008 and, in 2010 a full financial review took place. The most recent development had seen the relocation of the coffee shop and creation of a Heritage Lottery Funded "toilet story" and play zone, which Members took the opportunity to view.

Mr. Hurrell summarised what the Centre had "on offer". The premises provided an iconic building and visitor attraction. He stressed that the Museum and Heritage Centre was free to enter and told the local heritage story.

It also provided a performance space, an educational centre and conference facility, being at the gateway to the National Forest. The premises also accommodated People Express and the Magic Attic.

The organisation's Mission Statement was provided together with a financial background, which explained recent financial challenges and how Sharpes had responded. Mr. Hurrell explained how the Centre was looking to secure

its future, referring to recent developments at the Museum, the new coffee shop and play zone, together with works to the Kiln. He also confirmed the extensive partnership working and spoke about school visits. The presentation concluded in stating Sharpes commitment. This was to continue to protect the valuable heritage, arts and culture at the site and remain at the heart of the delivery of the strategic vision for the West Street area of the Town Centre. This commitment also included delivery of the Tourist Information Centre and to create an effective gateway for the National Forest in the Town Centre. In summary, there was an intention to remain “fit for purpose”.

Members submitted questions on the impact of the recently opened retail park at the other end of the Town, the loss of commercial support and efforts to gain more sponsors, together with the percentage use of the conference facilities. There was discussion about the role of Sharpes and that of the Council in terms of regeneration, together with observations/praise regarding the increased use of the facilities and the school visits.

Mr. Hurrell was thanked for the presentation.

The Committee then reviewed the circulated documents for the bodies that received funding of less than £25,000 per annum from the Council. The Community Partnership Officer took Members through each of the documents, confirming the current levels of grant funding and highlighting particular points.

Members were invited to submit questions. With regard to the Sinfin and Stenson Fields Asian Over 60's Welfare Club, there was discussion about the proportionate grants received from this Authority and Derby City Council, it being noted that the majority of its members came from the Stenson Fields area. The Officer confirmed that he attended bi-monthly meetings of this group. Presently, there was no Elected Member representation for the group.

With regard to Homestart South Derbyshire, the Chief Officer and a Trustee were in attendance and Members took the opportunity to ask questions of them. A context was provided on the work of this voluntary group and reference was made to the circulated case studies. A Member sought further information on the difference between Surestart, which was a statutory body and Homestart which was a voluntary body that worked along side it. In response to a question about staffing costs, details were provided about the ratio of paid employees to the 35 voluntary staff. Members praised the work being delivered by this voluntary organisation. It was noted that the Council had Member representation on this group in addition to the Officer attending its meetings.

The Committee then discussed the documents circulated by Next Step (Against Domestic Abuse). The Officer explained the relatively low level of grant support provided and the role of this voluntary organisation. It was noted that funding had been secured from the Big Lottery 'Reaching Communities Fund', which was due to finish shortly and work was taking place across the County to see how the project could be sustained. It was questioned whether levels of domestic violence were increasing and was noted that levels of reported abuse had increased. Other issues discussed were the provision of

“safe rooms” within a property and the peaks in domestic violence associated with certain events or times of year.

Next, the Committee received a report from Rural Action Derbyshire. The Officer explained the funding provided to this County-wide group, its role and services including specialist advice. An example of the work was helping parish councils when they were preparing parish plans and other examples were given. Again, it was noted that there was a considerable return for the Council’s contribution, whilst acknowledging that this group focussed on the north of the County, where there was more social deprivation. However, the group contributed to the South Derbyshire Partnership and provided support to the Community Partnership Officer.

The Chairman referred to the earlier review work undertaken on the Shopmobility scheme, which was another of the funded voluntary organisations. There was a wish to recognise them within this review report and the Community Partnership Officer provided an update on the Group’s relocation to the CVS Offices in Grove Street.

The Chairman commented that the Committee had received a lot of information over the previous nine months as part of this Funded Voluntary Organisation review. She expressed her thanks to the groups for their input to the process. There was a need to tie together the findings, to agree recommendations and then submit a review report to the Housing and Community Services Committee. She reminded that the brief for this review was around value for money and suggested two recommendations concerning how District Council Members reported back to Full Council and also on how the groups could report back via the Community Partnership Officer. An annual update could be provided, mainly on the changes that had taken place in the previous year. It was suggested that the annual documents produced by each organisation could include a note from the Elected Member serving on them. A suggestion was made to list the documents considered within the appendix to the review report and to provide hyperlinks to this information.

It was questioned what mechanisms there were for other organisations to bid for funding in the future. A Member recalled that an additional sum of £100,000 had been included within the Council budgets some years previously, but had not been allocated. The decision had been taken previously to fund certain infrastructure groups that delivered services across the District. It was considered that changes to future funding arrangements could form the basis of a further scrutiny review. Officers reminded that there would be another financial settlement in November, after which there would be more certainty over the Council’s financial position.

There was a consensus that all of the voluntary organisations had demonstrated value for money for the Council’s contributions. Further reference was made to the additional sum of £100,000 and there was a consensus that this funding shouldn’t be lost.

In terms of the review report, authority was sought for officers to liaise with the Chairman in producing the draft document. It would be circulated in time for the Committee’s Meeting on 2nd May 2012, with a view to the report being

finalised and submitted to the Housing and Community Services Committee in June. Members expressed their thanks to all of the groups involved for their time and the information circulated, which had shown the value for money the Council received for its contribution.

It was agreed that officers liaise with the Chairman of the Committee in producing a draft review report for consideration at the Committee's Meeting on 2nd May 2012.

MRS. A. PLENDERLEITH

CHAIRMAN

The Meeting terminated at 7.55 p.m.