

To: Executive Board – 13 March 2006

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Community Scrutiny Committee – 7 March 2006

123 DRAFT SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY

The Strategy and Review Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended), concerning the draft Social Inclusion Strategy.

Mark Fransham (Strategy and Review) presented the report to the Committee, and explained the background. He pointed out that Social Inclusions was a positive statement of what the Council would wish to achieve. It did not propose any new actions, but sought instead to implement the principles of social inclusion, which went beyond people living on low incomes to cover problems that were associated with having little disposable income. For example, child poverty in Oxford was higher than the national average, and people from the black and ethnic minority communities were more likely to be unemployed. Rough sleeping was also an issue.

During discussion of this issue, the following key points were made:-

- (1) The City Council would wish to see the new Children's Centres placed in the areas where they would be of most benefit, but it was appreciated that finding the space in which to put them would be a challenge.
- (2) There was concern that the numbers of rough sleepers were increasing. The problem seemed to be that many surrounding local authorities had a "local connections" policy, which sent people back to their former abode. In addition, some local authorities were sending people to Oxford precisely because the City of Oxford did not have such a policy. Approximately five years ago, Oxford had over 50 rough sleepers, and this led to the creation of a street culture amongst them. It was desirable to try to avoid this situation recurring. Val Johnson was looking at this issue seriously, and has made the Portfolio Holder (Councillor Dan Paskins) aware of it. Consideration might have to be given towards introducing a local connections policy for the City of Oxford.
- (3) It was suggested that, of the five principles outlined in the report, the third one could be strengthened to allow local people more say in local decision making, by the use of the Area Committees where possible. However, another view was put that Area Committees should be used in more of a consultative role, and that local councillors should also play a part.
- (4) It was also suggested that some assessment of voluntary work taking place in the City should be included. A question was raised about statistics relating to more privileged areas of the City.

- (5) Mark Fransham informed the Committee that he had attended a meeting of the Oxford Strategic Partnership, and that there was support there for various bodies working together on an audit of social inclusion work.. These included the PCT and members of the voluntary sector. The County Council had appointed someone to fulfil the social inclusion function, albeit under a different name.

Resolved:-

- (1) To note the contents of the report, and to note all the comments made by the Committee whilst considering this issue;
- (2) To endorse the underpinning principles in the Council's approach to promoting social inclusion;
- (3) To endorse the recommended forward plan for 2006/2007;
- (4) To ask that periodic monitoring reports be brought back to the Committee;
- (5) To ASK that the Executive Board support the work ongoing, including the requests for help from the Homelessness Directorate, with the issues of rough sleepers; and to further request that consideration be given by the Executive Board to the possible introduction of a "local connections" policy as a last resort.

The report relating to this item appears later on the agenda. However, the issue raised during the debate concerning the possible introduction of a local connections policy for homelessness will be dealt with in a report to be submitted by the Neighbourhood Renewal Business Manager to the May Executive Board.