EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 23RD NOVEMBER 2006 - DRAFT

57. SOCIAL INCLUSION ACTIVITY – AUDIT RESULTS

The Strategy and Review Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) detailing the results and findings of the Social Inclusion Audit, as agreed by the Community Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on 7th March 2006. Mark Fransham (Social Inclusion and Health Inequalities Policy Officer), presented this report to the Committee. The following additional information was given, and key points made:-

(1)   Councillor Williams observed that there had been changes to the criteria for awarding European Union grants to enable the applicant (if the applicant was within an area seen as affluent), to make a case for pockets of deprivation within their area. There had been a conference concerning European Union Structural Funding for Local Government to which Councillor Williams felt a delegate should have been sent, and that failure to do so was to miss an opportunity.

(2)   It was confirmed that a report concerning pockets of vulnerable older people would be presented at the Community Scrutiny committee meeting in January 2007.

(3)   There had been concern that the definition of Super Output Areas (SOAs) had been drawn up at national level and then applied across the board. However, there were parts of Cutteslowe and Marston that were deprived, although the area overall might be viewed as affluent. It was important to make clear that the City Council cared for people in such a situation. Although the Committee felt that the main emphasis should be on the SOAs, it was important that the smaller pockets of deprivation that were dotted around the City should not be forgotten.

(4)   It was noted that the housing officers were carrying out an Elderly Person's Review that might help to identify some of the needs of older people. The Chair commented that elderly people were often trapped by needing a place in residential or sheltered accommodation when such places were in short supply through hospital "bed blocking" and people been place inappropriately in residential accommodation. The Chair felt these were important issues for consideration.

(5)   Mark Fransham hoped to explore the monitoring framework for social inclusion work with the Oxford Strategic Partnership at some point. This would return to the Committee once completed.

(6)   As far as the take up of benefits was concerned, it was felt important that some part of the budget was devoted to increasing the income of people living on benefits. This might provide for computer software to help with this process, or even go towards hiring members of staff to assist with this. It would be important to work with other organisations to achieve the best outcome. Part of the problem with the lack of take up of benefits was the lack of knowledge about them. Running a campaign to encourage people to take up benefits would cost between £3,000 and £5,000. The Committee felt that an ongoing benefits campaign would be an important part of anti-poverty work.

(7)   Penny Randall (Policy Officer – Social Inclusion and Health Inequalities) would be starting work on the Affordable Warmth issue in the New Year under the auspices of Environmental Health.

(8)   Councillor Tanner suggested that there should be "future proofing" of all new Council policies to ensure that they took the need for social inclusion into account. Mark Fransham observed that this might give a useful steer to officers whilst writing reports.

(9)   Business and enterprise were one way out of poverty, but Councillor Altaf-Khan observed that, as far as the BME community was concerned, it should reach wider than purely business.

(10)   There was a work plan for community cohesion, but this required further work.

Resolved:-

(1) To approve all the recommendations outlined in the report, with the following alterations:-

    (a)   Services for people on low incomes – first recommendation to read "A ring fenced budget for ongoing benefits take-up campaigns **should** be provided on an ongoing basis" [alteration in bold typeface];

(2) To ask the Scrutiny Officer to write to the Leader of the Council expressing the Committee's disappointment that a chance to attend the conference on European Structural funding for Local Government (cited in point 1 above), was missed.

(3) To ask officers to use the information related to Super Output Areas to consult with SEEDA concerning making a European Social Fund application during the next financial year;

(4) To recommend to Executive Board that there should be "future proofing" of all new Council policies to ensure that they took the need for social inclusion into account, and that this should be gradually extended to cover existing policies;

(5) To thank Mark Fransham for all his hard work on this issue.