

Community Scrutiny Committee – 15 November 2007

60. CALL-IN: COWLEY COMMUNITY CENTRE

The Committee considered a report (previously circulated and now appended) of the Strategic Director, Housing, Health and Community, considered by the Executive Board on 5 November 2007 together with the related minute of the Executive Board.

The Chair explained he had called in the Executive Board decision to examine whether: -

1. the project represents value for money in the context of the proposed redevelopment of the Cowley Community Centre;
2. reconsideration of the location of Local Council Office might enable beneficial changes to the scheme for Cowley Community Centre;
3. the proposed location for the Local Council Office is likely to provide an accessible, highly visible and well-used service for the public.

Councillor David Rundle attended for this item in his role as Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities. He said that there was provision in the current year's budget to open a one-stop shop at the Cowley Centre. Premises that would be ideal in the longer term were not yet available and a suitable temporary unit had been. There was an urgent need to proceed because of the impending closure of the Blackbird Leys housing office. Consultation had been carried out and users had overwhelmingly supported the proposal to establish a facility in the Cowley Centre. There was no change of planning class for the unit and therefore no change in the balance of retail units, therefore it could be opened much more quickly than other possible options. This would demonstrate the Council's commitment.

The following points were raised during discussion:

- The unit proposed was tucked away and would not attract casual passers by, and therefore it was likely the facility would be underused and vulnerable to future budget cuts.
- It suggested that a decision should be deferred until the options appraisal for the Cowley Community Centre was completed.
- Councillor Rundle said that the proposed location was only an interim solution. Deferral would lead to considerable delays and no other unit was available for the interim period.
- Councillor Keen (Ward Councillor) said that he believed the unit was in the wrong location and did not cater adequately for the needs of the Credit Union (which was being displaced from the Cowley Community

Centre). He suggested there could be a possibility of a prefabricated building being sited in the car park for a temporary period.

- About 30-50 % of users would have pre-booked appointments.
- Members were surprised that there had been no footfall analysis to establish whether the location was sufficiently visible to casual users.
- Local people knew best whether the location was suitable but the proposal had not been submitted to the Area Committee for its views.

Resolved to: -

- (1) thank Councillor Rundle for attending.
- (2) that the Executive be recommended that: -
 - a. it be guided by the views of the Cowley Area Committee when establishing the location of the One Stop Shop at the Cowley Centre.
 - b. the decision be deferred until the Cowley Centre option appraisal has been completed and more information (including information on footfall relating to the proposed temporary unit) was available.