

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Cabinet in the Community

Meeting held 22 January 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Pat Midgley (Chair, East Local Area Partnership),
Leigh Bramall, Ben Curran, Julie Dore, Jackie Drayton and Mary Lea

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1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 The Chair of the East Local Area Partnership, Councillor Pat Midgley, and the Leader of the Council, Councillor Julie Dore welcomed members of the public to the meeting. Councillor Dore commented that this was the fourth year of the Cabinet in the Community meetings. They had been introduced as it was recognised that members of the public often did not get the opportunity to meet and speak to Cabinet Members within their local area.
- 1.2 Councillor Dore added that one of the biggest decisions currently facing the Council was to agree a budget for the 2015/16 financial year. By next year the council's main Government grant will have been cut by over 50% since 2010 and the Council were facing difficult decisions as to how to manage the budget cut, as they were faced with making a further £60 million of cuts next year.
- 1.3 Councillor Ben Curran, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, then provided an overview of the impact of the budget cuts on the City. Across the Council Equality Impact Assessments were being maintained to assess the impact of decisions on all groups which was no longer a legal requirement but the administration believed it was important to try and mitigate the impact of decisions as much as possible.
- 1.4 The Council Tax support scheme was being maintained at 23% whereas most Council's around the country were making cuts in this area. It was acknowledged that, in the light of the budget cuts, the Council could not protect everybody for everything but were working hard to mitigate the impact.
- 1.5 In terms of health, better partnership working with colleagues at the NHS was helping to mitigate the impact. The Better Care Fund would limit the cost of health provision by assisting people to stay in their homes. The care package which people received was also being reviewed to see whether a more efficient service could be provided.
- 1.6 Regarding transport, the contribution to the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive had been reduced. There had been better partnership working across culture, sports and leisure. However, those who benefited from the services needed to contribute to ensure the services were maintained. Smarter working had been developed between departments and public realms merged. Savings were being negotiated on many contracts and detailed consultation would be undertaken where changes were made.

- 1.7 In Children, Young People and Families more work was being undertaken on a regional level such as Youth Justice. The Cabinet Member, Councillor Jackie Drayton, was reviewing the Short Breaks and Respite Services. Schools had been relatively protected from the cuts.
- 1.8 The libraries review had received a lot of positive feedback. There were few authorities across the country who had managed to keep all their libraries open. There had been an extensive consultation before the final decision was taken and many libraries had remained open with longer opening hours.
- 1.9 The Council would continue to protect services where it could. Although a 1.99% increase in Council Tax was proposed for the forthcoming year this was on the back of a freeze for the past four years.

2. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Question 1 Winnie Smith asked why the Council were wanting to 'get rid' of Tenants and Residents Groups.

Answer 1 Councillor Julie Dore commented that she had said many times that there was no intention or programme or plan to disband tenants and residents groups. If this was a fear or a rumour amongst tenants and residents it should be made clear that this wasn't the case. The Tenants and Residents Groups (TARAs) were very highly valued by the Council and helped the Council to do their job. TARA's were in were the voice of their communities and raised a range of issues with the Council around services.

Responding to a further question from Mrs Smith regarding the TARA Recognition Policy, Councillor Dore stated that TARA's were in receipt of public money and, as such, there had to be accountability. This was the reason for the Recognition Policy which outlined a set of standards which TARAs needed to adhere to. If there were aspects of the Recognition Policy which TARAs did not agree with they should raise these concerns through the formal process.

Councillor Dore further commented that the Council were not trying to remove residents from TARAs. There would shortly be a thorough review of the Housing Strategy and Tenants involvement.

Question 2 Two members of the public raised concerns over anti-social behaviour around the Dagenham Road area and the lack of Police action to try and resolve the problems.

Answer 2 Councillor Pat Midgley stated that Members worked closely with the Police within the local area. Councillor Julie Dore added that a Community Safety Partnership was a good forum to raise issues of concern with the Police. She knew the area referred to well. It may be as simple as requesting the Police undertake walk rounds in the area.

A regular dialogue could be established to monitor issues on a monthly

basis so that the process did not have to be continually restarted. The Council had an effective system in place to deal with anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Jackie Drayton commented that the Police said when incidents of anti-social behaviour occurred these should be reported to the 101 number. The Police could then keep a log of incidents and allocate resources to hotspot areas.

Councillor Pat Midgley commented that the East Local Area partnership were currently having difficulties in their communication with the Police as the Inspector had recently left and a new Inspector had not yet started in post. It was hoped that this would improve in the future.

Councillor Jackie Drayton referred to the Norfolk Park Regeneration meeting which used to meet on a regular basis. This was a useful forum which brought the Police, Youth Justice and housing providers together. However, once the regeneration had been completed this meeting had ceased and it would be useful if a similar forum could be established.

A representative of Activity Sheffield commented that he would look into whether any diversionary activities could be established for young people in the area.

Question 3 A member of the public referred to issues she had been encountering in terms of securing a property in the area as she had a 7 year old diagnosed with epilepsy and was 31 weeks pregnant and asked what could be done to help her remain in the area?

Answer 3 Councillor Dore commented that personal circumstances should be taken into consideration when properties were allocated. If the questioner left their contact details this would be followed up.

Question 4 Debbie Matthews commented that Sheffield was losing a lot of money as a result of austerity cuts and welfare reform. The East and North East of the City were facing the biggest cuts. In respect of the devolution agreements what could be done to ensure disadvantaged communities benefited from the deals?

Answer 4 Councillor Leigh Bramall, Cabinet Member for Business, Skills and Development, responded that devolution in itself was irrelevant. It was about what could be done with it. The questioner was right to say that during the economic boom the disadvantaged communities benefited very little and he believed that the country had failed to provide a proper skills system to give people the chance of an adequate career.

People had no faith that they would be given access to the opportunities available. The message that engineering opportunities were no longer available was not the right message to convey. There were still opportunities available and not just at the top level but also at smaller engineering companies.

The Council's 100 apprentices programme was just a small part of what could be done. It was important that more powers were devolved and decisions taken away from Civil Servants at Whitehall.

Councillor Julie Dore commented on the recent 'devolution' deal. This was not about public services but about things which drove the economy – business, skills and infrastructure. The money was not new money but how it would be spent would now be decided as a region rather than component parts bidding for funding. It was not a policy deal or deal about how public services were run and the aim of the administration was for these powers to be devolved down and decisions on how money was spent were not taken at Whitehall.

Councillor Dore further commented that devolution without investment would not be a success. The Government closed down Regional Development Agencies and created Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) comprising local business leaders with no money allocated to service or facilitate them and no money to spend. In effect, therefore the LEPs became consultative bodies on how money was spent.

Councillor Jackie Drayton commented that the recent consultation for the Tackling Poverty Strategy had highlighted that most people defined as living in poverty lived in the East and North East of the City. The way out of poverty was employment, education, environment and health. The key for the Council was how they could influence things. Devolution was the first step. The 100 apprenticeship programme had a pre-apprenticeship component as some were further away from employment than others.

Councillor Leigh Bramall emphasised that devolution did not replace the funding which had been taken out of the City. The City had a long standing successful public sector. However, as a result of the cuts, graduates were now going into lower skilled jobs and taking those jobs away from those taking the first step up the ladder. It was a big challenge for the City and if the Council were able to obtain more control locally better interventions could be made to solve the issue.

Councillor Ben Curran commented that devolution deals were a smokescreen for the Government to say that they were doing something to tackle the issues. He wanted to see a proper settlement where more powers on local issues were devolved to decision makers in the City.

Question 5 Councillor Pat Midgley read out a written question submitted in respect of planting outside a tenants' flat from a member of the public who had been unable to attend the meeting. A written response would be provided.