

POLICY DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW 2011/12: PROGRESS ON REVIEWS

Report of the Chief Executive

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the progress in relation to the two policy reviews being undertaken by the Management Scrutiny Committee into self regulation and high-cost consumer credit and illegal money lending respectively.

2. Background

- 2.1 Initial scoping documents were presented to the Committee on the 14th July 2011 which set out proposed terms of reference for each of the reviews. At its meeting on 15th September, 2011 the Committee considered scene setting reports for both reviews into self regulation (now titled Demonstrating Local Accountability: A look at the emerging national Self Regulation Framework and implications for the Council) and illegal money lending (now titled At What Cost: The Effects of High-Cost Credit and Illegal Loan Sharks on Local Communities).

3. Demonstrating Local Accountability: Policy Review - Update

- 3.1 Following discussions around the approach and scene setting at the last meeting, Members agreed to the workshop approach for undertaking this particular review. The first workshop, to be arranged, will look at the sector led approach with a particular emphasis on local accountability tools including self assessment.
- 3.2 The workshop is aimed to be an interactive session and will also provide real life examples presented to Members by officers from Children's Services and Adult Social Care.
- 3.3 A report will be submitted to the 10th November 2011 Committee meeting that will outline the key points and issues rising from this first workshop.

4. At What Cost? : Policy Review Objectives of the Review - Update

- 4.1 The first focus group for this particular piece of work will have taken place immediately prior to this meeting. It is hoped that the discussions were informative and have contributed some useful evidence to the review process. A more detailed summary of this focus group will be prepared for the next meeting of the Management Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.2 As part of the policy review it is proposed to hold a session with Shontal, an interactive theatre group. Shontal are a not for profit organisation who have worked with a number of organisations to help promote financial inclusion. Using the medium of theatre Shontal bring home the reality of people struggling with debt. The format is interactive and includes audience engagement as part of the experience; during the play audience opinion and advice is sought. Shontal will

usually take around an hour for the initial piece however this will depend upon how voluble the audience are, as well as the time constraints of the event. The shows are scripted and rehearsed but never the same twice as the audience affects the flow of the action. This means the actors have to think on their feet. Our follow on work incorporates exercises demonstrating many aspects of financial risk and problems through discussion and workshop.

- 4.3 The show we would be looking to use as part of the review would be 'It's Only A Few Quid'. This show was commissioned by the Illegal Money Lending Team. Intended to be hard hitting and thought provoking, 'It's Only A Few Quid' looks at the hardship faced by a young mother who encounters the attentions of a loan shark. In a 1 hour performance, the audience sees how Gill's changing circumstances, and collapsing support network leads her to seek extra cash to help feed and clothe herself and her young son. Unfortunately she is led into a destructive financial and psychological chain of events. Surely somebody can help..... Led by a facilitator, the audience is invited to contribute to the advice and support Gill requires.
- 4.4 The aim of this as part of the review would be to illustrate how loan sharks operate in the real world and the effects this can have on a person, their family and the community. Also the interactive nature of the performance will allow for debate and discussion as the performance develops and participation will illustrate the support networks available to people in similar circumstances. This has the potential to be a powerful, innovative and informative exercise that will contribute valuable evidence to the policy review.
- 4.5 The Shontal Theatre Group are a not for profit organisation however there is a fee attached to the live theatre performance of £300.00. It would be for Members of the Management Scrutiny Committee to consider using their scrutiny budget to undertake this exercise.
- 4.6 The timetable for this policy review is attached as an appendix to this report.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 That the information in the report is noted.
- 5.2 That Members give consideration to using the Shontal Theatre Group as part of the evidence gathering approach to the review.

Background Papers

There were no background papers used in the preparation of this report.

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