

Appendix 4

Summary Report on Standards Complaint relating to Stocksbridge Leisure Centre

Outline of Complaint

Complaints were received from 4 participants in a public meeting held to discuss the proposed closure of Stocksbridge Leisure Centre. A Councillor was alleged to make a comment to the effect that the potential closure had not been made public earlier owing to the “political mischief” which would have been caused. There were underlying issues in relation to the decision making process, consultation and Equality Impact Assessments which were not within the scope of the Standards Procedure and subsequently gave rise to a Judicial Review being issued.

Investigation of Report

The complainants were informed by the Monitoring Officer of which matters could be considered under the Standards Process and they were invited to specify which provisions of the code had been breached and to the outcome they sought. The Independent Person and Monitoring Officer met to consider how to proceed and agreed to offer to meet all parties. Two complainants attended a meeting at which the subject of the complaint and the matters which fell outside the complaint were discussed at length. It was agreed the complainants would provide further information. They failed to do this and no further communication was received from them. One complainant withdrew. The Monitoring Officer and Independent Person also met with the Councillor to obtain her views and account of events.

Findings

Although there were slight differences in the accounts generally the events were agreed. The Councillor acknowledged the remark should not have been made and was not accurate as to the reasons the potential closure had not been made public. She apologised for the remark. It was clear that it was not the remark but the decision making process relating to the potential closure which was the real subject of the complaint. This was outside the Standards Process. The Monitoring Officer and IP decided that the matter should not proceed to the Standards Committee.

Recommendations

The Independent Person and Monitoring Officer make the following recommendations arising from the investigation

1. The City Council should develop closer working relationships with the Parish Councils to enable plans for their areas to be discussed and allows the Parish Council to be involved in future plans .

2. The Parish and City Council should attempt to agree a communications strategy in relation to future plans.
3. The Council should review the timing and nature of its consultation with the community on possible service cuts arising from budget restrictions. Where possible the consultation should take place before the Council's Annual Budget is made public as this is perceived by the public as the Council's decision to reduce or stop the service.
4. The Council should provide information in relation to the decision making process in particular the relationship between the annual budget and individual decisions relating to services and the role of Cabinet Members.
5. The Council should consider using Independent Advisors similar to Independent Persons to provide an external overview of the Council's communication and consultation plans.