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To: Lidgate, Bill
 Subject: Crossroads report

PARTNERSHIP OVERVIEW and SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Report on visit to

"CROSSROADS" voluntary organisation, by Cllrs. Pam Bacon and Bill Lidgate on 21st. January. 2002

"Crossroads" is a national organisation concerned in supporting carers in the Social Services sector. The local branch operates from Seeley's House, part of a complex of a Day Centre and Respite Care, at Knotty Green, covering South Buckinghamshire, (Chiltern and S. Bucks. District Councils, High Wycombe and the Health Trust). We met the Management Committee of Anne Whiteley, Lewis Jones and Brian Smith, with apologies from the Chairman for his absence

As we were seeking to find out how the volunteer sector within the County viewed their role as partners with the County Council, the first question was how "Crossroads" defined "partnership". All agreed the importance of consultation at an early stage so that they could influence County policy. They saw the role of County as supporting initiatives by "Crossroads" as the front-line service, but recognised that the local authorities had to be the providers, since they distributed funding and were often the commissioning agent. The Committee felt that County were very supportive and listened to their views, but the main criticism of this was the inevitable increase in documentation - directives, information, briefings, consultation meetings etc., which took up time, energy and cost of the Management, better spent in carrying out their actual work. Instead of whole documents, the Committee would prefer summaries! The real pressure came with the level of funding. County was willing to fund initiatives but irritation built up over lack of communication between departments within County and the slowness in implementing decisions and, therefore, funding, to be passed down to their Line Managers. Assessment of clients, for instance, led to time wasting while County slow to agree and pass down the decisions for implementation. Cutting out one layer of management could lead to quicker implementation. This also applied to Care Service Orders, a key factor in the day-to-day work of the organisation. Each contract or Agreement with County is of a high standard and the Committee welcomed this but this implied a high financial cost which was not always matched by County.

The Committee was satisfied with the training programme offered by County, but criticised the attitude that they were often asked to pay the cost, especially in the times when there were vacancies on a particular course. They were suspicious that voluntary organisations were excluded and wanted to be treated on an equal footing with Social Service employees, "in house". Worth checking!. "Crossroads" initiated their own recruitment of staff and carers and provided the complete package. They submitted the bill to County once a month, which was usually paid in full, but any shortfall was absorbed by the organisation, hence the need to have alternative funding, by bidding for specific grants from the Government, Lottery and having private clients etc. Lack of resources meant curtailing recruitment by means of advertising but they were fortunate in retaining carers who remained loyal and had long-term commitment - not common in an area noted for difficulty in recruitment and retention of staff!. For all this, "Crossroads" had a high reputation in the area. The level of training was high and the County's Inspection Unit maintained spot checks. The frequency of inspection and monitoring was deemed essential, but onerous and time-consuming and the Committee suggested that checks could be co-ordinated and less often.

Overall, the Committee was satisfied with the interpretation of "partnership" between "Crossroads" and County, but with the usual dissatisfaction with the amount of financial support and the slowness of some of the decisions. They would welcome an increased awareness in and interest of, their work, by Councillors and there was always an open invitation to visit Seeley's House.