

APPENDIX H
Agenda Item No. 11

ENSURING OUR SERVICES MEET THE NEEDS OF THE
Resources
WHOLE COMMUNITY – STAGE 1 SCOPING PAPER

Director of Corporate

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To enable Members to consider the focus for the subsequent stages of the review into the way in which the Council is approaching the delivery of its outcome to ensure our services meet the needs of the whole community.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Scrutiny Committee agrees the focus for the three stage review and the outline process set out in paragraph 4.2 of this report.
- 2.2 That the Scrutiny Committee selects from Appendix 1 of this report the witnesses that should be invited to participate in the next stage of the review and gives consideration to other witnesses they may wish to include, and that officers from key services, as proposed in paragraph 4.3, should also be asked to attend.
- 2.3 That the Communities Scrutiny Committee be invited to send three representatives to participate in the next stage of the Review.

3. Supporting Information

- 3.1 The Council's key aims provide the basis for the review work being carried out by all of the Scrutiny Committees in the current year. These key aims and outcomes help us to achieve our mission "To make Aylesbury Vale the best possible place to live and work" is based. One of the approved outcomes is to ensure that Council services meet the needs of the whole community.
- 3.2 In identifying the issues that the Scrutiny Committee may wish to examine in detail as a part of a three stage review focused on this topic, it is considered appropriate to start to ask some fairly basic questions. These can be largely grouped under four main headings:
- *What Services?* – the majority of Council services are a statutory requirement, and we do currently provide some discretionary services. Do we want to consider expanding our discretionary services or delivering our statutory services to a higher (or lower) standard?
 - *What Needs?* – What are the key needs of our local communities? Recent surveys have suggested that issues such as the fear of crime, cleanliness of public areas and affordable housing are priorities. However, there may be groups with more specific and fundamental needs that could be losing out if we are focused on the wider public priorities and therefore there would be implications.

- *What Communities?* – the overall community of Aylesbury Vale is in reality made up of a patchwork of smaller communities, which might be defined by location, (i.e. village or estate) or ethnicity and religion, age, personal circumstance (ie. disabled) or personal interests (ie. sports, hobbies etc.). Are communities being well served by the services we deliver?
- *How Accessible?* – Do any of our local communities or groups of individuals have difficulty in accessing our services? Are our services located so that they can be easily accessed? When we are contacted do we respond effectively? Are we still prone to look at issues from the Council’s rather than the customers’ perspective?

3.3 Clearly these questions, whilst valid, could lead to an extremely wide review by scrutiny which would be difficult to manage. In order to try and provide a greater focus for the review, some of the evidence that might relate to these issues has been summarised below for Members consideration.

Serving Communities

3.4 Three recent surveys might help us establish whether there are any community groups whose needs are not being satisfied. These surveys were the AVDC Household Survey (Summer 2004), the ODPM Biennial Survey (Autumn 2003) and the AVDC Housing Tenants Status Survey (February 2004). The key points coming out of these surveys are summarised below:

- 69% of respondents are generally satisfied with our services, with only around 11% expressing any dissatisfaction (AVDC Household Survey);
- only 62% of Aylesbury respondents stated that they were satisfied with our services, against around 72% to 73% elsewhere (AVDC Household Survey);
- 72% felt relatively well informed by the council, but only 66% of Aylesbury respondents and 58% of younger respondents felt this was the case (AVDC Household Survey);
- 75% of white respondents expressed satisfaction with the housing landlord service, but only 63% of non-white respondents (STATUS survey);
- similarly 83% of respondents over 55 expressed satisfaction with the landlord service, but only 62% of respondents under that age were satisfied (STATUS survey).

3.5 In addition to these survey results there are two other sources that might suggest other community service issues. These are:

- The CPA Inspection Report commented that whilst AVDC was delivering a variety of initiatives for young people, there was a lack of focus and our objectives for providing these activities were not clear;
- Anecdotal feedback from Parish Clerks and Members suggest that contacts with and information from AVDC are poorly coordinated, insufficiently focused, and overly heavy on detail – often leading to Parishes ignoring issues due to time and capacity constraints.

3.6 There appears to be little evidence, anecdotal or otherwise, for other particularly hard to reach groups. Consequently it is unclear whether these groups are well or poorly served. These include disabled groups, elderly groups and Asian women.

3.7 The information provided in 3.1 to 3.6 of this report suggests that:

- Aylesbury residents appear to perceive that they are not as well served as other residents;
- Younger age groups appear to perceive they may not be as well served as other residents and greater clarity of, and coordination of young peoples activities may be beneficial;
- Those from a non-white ethnic background perceive they may be less well served than other residents;
- There would appear to be room for improvement in our engagement with local parish and town councils, who will be key local community leaders in their own right.

3.8 What is not clear from the above analysis is whether the relatively poorer responses from some sections of the community are as a result of poorer quality services, greater difficulties in accessing those services, different expectations of the Council from different groups, or a greater reliance on Council support by some groups.

Service Delivery and Accessibility

3.9 The other perspective that needs to be considered is whether we are providing the right services and whether they are accessible enough to our communities. Since nearly all of our services are statutory functions we have little discretion over the services we provide, although we do have considerable discretion in the way we deliver them.

3.10 In respect of accessibility Members will be aware that we currently provide face to face contact services in Aylesbury, Buckingham (3 days per week) and Winslow (2 days per week). Telephone services are being upgraded and service specific call centres being established, with those services that restricted telephone access to specific times now working to expand access to full normal office hours. In addition, our online Internet Service is continuing to be upgraded and expanded to provide a 24/7 self-service channel, and all activity is supplemented by a wide range of printed material. Specific translation and other services for the disabled are available which can be detailed if required.

3.11 Issues of focus in this area will therefore include:

- Does the way in which we structure and/or deliver our services mean that some sections of our community are comparatively poorly served?
- Do we provide enough facilities to ensure that those with difficulties find it easy to access our services (ie. facilities for the disabled or for those for whom English is a second language)?
- Can our rural communities be better served through new or different access facilities or information points?
- Are our local facilities appropriate and in the right place or should they be changed in some way?

Best Value

3.12 The other issue that might be considered is what sort of services and/or access routes provides best value to the Council and the Taxpayer. Whilst we might all wish to see a local access point open 24 hours a day in every ward, this is clearly not affordable within the Council's current resources. Recent government announcements on the need to drive out efficiencies, as set out in the Gershon Report, also emphasise the need to meet the needs of our customers through being smarter and operating more efficiently. Therefore the challenge is to consider how we might do things better within existing or lower resources. Examples may include:

- Expanding the range of material that addresses the needs of specific groups (ie. non-English material, disabled access material etc.) whilst removing those items that are rarely used;
- Looking at the scope for providing some of our services through local shops and post offices rather than from our own premises;
- Working jointly with other organisations to provide more joined-up services whilst achieving economies of scale.

Overlap with Communities Scrutiny Committee

3.13 In considering a topic of this nature, Members may also wish to consider any overlap between this Scrutiny Review and the role and responsibilities of the Communities Scrutiny Committee. In this respect any issues that are considered relating to how well our communities are being served might fall under the remit of the Communities Scrutiny, whilst any issues of service accessibility might fall under the remit of this Committee. Members may, therefore, wish to consider whether there would be benefit in conducting this review as a joint review, or with invited representation from the Communities Scrutiny Committee.

4. Options and Proposals

4.1 Members therefore need to consider whether to focus this review on:

- How AVDC services support its communities;
- Which communities may perceive they are not being as well served as others and what can be done about this;
- Whether mechanisms to facilitate access to services are adequate, with specific reference to groups who are potentially at a disadvantage; and/or
- How to secure best value for our Communities from the services or the way in which they are accessed.

4.2 On balance it is suggested that the review should be focused on those communities who perceive they are less well served, although this in turn will draw in the other aspects mentioned above. It is therefore proposed that the process will be structured as follows:

- Call witnesses from relevant representative groups (see potential groups from whom witnesses could be called in Appendix 1 to this report);
- Discuss their views as to whether they are aware of communities that are poorly served, why this is and what can be done about this;
- Consider how services or access facilities might be changed to improve the access to and delivery of services within existing or reduced resources.

- 4.3 If the above approach is accepted it is suggested that Communities Scrutiny be invited to send three representatives to participate in the review. It is also suggested that officer representatives of a limited number of key services be invited to attend and to provide additional information and comment where appropriate. This should include Customer Services, Housing, Benefits and Planning.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 The recommendations are made in order to provide an adequate focus for the review within the planned timescales available for the review.

6. Resource Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report, although implications may result from the conclusions of the review.

7. Response to Key Aims and Outcomes

- 7.1 This Scrutiny Review is specifically targeted at one of the Council's outcomes with the objective of improving how the Council ensures that services are provided which meet the needs of the entire community.

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Background Documents: AVDC Equalities Strategy, AVDC Communications Strategy

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APPENDIX 1
COMMUNITY GROUPS WHO MIGHT PROVIDE POTENTIAL WITNESSES

Organisation	Community Group
Aylesbury Vale Association of Local Councils	Rural Communities
Connexions	Young People
Age Concern	Older People
Quarrendon & Meadowcroft Community Action Partnership	Estate based community
Multicultural Centre	Ethnic communities
Aylesbury Vale Race & Equalities Council	Ethnic communities
British Wheelchair Sports Federation	Disabled communities
Disability Access Group	Disabled communities
Bucks Association for the Blind	Disabled communities
Women's Institute	Rural Communities