

**Committee:                   Scrutiny Committee for Social Services and Health**

Date:                           8 July 2003

Title:                          Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Social Services and Health held at 10.00 am at Pelham House, St Andrews Lane, Lewes, East Sussex

Subject:                      Minutes

Attending:                  Garvican Lock McPherson Tunwell Webb Whetstone.

Lead Officer -              Roger Howarth, Scrutiny Lead Officer

Legal Adviser -            Angela Reid, Deputy Director of Legal and Community Services

Chief Officer -             David Archibald, Director of Social Services

Also Present: -             Councillor Glazier, Lead Cabinet Member for Social Services and Health

Mr Mike Barratt, former manager of Castleham Industries

2.     APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1    Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Neighbour.

3.     MINUTES

3.1    RESOLVED - to defer consideration of the Minutes of 7 May 2003 until the next meeting due to be held on 31 July 2003.

4.     REPORTS

4.1    Copies of the reports referred to below are included in the minute book.

5.     CALL-IN - CASTLEHAM INDUSTRIES

5.1    The Committee had before them the minutes of the decisions made on 24 June 2003 by Cabinet and a report by Director of Social Services which had previously been circulated to Cabinet. The Committee also considered the three reasons submitted by Councillors Webb, McPherson and Neighbour for requesting a Call-in of the decisions made by Cabinet in relation to the closure of Castleham Industries.

5.2    The Legal Adviser to the Committee, Angela Reid, advised the Committee of the procedures under the Council's Constitution and the Committee noted the options available to them.

5.3    The Committee invited Mr M Barratt, a former Manager of Castleham Industries to speak to the Members. Mr Barratt informed the Committee that he objected to the proposals to close Castleham. Mr Barratt explained to the Committee that, in his opinion, Castleham Industries needed a manager with commercial experience. Mr Barratt suggested that the factory should remain open and a management structure should be implemented with a strong commercial background. The factory should then be able to diversify. Mr Barratt confirmed however, that Castleham would always require subsidising.

5.4 Members of the Committee and the Director of Social Services were given an opportunity to ask Mr Barratt questions regarding his submissions. Members agreed that overall the printing industry had undergone immense change and was a fiercely competitive industry. And that Castleham was not alone with failing orders especially with the emergence of desktop publishing.

5.5 The Director of Social Services informed the Committee that there had been a change in recent years with regard to social services and the services provided for users with learning difficulties and disabilities. The Director confirmed that there was now more of an emphasis on rehabilitation and social inclusion and explained that Government policy and good practice now indicates that provision based in non-institutional work settings is more likely to lead to improved outcomes for service users. In view of this, Cabinet agreed in July 2002 that negotiations should take place with Royal British Legion Industries and Enabling Partnership to seek the transfer of the Workstep Contract from Social Services. This decision was made on the basis that this was not a core business of the Council. Following protracted negotiations, Royal British Legion Industries agreed to accept the transfer of the contract. The Committee also noted that the current users would be guaranteed continued employment and there would be opportunities for all those service users unable to take up new placements.

5.6 The Lead Cabinet Member for Social Services and Health also confirmed that he understood that the closure of Castleham would be unsettling to the service users, but emphasised to the Committee that a broader range of employment or training opportunities would be offered to all those currently placed at the unit.

5.7 In response to questions from the Committee, the Director of Social Services and Lead Cabinet Member for Social Services and Health confirmed that all current users would be individually assessed and all individuals would be continued to be supported via the workstep programme. In addition, the Director of Social Services was able to confirm that supplementary Government funding meant that there would be three additional posts on the workstep programme which would be able to provide support to Castleham at the critical stages.

5.8 The Committee also considered questions submitted by UNISON (previously circulated to the Committee).

5.9 In response to a question from the Chairman concerning whether new organisations had been approached with a view to taking over the contract, the Director of Social Service informed members that East Sussex Social Services was not the commissioner of the service. Job Centre Plus was the Commissioner of the Service and they had limited who could be approached to take over the contract.

5.10 The Committee also considered several letters received in support of Castleham Industries.

5.11 RESOLVED - that after having considered the evidence the Committee endorsed the cabinet's decision on the grounds that there was no credible alternative, and requested that reports by the Director of Social Services should be submitted to each of the Scrutiny Committee's meetings over the next twelve months on the numbers of current users who have been found alternative placements and those still waiting for placements and the level of support they would be needing.