

### If anyone can ~ Highfields CAN!

**No more scandals, lies and mismanagement! Our communities can't afford them!!**

There seems to be little or no shame in telling lies, being involved in scandals and remaining unaccountable for their misdeeds. Like many communities in Leicester our communities in Highfields have their lives and opportunities completely limited by the actions of senior councillors and officers of Leicester City Council. The sad fact is that it has gone on for many, many years. This current administration is the latest to do down the poor.

Highfields Community Association (HCA), for the last 20 years, has had to fight to maintain services that are relevant and appropriate for our communities. Funds, resources and workers have been under threat. HCA has withstood the assaults from a succession of city council bosses. HCA's only commitment is to our communities. Not to any political party! HCA's practice has always been to work alongside any person, body, organisation or administration that actively wants to assist and support our communities in Highfields.

Over a 20 year period, Highfields Centre became known for its excellence for services and staffing. National accreditation and recognition were key elements of this, as well as developing Area Forums and Directories to encourage collaboration locally to make best use of resources, knowledge and staffing in the area. HCA is a partnership driven organisation. Ably assisted, as we all know, by Priya Thamotheram.

For all this success and excellence, what have we witnessed? The targeting of HCA, Priya and other members of staff, cuts in staffing and services and divide and rule amongst communities.

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# Campaign Edition

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Launch of 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Guide to Advice Services in Highfields. 2 June 2006. A Government body has congratulated and confirmed the Guide will be used as a template nationally to promote good practice

#### In this Campaign edition

Media coverage Page 2 highlights from Leicester Mercury and BBC Radio Leicester. Quotes from Sir Peter Soulsby, MP and Abdul Osman Chair HCA.

Page 3 read the truth about the promises given and broken by the city council

HCA has always stood for partnership working. Community Governance makes it possible for contracts to be agreed with the Council and other partners to deliver services local communities need

## IDLE 'FLAGSHIP' IS A SCANDAL FOR OUR CITY

The lack of action to allow people to get full benefit from the Highfields Community Centre is nothing short of a scandal. It cost getting on for £5 million and houses some of the best sports, education and training facilities in Leicester. Funding came from major organisations like Sport England, the East Midlands Development Agency and the city council....

So why, some 20 months later, is top-quality computer equipment shut away behind locked doors when community groups are crying out for even the most basic help with information technology? Why has a complete training kitchen never been used to help local youngsters take their first steps on the career ladder? Why has one of the city's largest and best-equipped gyms never been used?.... Surely it is now imperative that this centre be put on the proper footing - after all, the city council spent public money on its creation, how can they let it stand idle?

Leicester Mercury 14 June 2006

**Breaking News:** The Cabinet's decision to extend Priya Thamotheram's post as Project Manager until March 2007 was contradicted by senior officers who issued an extension to only 30 June 2006. After months of delays and pressure from HCA, trade union, MP and the media, the senior officers have at last agreed to honour that Cabinet decision!

Editor's Note: Priya Thamotheram completes 25 years service at Highfields Centre on 1 August 2006.

**No more scandals, lies and mismanagement!!! Our communities can't afford them!!**

Please read Page 3 for the litany of broken promises

**Partnership working is the only way forward. We said it in 2004 and it's up to the council to catch up with those who work for local communities!**

"The Highfields Centre is a scandal. It's a scandal because of the lack of support from the City Council and it's a scandal that must be ended and only the City Council can end it. "

Sir Peter Soulsby. MP. 2 June 2006

Today, Labour MP Sir Peter Soulsby, who represents the area, said he would be writing to the council's chief executive to arrange a meeting.

He said: "It's an absolute disgrace that the centre has been left unused, particularly as it's such a needy community. I hold my surgeries at the centre and we are the only ones in the building. I have written to the chief executive and asked for an early meeting with him and the councillors involved."

Leicester Mercury 17 June 2006

"New departments but the song remains the same. We remember the crooked and twisted lies told in 2004. £4.5million was drawn down by Highfields Community Association for our communities. Not for the Council to mishandle it! Its our money and we want it spent for the people of Highfields. Playing poor people off against one another in Leicester just shows how badly we are served by the council and some of its senior officers." Abdul Osman. Chair. Highfields Community Association. 17 June 2006

**Continued from page 1** Instead of attacking HCA, staff and communities, you would think with national recognition, Highfields Centre would be held up as an example of what can be done in areas of deprivation. As we know only too well, this they are minded not to do! What they know and find difficult to cope with is the fact that Highfields people are known for standing up for themselves and have fought to keep the resources, services and staffing.

**The City Council and its officers would never have supported the development of the building and facilities we now have. HCA developed the necessary expertise, knowledge and staffing that convinced funders to put in £4.5million. The City Council was, and is a reluctant partner in this.**

**HCA brings in money and resources. The council has lost more than £3.5million in an effort to save £0.5million and ruined many Community Associations, other voluntary organisations and dismantled successful staff teams. Councillors have presided over all this scandalous activity and still rely on this kind of officers. HCA has the expertise, knowledge and staffing to serve the needs of Highfields Communities. The Council's senior officers do not! And yet these officers are the ones who will decide what a fit-for-purpose business plan is! Can it get any dafter than this? *Continued page 4...***



For 46% of Highfields adults, the average income is under £5,000 per year. The salary of senior officers who decide the future of local people is over £50,000 per year!

### A litany of broken promises

For over 18 months, Highfields Users Campaign has refrained from contacting the press whilst negotiations were held with Leicester City Council to resolve the long outstanding community governance, resources and staffing issues at the new Highfields Centre. Unfortunately, these negotiations have proved fruitless.

In October 2004, a senior Council officer pledged the centre will be fully operational by mid-November and "We want to see the centre busy. If you were to return in six months, you will see a different place" (Leicester Mercury, 21.10.04). Well, eighteen months later, the reality is that:

Some of the outstanding building (finishing) work has not been completed.

Approximately, 35% of the centre's floor space has not been still utilised.

Approximately, 65% of the centre's floor space is only partly utilised. The externally awarded revenue grant has not been made available.

The seriously deficient levels of staffing and resources have not been redressed; lifelong learning target achievement has been significantly reduced.

The outstanding management and governance issues have not been agreed

These realities resulted in Highfields Community Association writing to Rodney Green (Chief Executive, LCC) on 22/3/06 to seek

- a) a clear commitment to working with HCA towards Community Governance, in order to take most advantage of the new facilities,
- b) a clearly timetabled set of meetings to achieve this, and
- c) the appointment of a mutually agreed and independent person/firm to advise on the completion of the business plan to complete the transition.

This resulted in the most recent meeting with the Council and their subsequent Cabinet statement on 24/4/06. But it would appear that they have gone into sleep mode, as no further developments have materialised.

Abdul Osman (Chair, HCA) said "We have been very patient in working through these outstanding issues with the Council. But, further and unnecessary delaying tactics by the Council cannot be tolerated and hence, our decision to bring these matters to a wider audience".

To assist the council HCA has suggested that an independent person/firm be appointed to advise on the completion of the business plan and thereby make real progress rather than collude with officers who only know how to prevaricate, delay and make mischief.

Our communities deserve high quality and nationally accredited services and shouldn't have to wait for the council to get its act together. We can't wait that long.

Children and families' futures are at stake here! Rather than wait for the council, HCA successfully bid for the necessary funding.

We should have had an agreement on partnership working in 2004. Its 2006 and the council is still up to its old tricks.

**Partnership working is the way forward. HCA has actively worked to develop partnership working over a period of 20 years. With Community Governance this is possible. HCA will fulfil contractual obligations and be accountable for it!**



HCA Management Committee training and development March 2006. Advice, training and support are central to enabling committee members being able to make decisions relevant and appropriate for our communities in Highfields. A practice started more than 15 years ago.

**How much longer are we expected to live with indecision, incompetence and mismanagement?**

Please come to Highfields Centre and see the wonderful facilities.

You will agree with Highfields Community Association, Sir Peter Soulsby, the Leicester Mercury and many more that it is scandalous that the City Council hasn't provided the staffing and resources that local people need.

**Sign the petition demanding Community Governance for Highfields Centre and support Highfields Community Association to manage and provide services for the communities of Highfields in partnership with the City Council and others.**

Thank you for reading this.