

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday, 8 March 2011 AT 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members Present

Councillor L. Beeley (Chair)
Councillor F. Westley (Vice-Chair)
Councillor D. Anson
Councillor C. Bott
Councillor R. Carpenter
Councillor J. Cook
Councillor M. Munir
Councillor M. Yasin

Officers Present

Jamie Morris -	Executive Director, Neighbourhood Services
Steve Pretty -	Head of Engineering & Transportation
Steph Simcox -	Service Accounting & Financial Training Manager
Glyn Oliver -	Traffic & Transportation Service Manager

Portfolio Holders present

Councillor Ansell - Transport

54/11 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Tweddle.

55/11 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions.

56/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

None.

57/11 MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January, 2011, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

58/11 REVIEW OF WINTER SERVICE

Members received a presentation on the review of the winter maintenance service.

Officers explained that, due to the move to the new depot at Brownhills, the Priority 1 and 2 gritting routes would need to be revised. Given this need it was an opportune time to review the whole of the winter maintenance service. It was stated that the Council had a duty under the Highways Act 1980 to maintain the operation of the highway network and other public services to the local community and travelling public under winter weather conditions.

In relation to gritting and school closures, it was reported that all schools had been written to offering a variety of services. These ranged from gritting accesses (the additional cost to be paid by the school) to providing bins and road salt. None of the schools purchased the service of additional gritting or bins and salt. Members were referred to Appendix C of the report (annexed) which set out school closures and reasons for doing so. It was noted that a significant number of schools that closed were on or close to a priority gritting route.

Officers stated that financial constraints affected the provision of the gritting service and this would form part of the review. Investment in new vehicles which were more efficient had been undertaken and further vehicles were due to be purchased in the near future. Mechanical devices to ensure spreading on pavements was more efficient were also being considered. With a budget of £300k should additional roads be added to the gritting routes a road on the existing priority routes would have to be removed. In essence it was a case of balancing priorities to ensure that gritting was undertaken in those areas which would be most effective and beneficial for the Borough as a whole.

With regard to grit bins, it was stated that there were 176 located around the Borough. The majority were situated on steep hills. Grit bins were expensive to service and alternative provision, such as the use of small pick up trucks with a gritter attachment would be investigated as part of the review.

In relation to a question regarding bus routes, officers reported that some bus routes were gritted as they formed part of the gritting routes. Requests for additional gritting would be considered as part of the overall gritting programme however only routes which had been in place for 3 years would be considered. This was due to the fact that routes may be altered by

operators if they were not financially viable. There were a number of problems with gritting estates such as parked cars making access for gritting vehicles difficult.

Discussion followed on the gritting of Willenhall Town Centre on 18th December, 2011. Officers advised that the worst of the weather hit on the 18th December, 2011. Litter pickers and ground crews were deployed and rotated around the boroughs centres to clear the snow as best they could, given the severity of conditions.

Resolved

- 1) That progress made to date be noted;
- 2) That a further report on the review of winter service be submitted to the Panel in the 2011/2012 Municipal Year with a view to establishing a working group to consider the winter service operational plan.

59/11 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

The Panel received a report apprising the Panel of the new duties and responsibilities placed on this Council in accordance with the Flood Risk Regulations 2009 and The Floods and Water Management Act 2010.

Members were advised of the progress made to date and the proposed next steps to meet the statutory timescale. Officers explained that the Council had a legal obligation to complete a Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) by the 22 June, 2011. It was reported that Walsall was the first Council to draft the PFRA.

Members considered the report and expressed concern that the assessment could have a detrimental impact on house prices in areas deemed to be at risk of flooding. It could also impact on the cost of insurances.

It was further stated that some areas, identified as a preliminary flood risk, had not flooded for a considerable period of time and it was questioned whether this would be recognised. In response, it was explained that areas would be categorized and further guidance was expected to be issued from DEFRA as the legislation was new.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the specific duties imposed on the Council by the Flood Risk Regulations and The Floods and Water Management Act 2010 be noted.
- 2) That a copy of the presentation be circulated to members of the Panel.

- 3) That Members of the Panel provide the Head of Engineering and Transportation with comments on the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment, together with information as to any local areas of flooding they are aware of.

60/11 QUARTERLY BUDGET MONITORING

The Panel received a report summarising the predicted revenue and capital position for 2010/11, based on the performance for quarter 3 (1 April to 31 December 2010), for services within the remit of the Environment Scrutiny & Performance Panel.

Members noted that an identified risk was that of providing replacement free wheeled bins which could potentially cost up to £70k. The Executive Director (Neighbourhood Services) stated that this matter had been identified as a medium risk. More and more bins would become obsolete and require replacing. The demand and cost for replacement bins was absorbed by the Street Pride budget and it was anticipated that the cost of replacement bins could be up to £70k.

Members sought clarity on the loss of section 74 income. Officers explained that this was income generated through fines for companies spending more than the time allocated to them whilst carrying out repairs. Companies had become more efficient and so income from fines had fallen.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the 2010/11 forecasted year end financial position for services under the remit of the Environment Scrutiny & Performance Panel net revenue underspend of **£116k**, after the use of approved reserves and carry forwards and action planning, be noted.
- 2) That the capital position of a planned slippage of **£2.380m** for which a carry forward request will be submitted in order for scheme completion in 2011/12 be noted.

61/11 UPDATE ON TOWN CENTRE PARKING WORKING GROUP

The Panel received a report setting out progress made by the Town Centre Parking Working Group since its establishment by the Panel.

Members noted that two meetings had been held which had involved a number of officers from the Council. These had included regeneration, town centre management and planning policy. Members were advised that local business representatives would be attending the next meeting of the Working Group.

It was anticipated that the final report would be submitted to the Panel at the meeting scheduled to take place on 19 April, 2011.

RESOLVED

That the progress made by the Town Centre Parking Working Group be noted.

62/11 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

The work programme 2010/11 and forward plan were considered (annexed).

Resolved

That the 2010/11 work programme and forward plan be noted.

63/11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel will take place on 19 April, 2011.

The meeting closed at 7.10 p.m.

Chair:

Date: