

NORTH WALSALL AREA PANEL MEETING

Beechdale Lifelong Learning Centre, Stephenson Square, WS2 7DY

Thursday, 17 November, 2015 at 6.00 p.m.

Present

Councillor S. Fitzpatrick (Chair)
Councillor L.D. Jeavons (Vice-Chair)
Councillor J. Fitzpatrick
Councillor S. Fitzpatrick
Councillor K. Phillips
Councillor T.J. Jukes
Councillor C. Jones
Councillor A. Young

Officers

Vanessa Croft – Area Manager
Gary Fulford – Chief Executive (WHG)
Karen Marshall – Director of Governance and Compliance (WHG)
Keeley Beavington – Police Officer
Sarah Heath - Community Safety Anti-Social Behaviour officer
Nikki Gough - Committee Business and Governance Manager

11/15 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made. Apologies for the duration of the meeting were received from Councillor I.C. Robertson and Councillor M. Follows.

13/15 Declarations of Interest

Councillor J. Fitzpatrick declared an interest as a Member of Business Partnership.

14/15 Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to be considered in private session.

15/15 Petition on Dartmouth Close

Councillor A. Young submitted a petition on 'Dartmouth Close' which had historically had problems with antisocial behaviour including drugs and prostitution. Existing fences meant that individuals were able to evade the police. The police representative stated that there was little reporting of this and residents needed to report incidents of antisocial behaviour to enable the police to take action. Vanessa Croft suggested that a funding application was taken to the next area panel meeting. It was agreed that Vanessa Croft would meet with Councillor Young to discuss the issue.

15/15

Minutes of the previous meeting

The meeting considered the minutes of the meeting that took place on 17 September 2015, they were approved as a true and accurate record subject to the amendment that Councillor Jukes left at 7.40 p.m. and Councillor Phillips was present for the duration of the meeting.

Resolved

The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record subject to the following amendment Councillor Jukes left at 7.40 p.m. and Councillor Phillips was present for the duration of the meeting.

16/15

Walsall Housing Group (WHG) Governance review

The Chief Executive from Walsall Housing Group (Whg) talked to the presentation (annexed). Members were informed that an independent governance review which made recommendations to the board on its committee structure. The Corporate Plan 2014-2024 set out WHG's strategic aims, one of which is to have in place a governance model that is fit for purpose. To achieve this changes to the current arrangements were needed.

The reasons for the proposed changes are:

- The increasingly challenging environment in which Whg work which means that a strong board was needed, with the skills and experience relevant to achieving its corporate goals.
- Whg has become an increasingly complex business and included in its remit was providing support for local businesses, improving the health and well-being of customers and communities and contributing to and establishing and supporting local enterprises.
- Another driver for change was the need to meet governance standards set by the Regulator, the Homes and Communities Agency, which all Housing Associations (including Whg) must comply with. The standards include requirements about independence, board size and the appointment of all board and committee members based on a skills and experience assessment.
- The Regulator also required Whg to adopt and comply with a Code of Governance. The adopted Code required that the Board had a maximum of 12 members; the current structure provides for 13 members – three elected members, five customers and five independent members.
- If improvements were not made to the Board structure there was a risk that the governance would be downgraded and development money would be suspended or Whg could be merged into another organisation.

Under new arrangements Members would have to apply to become board members and a term of office would be increased from one to three years. Concern was expressed that the selection process may not favour those

Members who represented wards with high numbers of Whg properties and the consequence of that would be that the board would not be representative of tenants.

The Panel were informed that the customer services committee and scrutiny panel was comprised of tenants only. It was stressed that if the organisation was being registered now governance arrangements would be different. In the future Board Members would be paid. It was stressed that members who represented deprived wards were valuable in representing the real problems of social housing.

Resolved that; -

- **The presentation was noted**
- **The Board Members skills matrix is circulated to panel members**

It was agreed that item 7 would be received prior to item 6.

17/15

Anti-social behaviour profile

A briefing note on anti-social behaviour in North Walsall was tabled (annexed). Members were asked to raise any issues within the area. The following points were raised; -

Anti-social behaviour in Bloxwich toilets (Male)

This behaviour was problematic and long standing. It was noted that a facebook page existed to coordinate such behaviour. The police reiterated that this behaviour needed to be reported. The Public Safety Reassurance Officer stated that she had handed out diaries for completion to shop keepers.

The police representative stated that behaviour had to be explicit and it was difficult to prove guilt and obtain a conviction in these circumstances.

Members deliberated the closure of the toilets. The use of the toilets by bus drivers was considered, as was public feeling and use by other vulnerable groups. Solutions such as radar keys and requesting a financial contribution from bus companies were also considerations.

It was noted that complaints were not received about the women's toilet however if the decision to close them was taken both would need to be closed. Members agreed to survey how many members of the public used toilets and to canvas opinion. It was stated that the police would support the closure.

Happy Times Hostel Bloxwich / Leamore

Members discussed suspected drug dealing outside happy time's hostel. Concern was raised that this was happening openly. Police representatives stated that they were aware of these activities and it was a priority for officers.

Victoria Avenue

A member expressed concern that drug dealing was taking place in Victoria Avenue. Officers encouraged Members to report this activity.

Resolved that;

The report was noted.

18/15

Public Participation report

The Clerk to the Panel introduced the report and explained that this report was intended to assist members in encouraging greater public involvement in the work of the panels. Members agreed that this would be positive, although stressed the need for members of the public to report issues through official channels.

Resolved that; -

- 1. That North Walsall Area Panel agrees to introduce a public question time to take place at the commencement of all Panel meetings.**
- 2. That one co-opted member per ward is appointed to the membership of North Walsall Area Panel.**

19/15

Area Manager Report

The Area Manager was thanked for her report and the content was noted. Members expressed concern about the accuracy of facts and figures that they received at the last meeting in relation to health data due to the way that information is recorded. The Area Manager stated that this may be rectified by use of individual's addresses rather than their GP postcode when collating data.

Members discussed educational attainment and agreed it as a theme at the next meeting.

Resolved that;

The theme for the next meeting would be an update on schools in North Walsall (the school improvement strategy).

09/15

Funding Report

The Panel considered the funding applications as set out in the report.

Penkridge Fence

This project will see the erection of a new palisade fence to replace broken wooden panels which have caused issues for local residents with authorised access as a means of a short cut. Whg will provide 50% of the funding costs as a joint partnership venture

The Panel approved the application of 479.30

Sparkle into a Bloxwich Christmas

A community funday that is organised to celebrate Christmas collective working with local partners, organisation and charities to deliver a larger event. Activities will offer to raise the aspirations and civic pride of all involved and help increase the footfall in the town centre.

It was agreed that the Chair and the Area Manager obtained further information on match funding received from Whg and made a decision on the funding application outside of the meeting.

Winter Event

A winter event to promote the services on offer at the children's centre, signpost families to help where appropriate, promote community cohesion through a social environment, encourage families to attend activities together and build trust with families so they can access services without feeling intimidated.

The Panel approved the application of £500.00.

Resolved that; -

- **The Panel approved the Penkridge Fence application for £479.30**
- **The Area Manager in consultation with the Chair considers the sparkle into a Bloxwich Christmas application upon receipt of further information on match funding.**
- **The Panel approved the winter event application of £500.00.**

10/15

Dates and venues for future meetings

Noted.

The meeting terminated at 8.12.p.m.

Chairman:

Date: