

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Tuesday 17 January, 2012 in a Conference Room at the Council House

Panel members present:

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor C. Creaney (Vice-Chair)
Councillor I. Azam
Councillor S. Coughlan
Councillor L. Rattigan
Councillor K. Sears
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor F. Westley

Co-opted member present:

Mr. Philip Holmes MBE JP - Police Authority Member

Portfolio Holder present

Councillor Z. Ali (Communities and Partnerships)

Officers present:

Jamie Morris - Executive Director (Neighbourhoods)
Keith Stone - Assistant Director (Neighbourhoods)
Jo Lowndes - Partnership Manager
Richard Bubbs - Area Partnerships Project Manager
Tracey Evans - Lead Accountant
Craig Goodall - Scrutiny Officer

121/12 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A. Young.

122/12 Substitutions

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

123/12 Declarations of interest and party whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

124/12 Minutes

The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) reported the outcome of the Panel's recommendations to Cabinet regarding cemetery rules and regulations for Muslim burials. He explained that Cabinet had considered the Panel's recommendations and decided to continue to enforce the current cemetery rules and regulations.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 November, 2011, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

125/12 Budget Consultation Feedback 2012/13

The Panel considered the responses to the consultation on the budget that had taken place ascertaining what local people's priorities were and how they think they should be reflected in the budget.

The Lead Accountant highlighted the findings from wave 2 of the budget simulator consultation. She highlighted the results from wave 1 and wave 2 indicating the priorities residents had expressed preferences for.

The following were the principal points from the ensuing discussion:-

- Wave 2 of the budget simulator consultation had received 27 responses;
- A Member of the Panel noted that the budget simulator had received approximately 250 responses. This was representative of 0.1% of the local population. He questioned the effectiveness of the budget consultation process;
- The Panel was informed that other methods had been used to engage local residents and communities, including workshops with local businesses. A Member of the Panel requested further details on consultation activities regarding the budget setting process for 2012/13.

Resolved

- (1) That the Panel be provided with information on the consultation activities regarding the budget setting process for 2012/13;
- (2) That the report be noted.

126/12 Third Draft Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals 2012/13 for Consultation

Members were informed of the third draft budget report which outlined changes to the draft budget reported to Cabinet on 14 December, 2011.

The Executive Director for Neighbourhoods reported that for 2011/12 for services within the remit of the Panel, a modest overspend was currently showing and he aimed to break even by the end of the year. Regarding the 2012/13 budget, he explained there were no changes to the revenue budget but there were some new proposals in the Capital Programme. These were externally funded projects:-

- Illuminations in the Arboretum;
- Heritage Centre;
- Green Spaces Improvement Plan;
- A new community facility in Bentley;
- Broadway West playing fields.

The following were the principal points from the ensuing discussion:-

- A Member suggested that the Heritage Centre should be representative of the history of Walsall and how the Borough had been formed;

- There was a restoration work on Broadway West playing fields. This was taking place due to contaminated land. The site needed a cap of new soil to bring the site back into use. It was hoped that the cricket pitch would be back in use by 2014 at the very latest.

Resolved

That the draft revenue and capital budget proposals 2012/13 be noted.

127/12 Area Community Plans Achievements and Learning

The Panel considered the achievements and learning following development of Area Community Plans for the six neighbourhood and management areas across the Borough.

The Area Partnerships Project Manager presented a series of findings to the Panel. These included:-

- Area Community Plan achievements;
- Evolution of Area Partnerships;
- Learning from Area Partnerships;
- Future activities, including future developments.

The following were the principal points from the ensuing discussion:-

- It was noted that each Area Partnership area had developed its own approach to solving local issues, for example, anti-social behaviour, which has been tackled through a variety of methods including night time patrols with groups of partners;
- The Panel felt it was important that a framework was developed to enable the Local Authority and external partners to work together to tackle the high level strategic problems which are being identified in multiple Area Community Plans;
- The Partnership Manager highlighted the new Walsall Partnership structure to Members as contained in Appendix 1 (annexed). She explained that there would be a Borough Operations Group above the Area Partnerships Team which would be made up of key senior staff from partners who would be able to allocate resources to tackle these key strategic issues;
- Members expressed the wish to be involved with priority setting. The Portfolio Holder (Communities and Partnerships) explained that he envisaged this taking place through the relevant consultative bodies, for example, the Health and Wellbeing Board or Scrutiny and Performance Panels;
- A Member expressed concern about the level of engagement from external partners with Elected Members and local communities. He explained it was important that partners engage with the public. The Portfolio Holder (Communities and Partnerships) responded by explaining that partners were now much more engaged with the Council through the Area Partnership structure than they had ever been before. There were written agreements in place with partners to commit resources to tackling local problems.

Resolved

- (1) That a further update on Area Community Plans achievements and learning points be received in six months time;
- (2) That the report be noted.

128/12 Rehabilitation of Offenders Working Group - Membership

The Panel agreed the membership for the Working Group to consider the rehabilitation of offenders in Walsall.

Resolved

- (1) That the following Members be appointed to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Working Group:-

Councillor S. Coughlan
Councillor L. Harrison
Councillor K. Sears
Councillor I. Shires
- (2) That all Members be notified of dates when the Working Group will meet.

129/12 Work Programme 2011/12 and Forward Plan

The Panel considered its work programme and the latest version of Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

Resolved

- (1) That the Forward Plan be noted;
- (2) That the work programme 2011/12 be noted.

130/12 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be 6.00 p.m. on 28 February, 2012.

In closing the meeting, the Chair extended her congratulations to the Panel's Police Authority Co-opted Member, Mr. Philip Holmes on the award of his MBE in the New Year's Honours List.

The meeting terminated at 7.05 p.m.

Signed:

Date: