

NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 4 October at 6 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor Towe
Councillor Bott
Councillor Phillips
Councillor Sears
Councillor Woodruff

Officers present

Jamie Morris, Executive Director Neighbourhoods
Keith Stone, Assistant Director, Built Environment
Tim Challans, Assistant Director, Leisure, Culture and
Life-long learning
Clive Wright, Strategic Director WBSP
Judith Sunley, Head of Public Protection
Colin Teasdale, Performance and Scrutiny Officer

27/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Beilby and Creaney

28/07 SUBSTITUTIONS

- There were no substitution(s) for the duration of this meeting.

29/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

30/07 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Towe stated that under item 19/07, Consultation on Draft Car Parks Strategy, he had not asked whether the consultation would only be web-based but how the consultation would work and asked that this be changed.

Councillor Woodruff stated that although she had been present at the meeting her name was not on the list of panel members present and asked that this be added.

Councillor Bott asked if his previous question under item 20/07, verge parking, regarding the cost of dropped kerbs compared to other authorities had been dealt with. Keith Stone responded that he did not have the figures on specific costs but could get average costs compared to other authorities. Councillor Phillips added that it would be useful to know of any exemptions other councils applied to charging for dropped kerbs.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 August 2007, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to the amendments stated above

That details on the average costs of dropped kerbs and any exemptions to charging in other authorities are distributed to members for information.

31/07 FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan as at 10 September 2007 was submitted:

Members queried what was involved with the play strategy (Item 71/07 of the forward plan.) Tim Challans said this was a draft strategy submitted to the big lottery for funding and was now going to Council. Copies of the strategy would be distributed to members

Resolved

That the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel

- Note the Forward Plan of 10 September 2007
- That copies of the play strategy are distributed to panel members for information

32/07 Update on Community Association

Jamie Morris gave a verbal update on Community Associations, this had been presented to the panel before and recommendations were due to go to cabinet but this had been delayed.

Since then, developments nationally with the Quirk review meant that there was now a government incentive (via lottery funds) to transfer community association buildings into a third party trust. There was, however, still an issue of maintenance and specifically how the council could bring the current buildings up to an acceptable standard prior to transfer.

Jamie Morris stated that the recommendation to cabinet would be that the overview of the bid process is carried out by the Neighbourhoods scrutiny panel.

Councillor Towe said that more extensive formal consultation would be wanted, Jamie Morris agreed that this should be the next step.

Councillors Towe and Phillips asked what the view of the Community Associations were of these delays. Jamie Morris responded that whilst there was frustration on all sides, there was recognition that the extra time taken to test out this option would be worth while.

Councillor Bott asked that if the Community Association closed would the council move out to secure the site the next day.

Jamie Morris replied that, as with any council properties, they would take whatever actions was necessary to secure the site.

Councillor Phillips said that a speedier conclusion as possible was desirable all round to the meeting should be scheduled as soon as possible.

Resolved

That it is recommended to cabinet that the overview of the bid process for community associations is overseen by the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel

33/07 Illuminations Update

Tim Challans circulated a note to members with an update on the illuminations including news that Travel West Midlands had agreed to provide free buses to the arboretum.

Councillor Towe requested that a full schedule of bus timings could be distributed to all council members so that they could promote this, this was agreed.

Councillor Towe also added that they wanted to make sure the box office process for booking a place on the bus was as simple as possible and Tim Challans agreed that this would be looked at.

Councillor Towe said there was a need to clarify with Travel West Midlands that enough buses would be supplied to meet demand, so that the agreement was not just for a specific number of buses which once full would not take any more.

Councillor Bott welcomed the work done by the illuminations team but pointed out to officers that neither Moxley nor Darlaston received the Advertiser so they needed to ensure there were other ways of promoting it other than through this source.

Tim Challans stated that they had agreement to put lights up on Lichfield Street and the Civic Centre, this was very expensive to do due to the infrastructure that had to be put in place so it would be on an expanding programme with just a small number of lights up this year but growing year on year.

Members were also informed of the work with schools and young people with the example given of pumpkins for children to decorate some of which would be supplied directly by Asda. Councillor Towe asked that the names of the children were written on the pumpkins so that people could recognised whose was whose.

Tim Challans told the panel that schools had been reluctant to organise school trips, as previously suggested, due to issue around security and health and safety but that they were doing a lot of work to involve children directly.

Councillor Towe asked Tim Challans to check, and inform panel members of the timings of the two fireworks displays on the 5th November as this clashed with full council that evening.

Tim Challans stated that whilst they had managed to secure some sponsorship, there had been difficulties with this. Councillor Bott queried if they had contacted Walsall

Housing Group as part of this, Tim Challans replied that he did not have the full detail of everyone that had been contacted but there had been a lot, he would double check whether or not WHG were on there.

Councillor Towe expressed his pleasure that a national gardening magazine had contacted the council to cover this event.

Councillor Towe said he was disappointed with the lack of engagement from the town centre manager as part of what they had done was to bring people into the town, he commented that the town centre manager had shown a lack of interest and since in the council's employment should be doing more. Tim Challans said all the town centre shops had been contacted individually and that they were disappointed in the lack of response from them.

34/07 Sustainable Communities Strategy

Clive Wright gave a presentation outlining how the borough's sustainable communities strategy was being developed and what the next steps would be. This would be the overarching strategy document for all partners within the borough and a first draft would be produced by the end of October with an extensive consultation programme after this leading to the final document being produced in March 2008.

Councillor Phillips asked whether the focus groups that would be used were pre-existing ones or ones compiled specifically for this purpose. Clive Wright responded that these would be specific ones aimed at ensuring they gather as broad a spectrum of views as possible.

Clive Wright said he would distribute copies of the presentation to panel members after the meeting.

35/07 Environmental Enforcement

Judith Sunley presented an update on Environmental Enforcement and was seeking scrutiny's input prior to the Environmental Enforcement improvement plan going to Cabinet and the Safer Stronger Communities Board.

Councillor Towe asked if CCTV used for enforcement was fixed or moved around. Jamie Morris replied that there were three types of camera; fixed, mobile and covert. Judith Sunley added that there were limits to the number of cameras that they could deploy in response to local neighbourhood concerns and that the cameras deployed were authorised by the public protection team and moved around based on priority.

Councillor Bott stated that the policies were not working in Darlaston South and that there was plenty of examples of extreme anti-social behaviour in places such as George Rose Park and Kings Hill Park, which nothing was being done about. He stated that he had forwarded a report to the portfolio holder and to the partnership director of the safer Walsall borough partnership but had not received a response from either of them.

Judith Sunley said that a number of services and agencies were involved but that it was an extremely difficult task to deal with the anti-social behaviour described and that a lot

of the examples Councillor Bott had raised were police matters highlighting the importance of agencies working closely.

Councillor Towe asked what happened to the minimum standards for parks, Jamie Morris replied that these had been agreed by cabinet and would be produced this year. Councillor Towe expressed his concern about the time taken and asked Jamie to feedback with a date when they would be implemented.

Councillor Phillips asked how 'major parks' were defined in the context of the minimum standards. Jamie Morris said they would identify the names of the parks and distributed this to members.

Councillor Woodruff asked how involved Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership were in all this work. Jamie Morris replied that the Community Safety Intervention Groups highlighted in the report were part of WBSP.

Councillor Woodruff said they didn't seem to be quite as proactive as she thought they would be. Jamie Morris pointed out that much of the activity done by the groups was very laborious, involving a lot of evidence gathering in the way of diary keeping for example. He acknowledged that this did lead to frustrations but that it was an essential part of the process to ensure a successful conviction in the courts. Judith Sunley added that there was often a difficulty in gaining evidence as neighbours were reluctant or fearful about giving evidence.

Councillor Bott asked, if making a commitment to investing in Palfrey Park why not the parks in his ward? Jamie Morris said that there was investment going into these parks, though there may be a public perception that it was not enough. Councillor Bott challenged this and asked Jamie Morris to meet him at George Rose park to show where the investment had been. Jamie Morris replied that he would provide Councillor Bott with information on levels of investment.

Councillor Phillips said he shared Councillor Bott's frustration over investment and whilst he didn't dispute some investment was happening if often wasn't perceived to be enough to actually make a difference.

Councillor Towe said, despite frustrations, he recognised some good work had taken place and thanked officers for that.

36/07 Street Trading Review

Judith Sunley circulated a presentation on the street trading review, and it was agreed that as the members had seen this presentation before at LNPs they didn't want her to run through it again in detail, and she invited the panel's views prior to the recommendations based on consultation going to licensing committee and cabinet.

Councillor Towe asked for clarity on the dates this would be going, Judith Sunley replied that it would go to Licensing Committee on 24 October and Cabinet on 21 November.

37/07 Update on Waste Management Working Group

Members were given a briefing note on the Waste Management Working Group, Keith Stone informed them that the implementation plan was currently being drafted and this would pick up the recommendations of the working group.

Councillor Towe asked what members could do to help tackle some of the issues. Keith Stone said where members were aware of issues it would be useful if they advised the street pride team.

Councillor Bott asked if the companies that cleaned bins had to have a license. Officers replied that they were not aware of any requirement for this.

Councillor Phillips suggested that if cleaning bins was profitable then it could be something the council could look at doing themselves. Councillor Towe welcomed this idea.

Keith Stone advised the panel that the implementation plan was domestically focussed so he would bring an additional report on business waste to ensure all issues were picked up.

Resolved

That the implementation plan, and an additional report on business waste is brought to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel for monitoring.

38/07 Community Call for Action (CCfA) Working Group

Councillor Towe asked for note from this meeting to be distributed to members. He said his understanding was the CCfA had to be implemented by April 2008 and asked Jamie Morris for clarity on this.

Jamie Morris said the Police and Justice Act was on hold and there was uncertainty over the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill had yet been passed so he didn't think the original deadline of April 2008 still stood but he would seek clarity on this.

Councillor Towe informed the panel that the West Midlands Overview and Scrutiny Network event was taking place the next day at the Bescott stadium which they had all been invited to and he was attending. He thought more information in what was happening would come out of this day.

39/07 Budget Scrutiny Arrangements 2007 (Late Item)

A briefing note was circulated to members outlining the proposed arrangements for scrutinising the budget this year. Councillor Towe explained that this had been discussed at the scrutiny working group and that the proposal was for a representative from each of the panels to attend the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 28 November and Cabinet on 19 December to represent the views of their panel.

Councillor Phillips said whilst it did not affect him as his party had representation on all the panels he could foresee problems for independent members as didn't have representation across panels. Councillor Bott said that as an independent member he didn't have a problem with this aspect and supported the proposals.

Resolved

That the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel endorse the recommendations laid out in the briefing note on budget scrutiny arrangement 2007.

09/07 DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 27 November 2007.

The meeting terminated at 7.45 pm.

Chair:

Date: