

## **COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

**Tuesday 10 April, 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 I. Rattigan  
Councillor K. Sears

**Portfolio Holder present** Councillor A. Harris (Leisure and Culture)

**Officers present:** Jamie Morris - Executive Director (Neighbourhoods)  
Sue Grainger - Head of Libraries, Heritage and the Arts  
John Leach – Head of Communities & Partnerships  
Stephen Snoddy - Director (The New Art Gallery)  
John Beavon - Area Manager (Trading Standards and Licensing)  
Mark Wilson - Licensing Officer  
Scot Kearney - Licensing Officer  
Lorraine Boothman - Deputy Trading Standards and Licensing Manager  
Craig Goodall - Scrutiny Officer

### **142/12 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors F. Westley and A. Young and Mr. Philip Holmes MBE JP.

### **143/12 Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

### **144/12 Declarations of interest and party whip**

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

## **145/12 Minutes**

### **Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February, 2012, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

## **146/12 The Big Society**

Members considered the latest national and local development of the Big Society agenda.

The Head of Communities and Partnerships highlighted the Coalition Government's policy ideas and sought the views of Members on thematic areas and local developments, namely:-

- Community empowerment
- Opening up public services
- Social action

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

- It was felt there was a lack of empowerment across the Borough. Local people needed to be constructively engaged and provided with genuine opportunities if they are to become active volunteers;
- The possibility of bringing void and derelict properties into community use was discussed. It was noted that legislation enabling local communities the opportunity to take control of community assets was set to be introduced in the summer;
- Neighbourhood planning would enable local communities to have a greater say over the development of their neighbourhoods;
- The Council needed to create opportunities for smaller companies to bid for Council contracts;
- Area Community meetings could become more inclusive;
- It was noted that the new "Health Watch" body was required to be a social enterprise.

### **Resolved**

That the report be noted.

## **147/12 Managing Unauthorised Encampments**

Members were informed of the range of powers available to deal with unauthorised encampments (UE) and considered the protocol that had been prepared that outlined the response to any UE that may arise in the Borough.

The Trading Standards and Licensing (Area Manager) explained that dealing with UEs was primarily the responsibility of the Council working in partnership with the Police. He reported there had been 45 UEs in Walsall during 2011

which was the highest number on record. He highlighted the protocol for managing UE, including the various steps that were required to be taken before an UE could be removed.

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

- It was thought that the visit of the Pope to Birmingham and the number of local weddings involving travelling families had been the cause of the high number of UEs in 2011. There was a large settled travelling community in Walsall;
- Members expressed frustration that if an UE occurred over the weekend, it would not be dealt with by Licensing Team until Monday morning. Members were re-assured that the UE would be dealt with as a high priority once officers were available and often the Police will assist in managing the situation and re-assuring communities over the weekend period;
- It was a criminal offence for the same person to return to a site used as an UE within three months;
- There was a £7,000 budget available to employ bailiffs to remove UEs if required. However, this was not normally required as the vast majority of UEs moved on before any legal action was required. It was more difficult to move on UEs on private land as the consent of the landowner was required;
- A Member highlighted that the problem of UEs would be continual until a suitable transit site for travellers was located in the Borough. A transit site would find a suitable and legal stopping off point and make evictions easier as there would be suitable sites to move those on an UE to. Until a transit site was available the problem would only be moved from one UE to another;
- With regard to private landowners, a Member asserted it was unreasonable for a private landowner to take into account the welfare of people who had created an UE on their land as they were trespassing.

## **Resolved**

That the report be noted.

## **148/12 New Art Gallery Working Group**

The Panel received the final report and recommendations of the New Art Gallery (NAG) Working Group.

Councillor Azam, Lead Member for the NAG Working Group, highlighted the findings and recommendations following the one-off investigation to the Panel. Particular reference was made to the recommendation that the NAG should open on a Sunday. It was felt this was important to attract additional visitors, particularly young people and families, and give people a reason to visit the Town Centre. He reported the Working Group were keen for the NAG to submit an application to host the Turner Prize in the near future. Finally, he thanked the staff at the NAG for the help and assistance during the review.

A Member of the Working Group added that she had been impressed by the level of community engagement taking place. She also supported Sunday opening and added that the NAG would also attract new visitors to the new hotel being built on the Waterfront development.

Following a question, it was explained that the NAG Audience Development Officer was working extensively with local communities to ensure that visitors represented the local population. Events were timed around holidays and religious festivals to assist in interacting a broad range of black and minority ethnic groups.

The Portfolio Holder (Leisure and Culture) supported the recommendations made by the Working Group. He congratulated the NAG for increasing visitor numbers in a time of austerity. He explained it was important for local people to be proud of the NAG.

The NAG Director explained that if Walsall was to successfully bid to host the Turner Prize, a large influx of additional visitors could be expected for the duration of the three month event. He added that being open on a Sunday would be critical to the bids success.

The Panel were supportive of the idea of the NAG bidding to host the Turner Prize and resolved to consider the issue in more detail at a future meeting.

### **Resolved**

That:-

- (1) the following report and recommendations of the New Art Gallery Working Group be approved and forwarded to Cabinet for consideration;
  - (2) the Panel support the idea of the New Art Gallery bidding to host the Turner Prize;
- and;
- (3) that a further item on bidding for the Turner Prize be considered at a future meeting.

### **149/12 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**

That the Work Programme 2011/12 and Forward Plan be noted.

### **150/12 Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be agreed by Annual Council on 23 May, 2012.

In closing the meeting, the Chair thanked all Members and officers who had contributed to the work of the Panel during the previous Municipal Year.

The meeting terminated at 7.43 p.m.

Signed:

Date: