

**DARLASTON NORTH/BENTLEY/DARLASTON SOUTH  
AREA PANEL**

**Thursday, 12 November 2015 at 6.00 pm**

**at Darlaston Methodist Church, Slater Street, Darlaston**

**Present:**

Councillor Burley (Chair)  
Councillor Chambers (Vice-Chair)

**In attendance:**

Nicola Holmes – Area Manager  
Steve Gittins – Community Safety  
Rob Gillam – Walsall Housing Group  
Karen Marshall – Walsall Housing Group  
Sergeant M Shaid – West Midlands Police  
PC R Collins – West Midlands Police

**Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors James and Underhill.

131/15

**Minutes**

**Resolved**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September, 2015, copies having previously been circulated to each member of the Panel, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

132/15

**Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

133/15

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

134/15

**Restructuring of Walsall Housing Group's Board**

The Walsall Housing Group representative (Rob Gillam) made a presentation with the aid of a hand-out (see annexed) and explained that the group was reviewing its governance arrangements. Part of this

process will see the group attending Council meetings and events. It was proposed to visit all of the Council's Area Panels. He explained WHG's history and indicated that the group owned and managed over 20,000 properties in 19 neighbourhoods across Walsall. Since the group's formation in 2003, over £400m had been invested in homes and services. The group's headquarters were in Hatherton Street, Walsall and employed over 650 employees.

Since its inception the group had built 1001 new homes at a cost of £97m and had trained over 500 apprentices through its skills programme.

Mr Gillam reported that the group was in the process of changing its board from its current tenant, councillor and independent make up into a skills based board. The number of board members would also reduce from the current 13 to a maximum of 12 and under the new board arrangements each member would have one vote.

Councillor Burley asked why local boards were being removed. Mr Gillam replied that the group had originally had five local landlords which had reduced into one and five local committees which carried out the scrutiny function. The Housing Communities Agency which currently regulated the group had stated that it's scrutiny function should be independent so the local boards will be disbanded.

Mr Gillam concluded by stating that the new board would continue to have Councillor and tenant members.

After further discussion it was

### **Resolved**

That the presentation be noted.

134/15

### **Community Safety**

The Community Safety representative (Steve Gittins) reported that he controlled the Anti Social Behaviour Team of four officers operating across the borough. There were a raft of tools and powers available for the team to use and they could be contacted by phone, email or councillor referral. A new Act in 2014 had provided additional powers for Anti Social Behaviour teams to use. He indicated that Community Safety officers attended the various partnership meetings regularly and added that Walsall Housing Group had it's own Community Safety team.

Sergeant Shaid (West Midlands Police) introduced himself to the meeting and indicated that he covered the Darlaston and Bentley areas and had been a serving officer for 14 years. He referred to the reduction in police budgets and the loss of police officers which were

having a major impact. He indicated that a number of projects were being implemented which would help the police work more efficiently.

Sergeant Shaid reported that there were 10 local police units across the borough at present but these would be reduced to 8. PCSOs would be reduced from 670 to 119 by 2020. Technology was being improved to get officers back on the streets. A neighbourhood taskforce and other teams would be introduced and all frontline officers would be fitted with body cameras to record details of arrests etc and lead to a better conviction rate. Officers would be provided with mobile devices containing apps which would enable officers to stay on the street and not return to the station so often.

Sergeant Shaid continued that the closure of front offices at a number of police stations meant more officers were on street for longer. He drew the panel's attention to the Active Citizen Project which would encourage local residents to act as the eyes and ears of the force. West Midlands Police would provide training to help the local community to assist them in reducing crime and anti social behaviour.

Councillor Burley felt that the loss of PCSOs was a retrograde step as they currently provided the eyes and ears of the force and were a reservoir of local knowledge. She felt that the visible presence they provided was essential and their extra support would be missed.

A resident of Gordon Street, Darlaston commented that crime was on the rise in Darlaston and young people were walking around openly smoking cannabis but no action was taken.

Sergeant Shaid replied that unfortunately the police could not be everywhere but if officers caught youths smoking cannabis in the street they would take action and confiscate the drugs.

A resident of Gordon Street explained that problems were being experienced because cars were travelling at excessive speed in the street. There was also one particular motorcyclist who regularly travelled along Gordon Street at tremendous speed. Another resident of Gordon Street expressed concern that a pedestrian crossing was dangerous. Councillor Burley reported that councillors had tried to get the crossing re-sited but the Council had stated as there had been no fatalities in the area it could not be moved.

Sergeant Shaid explained that police officers were often frustrated because they could not obtain the evidence needed to gain convictions.

PC Collins informed the meeting that a new initiative called Face Watch which was being trialled by eight police forces and was proving to be very successful. It involved the police informing the public of low level crime and people they wished to interview via social media.

People could view 'wanted people' and if they saw them they could advise the police of their whereabouts. He added that the system appeared to be working well.

Councillor Burley asked how it would be piloted and PC Collins replied that it would be launched at the end of November and would be promoted by adverts throughout the borough.

The Group Manager – Early Help and Strengthening Families (Isabel Vanderheeren) made a presentation regarding the work of her team. (See annexed). She stated that the team worked with schools in Darlaston to help identify families needing help.

After further discussion it was

**Resolved**

That the presentations be noted.

135/15

**Area Panels – Public Participation**

The report of the Head of Democratic Services was submitted:-

(See annexed)

**Resolved**

1. That the Panel agrees to introduce either a public forum or public question time to take place at the commencement of each panel meeting; and
2. That the Panel agrees to appoint one co-opted member per ward subject to Council approval.

136/15

**Funding Report**

The joint report of the Area Manager and the Area Partnership Manager was submitted:-

(See annexed)

The Area Manager (Nicola Holmes) enlarged upon the report and explained the projects contained therein.

137/15

**Darlaston King Street Notice Board**

The Area Manager reported that it was proposed to erect a notice board in King Street, Darlaston for use by residents, traders, community groups and partner agencies to provide information about the range of services, activities and information for people visiting the

town. The location to be determined by members of the Town Centre Business Partnership.

Members requested that ward councillors should also be involved in the siting of the notice board and it was

**Resolved**

That funding in the sum of £3100 for the King Street, Darlaston notice board be approved subject to ward councillors being consulted on the siting of the notice board in King Street.

138/15

**Darlaston All Active Christmas Event**

The Area Manager reported that the funding requested would assist towards the cost of a Christmas event for people from across the area taking place on 3<sup>rd</sup> December at Darlaston All Active Centre. She added that match funding in the sum of £950 would be provided.

**Resolved**

That funding in the sum of £770 for the Darlaston All Active Christmas Event be approved.

139/15

**Old Hall People's Partnership – Kitchen Improvement**

The Area Manager reported that the funding would be used to purchase a new cooker and toaster for the community cafe in Wilkes Avenue following its re-launch. The cafe was now open daily for lunch club offering healthy meals and snacks.

**Resolved**

That funding in the sum of £751.98 for the Old Hall People's Partnership kitchen improvement be approved.

140/15

**Darlaston Town Christmas Pantomime**

The Area Manager reported that the funding would be used to offer a local performance of the pantomime Jack & the Beanstalk for families in the Darlaston and Bentley areas. She added that match funding in the sum of £436 would be provided.

**Resolved**

That funding in the sum of £650 for the Darlaston Town Christmas Pantomime would be approved.

141/15

**Community Safety – Crown Court Darlaston Project**

The Area Manager reported that the funding would be used to install fencing at this location to alleviate issues of anti social behaviour such as fly tipping and litter. The fencing would also secure the site and reduce the number of break ins to properties. The low wall was used as a seating area by young people creating complaints from residents.

**Resolved**

That funding in the sum of £1900 for the Community Safety – Crown Court, Darlaston Project be approved.

142/15

**Annual Christmas Event in Darlaston Town Centre**

The Area Manager reported that the funding would be used to support the Darlaston Town Centre Christmas event taking place from 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> December, 2015. It would include a grotto, entertainments and activities for families throughout the area. The event was being supported by a number of agencies including Darlaston Sure Start and the events committee.

**Resolved**

That funding in the sum of £880 for the annual Christmas event in Darlaston Town Centre be approved.

143/15

**Area Managers Report**

A report was submitted:-

(See annexed)

The Area Manager (Nicola Holmes) enlarged upon the report for the benefit of the panel.

**Resolved**

That the Area Manager's report be noted.

144/15

**Dates for Future Meetings**

The dates for future meetings of the panel were submitted.

**Resolved**

That the dates for future meetings be noted.

**Termination of meeting**

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 8.07 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....