

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

1 December 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor C. Creaney (Vice-Chair)
Councillor K. Aftab
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor D. Pitt
Councillor I. Robertson
Councillor I. Shires

Portfolio Holders present

Councillor M. Bird – Leader
Councillor A. Andrew – Regeneration
Councillor G. Perry – Communities and Partnerships

Officers present

Jamie Morris	Executive Director – Neighbourhood Services
Keith Stone	Assistant Director – Neighbourhood Services
Chris Holliday	Head of Leisure and Culture
Sue Grainger	Head of Libraries and Heritage
Steph Simcox	Service Accounting and Financial Training Manager
Ben Percival	Sports and Leisure Manager
Craig Goodall	Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

53/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Towe and B. Sanders.

54/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

55/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

56/09 REVENUE AND CAPITAL MONITORING – 2009/10 SECOND QUARTER FORECAST

The Panel were informed of the predicted revenue and capital outturn position for 2009/10 based on the financial performance for quarter 2 (April to September 2009) for services within the Panels remit.

Steph Simcox explained that the year end forecast was a predicted revenue overspend of £66,000 once anticipated remedial action had taken place and a capital underspend of just over £1m was being predicted which would be carried forward into 2010/11. She highlighted further information on the use of earmarked reserves, further details on the

forecast revenue outturn, an analysis of reasons for revenue variances and a forecast on the capital outturn.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- The £36,000 unachieved income from Costa Coffee due to lease negotiations. These negotiations were now complete and the money was due to be received shortly.
- Members felt that the Council should make increased use of the third sector.
- Legal obligation had required the £60,000 spend on air conditioning at the local history centre. Members were informed that an investigation was taking place to co-locate the museum and local history centre.
- An extra £80,000 had been required to be spent on provisions (food) in the Catering Service due an increase in demand for free school meals which had increased by 9%.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. the Panel receive an item on the development of Bloxwich and Pelsall Libraries;**

and;

- 2. Members be advised on the work that has taken place for lodge landscaping at George Rose Park.**

57/09 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET 2010/11 FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Panel considered the draft revenue budget proposals for 2010/11 for the services within their remit. Members considered the portfolio plans and budget proposals for the Leisure and Culture and Communities and Partnerships Cabinet Portfolios.

Leisure and Culture Portfolio

Councillor Bird briefly summarised the Leisure and Culture budget proposals.

Service redesign, 115, 'closure of Willenhall Leisure Centre'

Councillor Bird reported that the centre had been forward as a potential saving for the last four years but had always been saved despite its performance. The centre was currently costing the Council over £900 per day and the cost per user was £4.54 compared to around £2.50 per user for other local leisure centres. It was felt that there was adequate alternative provision in the local area that could be utilised by residents and schools. Pressures elsewhere in the Council budget meant that savings had to be made across Council services.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion regarding the proposal to close Willenhall Leisure Centre:

- Even though usage figures had increased in the last 12 months the centre was still not well used; and it was considered unlikely it would achieve comparable performance levels to other leisure centres in the borough.
- Over £220,000 investment had taken place at the centre for health and safety reasons during the last year.
- It was not possible to substantially improve the existing facilities within the available budgets
- There was a new leisure centre located two miles from Willenhall, outside of the borough, which had more facilities and a choice of swimming pools. A second leisure centre in Bilston, also two miles away, was about to be constructed.
- There were currently 27 swimming pools in Walsall; five at Council leisure centres and a further twenty-two at schools). Following a question from a Member about whether or not the available number of swimming pools in the borough was excessive for the size of the local area, the Panel were informed that the provision could be considered excessive compared to other local areas. Research was underway to quantify the boroughs exact requirements, which could be as low as 12 swimming pools. .
- Members felt that closure of Willenhall Leisure Centre could increase levels of deprivation in the west of the borough.
- Reference was made to the Willenhall Project Reference Group action plan regarding the regeneration of the local area. The impact of the closure of the centre could have a detrimental impact on the achievement of the plan as it was important to have facilities for residents to attract people to live and work in the local area.
- Alternative provision nearby, outside the borough, attracted a different clientele to those that used Willenhall Leisure Centre.
- Some Members felt that the west of the borough was not attracting the right levels of investment from the Council.
- Closing Willenhall leisure centre would have a detrimental impact on the achievement of the plans and priorities set out in the Leisure and Culture Portfolio plan and in reducing levels of childhood obesity.

In response Councillor Bird explained that there had been substantial investment in the west of the borough during the previous few years and that it was purely usage of the site and the need to make savings in areas across the Council which was influencing the proposal.

New Income, 112, 'additional income generation from the schools music service'

It was confirmed that the additional income would be charged to schools who use the music service rather than a charge to individual pupils.

Service Redesign, 117,' General Efficiencies – Local History centre including reduction in staffing costs'

This redesign included a reduction in staff and supplies and an increase in fees. It was recognised that the local history centre was popular with visitors to the borough. A reduction in service to visitors was acknowledged as a consequence of the proposal.

Efficiency, 103, Library Staffing Restructure

It was explained that two part time posts, at the New Art Gallery, equivalent to more than 1 fulltime equivalent post were being reduced to one fulltime post.

Communities and Partnerships Portfolio

Councillor Perry explained that his portfolio covered £3.5m of services and expenditure. In addition to the efficiencies and, new income and service redesign set out in the report he reported that there was to be a £120,000 investment in tackling environmental crime. This growth bid had been considered by the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- The Street Champion scheme had been relaunched and had been supplemented by the government's Community Crime Fighter programme to reflect greater roles and responsibilities in tackling anti-social behaviour.
- Members were supportive of schemes utilising restorative justice.
- The Panel agreed to evaluate and monitor the introduction and operation of the new Neighbourhood Management Model.

In closing the item Councillor Bird and Panel Members congratulated Councillor Perry for the successful way that he managed his portfolio.

RESOLVED:

That:

- 1. further information be provided to the Panel on the alternative leisure facilities available, including the possibility of subsidised memberships at other nearby leisure centres, to residents should Willenhall Leisure Centre be closed;**
- 2. the Panel be informed of the alternative swimming and leisure facilities that will be provided for the primary, secondary and special schools that currently utilise Willenhall Leisure Centre;**
- 3. the efficiency, new income and service redesign proposals for the Communities and Partnership Portfolio be supported;**
- 4. the Panel evaluate and monitor the introduction and operation of the new neighbourhood management model.**

58/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel noted the date of the next meeting as 18 January 2010.

The meeting terminated at 7.31 p.m.

Signed:

Date: