

Item 4

MEETING OF THE REGENERATION, ENVIRONMENT HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY, SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Held at The Council house, Walsall on
2 November 2004 at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor I Shires (chairman)
Councillor Yasin (vice chairman)
Councillor Beeley
Councillor Cassidy
Councillor Coughlan
Councillor Harris
Councillor Harrison
Councillor Johnson
Councillor Robinson

CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

41. Members noted the following change in membership for the duration of the meeting:

Delete: Councillor Tweddle
Substitute: Councillor Beeley

APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillor Aslam.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

42. Councillor Johnson declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 10(a) on the agenda relating to Bentley Road North. She agreed to leave the room during consideration of this item and to take no part in the discussion or voting on the item.

The members of the political groups indicated that there were no whipping arrangements for any of the political parties in respect of items on the agenda.

NOTES OF MEETING

43. Agreed that the notes of the meetings 22 September 2004, copies having previously being circulated to each member of the committee, be agreed as a correct record. Councillor Robinson indicated that in the notes as agreed it had been agreed to bring a report on Fly Tipping and Bulky Item collection service to

the next meeting. He requested that officers bring the report to the meeting on December 15 2004.

Officers apologised for the oversight and agreed to bring a report to the next meeting.

FEEDBACK FROM WORKING GROUPS

44. TELECOMMUNICATIONS MAST WORKING GROUP – 13 OCTOBER 2004

The pro-forma from the working group was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Councillor Johnson gave feedback to the panel as set out on the document. David Elsworthy advised the panel that he had set a provisional date to update members about development control matters 29 November 2004, and that it may be possible to invite telephone operators or an independent speaker to that event.

Councillor Johnson advised that the working group were considering joining other Local Authorities to lobby Government through the Local Government Association (LGA) to change the policy and remove permitted development rights.

David Ellsworthy clarified that the LGA want to move the Government to a more consistent position and that many Local Authorities were supporting the LGA.

Councillor I Shires advised that the Centre for Public Scrutiny website (www.CfPS.org.uk) held an online forum and that recently there had been items on about mobile phone masts. He passed details of his research to the Lead Member for the working group, Councillor Johnson, and thanked her for the update from the working group.

It was agreed that the report of the Lead Member be received and agreed that the research information be passed back to the working group.

REGENERATION WORKING GROUP – 25 OCTOBER 2004

45. The pro-forma from the working group was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Councillor Coughlan, Lead Member for the working group, gave feedback to the panel. He advised that a mapping exercise had been undertaken to highlight major transport projects in the Borough and that he had asked for a short presentation to this meeting to make members aware of the issues they may want to scrutinise.

Graham Fry was in attendance at the meeting and gave a brief presentation which outlined a number of projects. He advised that the projects outlined may become part of the Transport Strategy in 2005.

During the presentation Mr Fry outlined the impact that the projects have on regeneration, he said that they should demonstrate Value for Money (VFM) and

must demonstrate economic returns to the Borough. The following projects were outlined:-

- Town Centre Transport Package
- Integrated Transport Package
- Bradford Place Interchange
- Junction 10 Gateway
- Brownhills Corridor
- Red Routes
- Metro 5 W's route
- Other Initiatives
- Air Quality – new obligations to look at air Quality
- Accessibility Planning

He advised the panel that the next steps were to prepare the Local Transport Plan, draft to be considered by scrutiny in March / April and Cabinet and Council for approval in April / May 2005. He advised the plan should be complete and approved by 31 July 2005.

There followed a period of discussion as a result of which, it was:-

46. Resolved

1. That the panel endorse the work programme for the Regeneration Working Group and that the membership of the group be reconfirmed as Councillors Coughlan, I Shires , Yasin.
2. That the brief outlined in the brief setting pro-forma submitted be agreed as the remit of the working group, as follows:-
 - A mapping exercise be undertaken to identify and plot all existing and proposed regeneration activity within the borough.
 - That officers provide further information about the 'Keyway Report' - a Black Country Study currently being undertaken, which looks at the issues of access to industrial areas and traffic models.
 - That research into existing and future proposals set out in the West Midlands Local Transport Plan (WMLTP), Walsall's Transport Strategy and the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) is undertaken in order to determine the impact that these strategies or plans will have upon existing and proposed regeneration activity within the borough, particularly in respect of proposed transport infrastructures and access to employment.
 - That a clear picture is identified representing what transportation issues are currently affecting or could potentially affect the success of economic regeneration projects within the borough. This is required to enable members to identify issues early and potentially reduce any negative impact, through scrutinisation at project development stage.

Further Resolved

47. That the panel request that officers carry out an evaluation exercise of the performance indicators that specifically focus on the issue of recycling and that an item be included on a future agenda to present the findings to the panel.

PLANNING BEST VALUE REVIEW

48. Mr David Elsworthy was in attendance to give a presentation of 'a best value review of planning' and outline the improvement plan to members of the plan. Copies of the slides were tabled:-

(see annexed)

Mr Elsworthy advised that staff within the Service area have worked really well to improve the service provided.

In response to questions about staff turnover and retention of staff, Mr Keith Stone said that the short term restructuring of the service will address the immediate needs of the service, however there will be a need to look at recruitment and retention packages in the long term. Members were concerned that staff were being lost to neighbouring authorities in recent months, and suggested the way to improve this is to make Walsall a more attractive place to work.

Members asked what consideration had been given to outsourcing the service and were informed that the review looked at different options and that it had been found that the service is better kept in house.

Members discussed apprenticeship style links between the planning service and education 'growing your own', actually getting into schools and making work in Local Authority interesting. Members were advised that Walsall was certainly looking at recruitment and retention of staff. David Elsworthy advised that UCE have two planning courses and that they are over subscribed, indicating that things will improve. Members recognised that the experience within the householder planning teams is a great benefit and that if they can do the work they should not be barred by a qualification.

Members discussed the development control committee and the progress made in determining planning applications. Members asked what officers were doing to publicise the good news.

Members further considered that the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships should be looking at what the UDP means to them in their area. In particular how the LNP Local Plan can be put into the UDP and what the plan means to the people who live in the area.

Members felt that the plan should be monitored and after a further period of discussion it was:-

Resolved

49. That the Regeneration Environment Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance panel endorse the completion of the Best Value review of Planning

That the Regeneration Environment Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance panel agree to receive quarterly update reports on progress of the improvement plan

ENVIRONMENT INSPECTION REPORT

50. Mr Keith Stone was in attendance at the meeting to give a verbal update.

Mr Stone advised that officers were currently awaiting the report of the final inspection and that it was imminent. He said that the inspection team was impressed with the improvements made and indicated that areas of best practice had been highlighted.

Sonia Davidson Grant advised that the current rating was poor with no prospects and that the revised rating was fair with excellent prospects, which had been published on the Audit Commission web site. She said the vast improvement was down to the staff of the services areas concerned and that the hard work and effort has been recognised.

Councillor Shires requested a full report back to this panel showing the improvement plan. He said that fair doesn't really reflect the shift that has taken place and that the good news and congratulations should be passed on to all involved when the report is released.

Keith Stone said that strong corporate services provide a solid platform and that this has developed in this case. He felt that recognition for the work was deserved and officers deserved a pat on the back.

Members noted the verbal update.

Quarterly Performance Report

51. The report of the Executive Director was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Sonia Davidson-Grant explained the purpose of the quarterly performance indicators to members, emphasising that they give members opportunity to see how key indicators are performing. Members asked for a presentation to the next meeting of Regeneration focusing on the recycling PI's and concentrating on the exception reporting.

Resolved

52. That a presentation on Recycling Performance Indicators be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

FORWARD PLAN

Agreed

53. To receive the forward plan

PETITION REPORTS

54. The following Petition reports were submitted:-

- (a) Bentley Road North at Junction with King Charles Avenue – Request for Crossing
- (b) Against New Road Linking Nechells Lane Island and The Keyway
- (c) Save the Stag Pub
- (d) Residents of Hardy Road/Blakenall/Birchills/Leamore
- (e) Fountain Way Garages

(see annexed)

55. Resolved

- 1. That the reports be received
- 2. That the reports in future be referred to the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships for consideration of inclusion in their Local Plan.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.50 pm.