

## **CORPORATE AND PUBLIC SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Thursday 14 April 2016 at 6.00pm at the Council Chamber, Council House, Walsall**

<b>Panel Members Present</b>	Councillor M. Nazir (Chair) Councillor I. Shires (Vice-Chair) Councillor P. Bott Councillor S. Cooper Councillor S. Craddock Councillor K. Ferguson Councillor I. Jeavons Councillor A. Nawaz Councillor L. Rattigan
<b>Portfolio Holder</b>	Councillor M. Bird – Leader Councillor M. Arif – Shared services and procurement Councillor A. Harris – Community, leisure and culture
<b>Officers Present</b>	Simon Neilson – Executive Director (Economy and Environment) James Walsh – Assistant Director (Finance) Paul Gordon – Head of Business Change Mark Holden – Head of Clean and Green Steve Pretty – Head of Planning, Transport and Engineering Elise Hopkins – System Leader (Money, Home, Job) Jo Lowndes – Partnership Manager Nigel Rowe – Community Cohesion and Engagement Lead Officer Craig Goodall – Committee Business and Governance Manager

### **82/15 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sohal.

### **83/15 Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

### **84/15 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

### **85/15 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

It was noted that there were no items to be heard in private session.

## 86/15 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

### Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2016 were approved as a true and accurate record.

## 87/15 Petition: Save Our Services

The Committee considered a petition that had received over 500 signatures. The petition said: *'Save Our Services: successive years of council cuts are now threatening to seriously undermine, and in some cases completely destroy, vital public services. These include some on which the most vulnerable people in our community rely, We call on the council not to implement further cuts and work with others to demand the Government reinstates funding to maintain our community'*.

Three petitioners addressed the Committee regarding the petition, namely, Sue Tame, Steve Lawton and Janet Hughes. They called upon the Council to not implement the cuts being foisted upon them by the Government in order to tackle inequality and assist vulnerable people. Services such as Links to Work were a vital facility for local vulnerable people. Walsall should be proud of these services and maintain them.

The Leader of the Council responded to the petition. He agreed with the sentiments expressed by the petitioners but explained that the Council was under a legal duty to set a balanced budget. The Council was required to prioritise its resources. Statutory services were funded first, discretionary services second. He added he was meeting the Secretary of State for Local Government and he would report the petition and its concerns directly to him.

The Assistant Director (Finance) report that the Council had lost £97m in government funding since 2010. The authority was limit to increasing Council Tax by no more than 2% each year. If a council tax increase greater than 2% was desired then a local referendum was required to approve it. Council tax receipts made up 16% of the councils overall budget. In order to maintain its current budget level for next year a council tax rise of 25% would be required.

The funding reductions would be compounded by changes to business rate retentions. By 2020 each local authority would keep its own business rate receipts. As Walsall had low numbers of active businesses this meant Walsall would receive less money as it benefitted from the current redistribution of national business rates.

Members of the Committee expressed frustration that areas like Walsall were losing out financially compared to some local authorities who had seen their funding increase.

**Resolved:**

**That the Leader present the 'Save Our Services' petition to the Secretary of State for Local Government.**

**88/15 Traffic issues in Sandwell Street and Bath Street**

The Committee discussed traffic problems in Sandwell Street and Bath Street, Caldmore.

The Chair invited three speakers to address the Committee. Mohammed Bashir, Sandwell Street resident, Aftab Hussain, Caldmore Traders Association and Jamal Rahbib, Caldmore Trader and Bath Road resident. The speakers explained that since the roadworks on Caldmore Road had begun traffic in Sandwell Street, Bath Street and Bath Road had been gridlocked. The traffic would back up to Little London. The problems were at their worse during the morning rush hour. Vehicles were refusing to give way, cars were mounting the pavement and people were arguing in the street. Several fights had been prevented. The traffic problems were having an impact on businesses on Caldmore Road.

The Head of Planning, Transport and Engineering was invited to respond to the concerns expressed by the three speakers. He provided background information to the development of the scheme and the consultation that had taken place. He noted the feedback from the three speakers and commented that the current problems were being caused by the roadworks and should resolve themselves once the scheme was completed. He added that should problems still exist on side streets once the scheme was complete then modifications could be made to those streets in the future to prevent the existing problems taking place.

The Leader announced that he would take a report to the next Cabinet meeting on the issue to discuss if there were any improvements to the situation that could be made in the short term.

The Committee noted the feedback received and felt that it would be beneficial to take an item in the new municipal year to review the impact of the completed scheme on the local area. This item would include inviting the three speakers back to address the committee on their views.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. the Committee consider the impact of the introduction of the one way system on Caldmore Road in the new municipal year**
- 2. The following speakers be invited to address the committee:**
  - a. Mohammed Bashir;**

- b. Aftab Hussein;**
- c. Jamal Rahbib.**

#### **89/16 Waste Collection Policies**

The Committee considered waste collection policies for multi-occupancy properties (flats and apartments) (MOPs) and homes in multiple occupation (HMOs).

The Head of Clean and Green provided Members with an overview of the two policies and explained they were due for review.

Following questions the Head of Clean and Green explained that MOPs and HMOs currently received, and would continue to receive, weekly collections. These type of properties would not be affected by the changes to fortnightly collections to other properties. Euro bins were provided to each property based on the number of residents.

Members reported problems across the borough with uncollected bins and excessive and inappropriate waste. Uncollected bins made the problems worse as further waste would be added to the uncollected waste. The Head of Clean and Green noted this and reported that it was the responsibility of the landlord and tenants to ensure bins were uncontaminated and could be collected. Excess waste could be collected but it would be charged. The Council did not undertake enforcement action for any waste related issues. Members noted problems with unresponsive property management companies and high turnovers with occupant compounding the problems.

A Member suggested that the Committee form a working group to consider the issue in the new municipal year.

#### **Resolved:**

**That the Committee consider establishing a working group in the new municipal year to consider the waste policies for multi-occupancy properties and homes in multiple occupation.**

#### **90/15 Final report of the Community Cohesion Working Group**

The Committee considered the final report and recommendations of the Community Cohesion Working Group (CCWG). The report was tabled at the meeting (annexed).

Councillor Nawaz, Lead Member for the CCWG, introduced the report. He explained there was cohesion in Walsall but it was not as strong as it could be. Communities were living parallel lives. Walsall was a parochial borough and there was no one Walsall philosophy. The Council needed to do more to improve the diversity of its workforce. Services to gypsies and travellers were inadequate. He added that the working group had considered the prevent anti-terrorism programme and recognised it was an impediment to cohesion

within the Muslim community. He thanked the working group and its support officers for their hard work.

A Member of the working group echoed the comments made and explained it was important to focus on the things that unite people to build a cohesive borough. He felt that Area Partnerships played a key role in supporting communities.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. The final report and recommendations of the Community Cohesion Working Group be approved and forwarded to Council for consideration;**
- 2. The Corporate and Public Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel review the implementation of the working groups recommendations in April 2017.**

#### **91/15 Final report and recommendations of the Welfare Reform Working Group**

The Committee considered the final report and recommendations of the Welfare Reform Working Group (WRWG). The report was tabled at the meeting (annexed).

Councillor Jeavons, the working group lead member, introduced the report. He highlighted the significant amount of change that was taking place to welfare reforms and how these were affecting local people. Housing evictions and foodbank use was increasing. As council resources drew scarcer it was important that help was directed at those in the most need. Therefore the working group were recommending that profiling of residents took place.

Members of the committee spoke about the importance of supporting local people and ensuring that access to advice services, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, remained.

The Portfolio Holder (Personnel and Business Support) noted the report and explained that a Council Tax reduction scheme was in place to help local residents. He added that the proposal to unite advice services under a single charitable trust was also progressing.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. The final report and recommendations of the Welfare Reform Working Group be approved and forwarded to Cabinet for consideration;**
- 2. The working groups final report be shared with all Councillors and local MPs;**
- 3. The implementation of the working groups recommendations be reviewed in 12 months time;**

**4. An item on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme be considered in the new municipal year.**

**92/15 Follow up on recommendations of the Area Partnership Working Group**

The Committee followed up on progress made with the implementation of the Area Partnership Working Group (APWG) which presented a final report and recommendations to the former Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 9 April 2015.

The Chair invited the Portfolio Holder (Community, Leisure and Culture) to report on progress made with implementing the working group's recommendations. The Portfolio Holder reported that he believed Area Partnerships had been successful but Area Panels had not achieved. He added that a review of community associations (CA) was about to take place.

Members of the committee felt that Area Panels had been an effective mechanism for engaging with local people. If they were going to be abolished then it was important that something was developed in replace them. Further to this the small grants available through the Panels played a key role supporting local community groups. Members felt that CAs had no links to Area Panels in this context.

Members raised the alternative budget passed by Council that included funding for Area Panels. Members also noted the proposed points system for road maintenance that Area Panels were due to contribute to had quietly disappeared.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. Area Panels continue to meet in the new municipal year;**
- 2. The recommendations of the Area Partnership Working Group be implemented.**

**93/15 Areas of Focus 2015/16 and Forward Plans**

**Resolved:**

**That the Committees Areas of Focus and Forward Plans be noted.**

**Termination of Meeting**

In closing the meeting the Chair thanked all Members and Officers for their attendance and contributions to the success of the committee during the year.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 8.56 pm.

Signed: .....

Date: .....