

NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Monday, 12th November, 2014 at 6.00 p.m. in a Conference Room at the Council House

Members in Attendance: Councillor C. Towe (Vice-Chair)
Councillor M. Arif
Councillor A. Ditta
Councillor S. Fitzpatrick
Councillor D. Hazell
Councillor J. Murray
Councillor A. Nawaz
Councillor K. Phillips
Councillor E. Russell
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor G. Sohal

Portfolio Holders in Attendance: Councillor K. Hussain – Community, Leisure & Culture
Councillor L. Jeavons – Environment and Transport

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor G. Illmann-Walker

Officers in Attendance: Jamie Morris - Executive Director (Neighbourhoods)
Mark Holden – Head of Clean and Green
Chris Holliday – Head of Leisure and Community Health
Steve Pretty – Head of Highways and Transportation
Sue Grainger – Head of Heritage, Libraries and Arts
Jev Bhalla – Principal – Walsall Adult and Community College
Judy Hallam – Spin-out Project Lead – Walsall Adult and Community College
Jacky Griffith – Assistant Principal – Finance and Resources – Walsall Adult and Community College
Chris Knowles – Services Finance Manager
Craig Goodall - Committee Business and Governance Manager

Vice-Chair in the Chair

12/14 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C. Creaney.

13/14 Substitutions

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

14/14 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillors M. Arif, E. Russell and C. Towe declared non-pecuniary interests in Item number 16/14 as Council appointed Board Members of Walsall Adult and Community College.

Councillors A. Ditta and A. Nawaz both declared non-pecuniary interests in Item number 16/14 as Trustees of Palfrey Community Association which is used as a teaching venue by Walsall Adult and Community College.

15/14 Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting which took place on 13th October, 2014, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

16/14 Walsall Adult and Community College Delivering Differently

The Panel considered the possibility of Walsall Adult and Community College (WACC) becoming an independent organisation.

The Executive Director introduced the item explaining that a number of methods had been investigated to establish the possibility of WACC becoming an independent organisation. The Principal (WACC) gave a presentation (annexed). He highlighted the purpose of WACC, its provision and successes. He explained the benefits of the 'spin-out' and how the transition would be managed. Once WACC was independent it would no longer receive any financial support from the Council. The financial gap would be bridged through increased income. The current net cost to the Council was £400,000.

Following questions Members were informed that it was anticipated funding would grow by 40%. Being separate from the Council would enable WACC to apply for European Funding. This would enable WACC to double the number of students enrolled. It was acknowledged that managing this growth would be a challenge but demand was there in the community. Traineeship and Apprenticeship courses attracted funding met needs of the local population. WACC tended to work with small and medium enterprises to find work placements for students.

The meeting discussed the location of WACC and whether or not it would benefit from a new larger town centre campus. After discussion Members agreed that the current model of satellite sites across the borough was working successfully. Moreover it was key to attracting new students who preferred to study in their locality.

Members requested a demographic breakdown of WACCs students.

At the close of the item the Panel was supportive of the spin-out proposal.

Resolved

That:-

- 1. The Panel support the proposed spin-out of Walsall Adult and Community College;**

and;

2. Members be provided with a demographic breakdown of students studying at Walsall Adult and Community College.

17/14 Quarter Two Financial Monitoring Position for 2014/15

Members considered the predictive revenue and capital position for 2014/15 based on performance for quarter two (1st July to 30th September 2014) of the services within the remit of the Panel.

The Services Finance Manager reported that there was a predicted revenue under spend of £301,000. Capital spending was currently on target to under spend by £80,000 with £60,000 requested to be carried forward.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

18/14 Draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2015/16 to 2018/19 for Community Leisure and Culture Portfolio and Environment and Transport Portfolio.

The Panel considered the draft revenue budget and capital programme for 2015/16 to 2018/19 for the Community Leisure and Culture Portfolio and the Environment and Transport Portfolio.

The following are the principal points arising from discussion at the meeting:-

Community Leisure and Culture Portfolio

Saving reference 16: tree management/urban forestry – reduction in posts and deletion of new tree budget.

Following a question on the risks associated with the saving the Head of Clean and Green acknowledged that the reduced frequency of tree inspections could mean that potential problems would not be noticed as quickly as they were currently.

Saving references – 47, 48, 49, 50, 51: loss of posts in Area Partnerships and Community Development plus the reduction in support to Community Associations.

Members questioned the Portfolio Holder on how he would achieve the priorities in his portfolio plan around developing Area Partnerships and the voluntary and community sector despite the proposed savings in Area Partnerships and Community Developments.

Members expressed concern that removing financial support to Community Associations, to assist with building management, would have an impact that could cost the Council more in the longer term.

The meeting discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the current Area Partnership model. A Member suggested that funding for Area Partnerships could be better spent

supporting Community Associations. Other Members felt the role that Area Managers played was key in solving complex problems. Following a query the Executive Director reported that two Area Manager posts were funded by partners.

Saving references 58 and 59: Reductions in greenspaces and ground maintenance

A Member expressed the view that cuts to frontline services such as those proposed in greenspaces management and events should be avoided. A Member in attendance explained that if the Council stopped facilitating these events, it was hoped that the community would run the events for themselves instead.

Saving reference 62: cease outdoor adventure service

A Member noted that this service was used by many disabled children and expressed concern that this would impact heavily on this small group.

The Head of Leisure and Community Health responded by explaining that options were currently being explored to continue the service. These options included increased charges and externalisation of the service.

Environment and Transport Portfolio

Saving reference 82: reduction in street cleansing across the town centre and district areas

The Panel expressed concern about the impact of this saving proposal. Members did not want the area to become untidy and become a place that people were not proud to live in.

The Portfolio Holder explained that shifts would be managed to utilise the available equipment in the most efficient way to try and minimise the impact of the proposed service reduction.

Saving references 79 and 80: garden waste collection operation for 6 months (instead of 8 months) and introduction of garden waste charges

Concerns were expressed about introducing charges for the collection of garden waste. Other authorities that had followed this course had experienced difficulties. It was noted that whilst some authorities had stopped charging there were many more that still charged for garden waste collection successfully. Members requested further information as to why some authorities had stopped charging.

Due to seasonal variations in demand for garden waste collection it was felt the change to a six month collection service would be a difficult saving to achieve whilst maintaining adequate levels of service. Some Members suggested that it would be better to continue the service into the Autumn/Winter to deal with leaf-fall rather than start early in Spring.

The Portfolio Holder acknowledged this potential issue and noted that if charging was introduced the times the garden waste collection service was available would be reconsidered.

Saving reference 77: reduction in household waste recycling centre times

Saving reference 78: amend frequency of residual waste collections from weekly to fortnightly

Members were concerned about the potential increase in fly-tipping should residual waste be collected fortnightly at the same time as reducing the opening hours of Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRC).

The Head of Clean and Green reported that a feasibility study for all the waste related proposals would be undertaken to assess the potential impact. The results of this study would then be used to design the future service in order to minimise the impact on residents as much as possible. Following a question from a Member he confirmed that allowances had been made for potential increases in fuel costs if the amount of waste taken to HWRCs increased.

Saving reference 88: reduce reactive highways maintenance

A Member expressed concern that reducing reactive highways maintenance could bring about an increase in insurance claims against the Council. The Head of Highways and Engineering acknowledged this risk but noted it was anticipated that new repair techniques should reduce the need for future reactive maintenance.

Saving Reference 96: introduction of nominal car parking charge £1 for 4 hours to assist with ongoing car parking maintenance charges in district centres

The Panel held mixed views on this issue. On one hand Members were concerned that the introduction of car park charges could have a negative impact on local businesses. However, on the other hand some Members thought that a minimum parking charge would prevent car park spaces being unnecessarily filled by people not shopping in the area.

The Portfolio Holder acknowledged the potential difficulties and explained that it was necessary to generate a budget to maintain the car parks moving forward. He felt that the introduction of a low cost single unit charge to secure the attractiveness of the facilities in the future without being so expensive as to push people to shop elsewhere.

Resolved:

That:-

- 1. the draft revenue budget and capital programme 2015/16 to 2018/19 for the Community Leisure and Culture Portfolio and the Environment and Transport Portfolio be noted;**
- and;**
- 2. further information be provided to Members detailing the Local Authorities that have introduced and subsequently removed garden waste collection charges together with the reason for doing so.**

19/14 Compliance with the Waste Framework Directive and Waste Regulations 2011 – Recycling Collections and Material Streams

The Panel were informed of the requirements to meet the European Commission's Waste Framework Directive (WFD) Waste Regulations 2011

The Panel were informed of the requirement of the European Commission's Waste Framework Directive (WFD) and Waste Regulations 2011 in relation to recycling collections and material streams.

The Head of Clean and Green explained that the WFD contained a target for separate roadside collections of recyclable materials. Walsall currently collected mixed materials. The WFD allowed this to continue as long as it could be evidenced that separate collection was not technically, environmentally and/or economically practicable (TEEP) and high quality recycling could still be achieved. The Council had completed its assessment and had found to be compliant to TEEP. If changes to waste collection services were made then the assessment would have to be reviewed.

Following questions Members were informed that the assessment was not externally verified. If the assessment was to be challenged it was expected that this would be from a recycling processor as they would be seeking to improve the quality of materials received. The assessment could be challenged.

The meeting discussed contamination with comingled collections and the problems it caused for the Council's recycling contractor. The Panel supported the production of a DVD on this issue that could be used to encourage residents to reduce contamination. Members also requested a site visit to Casepak, the Council's recycling contractor.

Resolved:

That:-

- 1. the Panel support the production of a DVD demonstrating how a recycling plant works and the consequences of contaminated waste. Once produced this DVD should be shared across the borough;**

and;

- 2. the report be noted.**

20/14 Work Programme 2014/15 and the Forward Plan

Resolved:-

That :

- 1. the following items be added to the Panels Work Programme:-**

- a) Unauthorised encampments;**
- b) Highways Maintenance Strategy and Asset Management Plan;**
- c) Street Light Lantern LED Conversion;**
- d) Road Safety Framework;**
- e) the Future of Area Partnerships**

and;

2. the Forward Plan be noted

21/14 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be 6.00 p.m. on Tuesday 6th January, 2015.

The meeting closed at 8.23 p.m.

Chairman:

Date: