

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 1 October 2009 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)
Councillor S. Coughlan (Vice-Chair)
Councillor D. Anson
Councillor L. Beeley
Councillor R. Carpenter
Councillor K. Sears
Councillor I. Shires

Portfolio Holders present

Councillor A. Andrew - Regeneration

Officers present

Tim Johnson	Executive Director – Regeneration
Mike Tichford	Assistant Director – Regeneration and Neighbourhood Services
Debbie Parkes	Housing Strategy and Partnerships Manager
Rob Gilham	Walsall Housing Group
Jo Lowndes	Partnership and Performance Manager
Dan Mortiboys	Corporate Finance Manager
Laura Terry	Partnership and Performance Officer
Craig Goodall	Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

19/09 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors: D. Douglas-Maul, L. Harrison, K. Phillips and B. Tweddle.

20/09 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillors L. Beeley and R. Carpenter substituted for Councillor B. Tweddle and Councillor B. Douglas-Maul respectively.

21/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

Councillor I. Shires declared a personal interest in item 6 'Walsall Regeneration Company'.

22/09 MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2009, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

23/09 **WALSALL REGENERATION COMPANY**

The Panel discussed the potential future role and responsibilities for the Walsall Regeneration Company (WRC).

Tim Johnson gave a presentation (annexed) informing the Panel of a recent review of the WRC undertaken by Liverpool John Moores University. The report recognised the role and achievements that the WRC had made a series of recommendations for future action. The key recommendation was the development of a new business plan for the WRC to reflect the changing economic situation.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- It was likely that previously proposed schemes would need to be re-evaluated however it was important to retain ambition.
- Potential development sites within the Darlaston Development Delivery Area were very polluted and would require substantial remedial work. However the strategic location of the site meant it was still probable that further investment and development would take place.
- It was important that the West Midlands began to evolve its manufacturing industries, for example, into more high tech and specialist products.
- Regional Development Agencies, such as Advantage West Midlands, needed to be more ambitious.
- Investment was required in broadband speeds across the nation. The Gigaport development was noted as an important contributor to resolving this problem locally.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. the Panel consider the revised Walsall Regeneration Company business plan at a future meeting;**

and;
- 2. the Panel consider the Walsall Regeneration Company's plans for Walsall Town Centre at a future meeting.**

24/09 **SUB REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS**

The Panel considered a draft Cabinet report proposing the introduction of a single choice based letting allocation process across the existing 15 Housing Associations operating in the borough.

Debbie Parkes and Rob Gilham, Walsall Housing Group (WHG), gave a presentation to the Panel on the 'Choose and Move' choice based lettings scheme operated by WHG across the borough since 2006 (annexed).

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- 'Choose and Move' had reduced property turnover.

- A set number of properties were kept unoccupied across each local area. This was to help maintain balanced communities across the borough.
- Demand for social housing outstripped supply. There was a need to construct more social housing.
- Immigrant families did not always get priority over local people.
- The main cause of homelessness was relationship breakdown or financial problems. Those who were considered homeless received support from a specialist team who would help to identify housing that met their needs.
- Sheltered housing was being provided across the borough to enable older residents who wanted to give up their home to still live in their local area.
- Tenants who caused anti-social behaviour were managed in a number of ways, including specialist tenancies. However, it was important to manage the issue and solve the problems at hand rather than move them to another area. Eviction was the last course of action. The Panel noted that private owners may not report instances of anti-social behaviour as it could create difficulties when it came to selling their properties as they were obliged to inform the buyer of issues connected to the property. Choice based lettings could be a long term factor in creating more settled communities with reduced levels of anti-social behaviour.

The Chair explained to the Panel that the introduction of the choice based lettings, along with other related articles such as a common housing application form, were initiatives that the Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group, operated by the former Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel, had recommended for introduction.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. the proposal to introduce a single choice based letting allocation process be supported;**
- and;**
- 2. Members be provided with information on how households causing anti-social behaviour are tackled, including the approach taken to dealing with those households which are privately rented.**

25/09 WALSALL PARTNERSHIP HALF YEARLY REPORT

The Panel were informed on a range of issues led by Walsall Partnership including: progress in agreeing Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets with Government Office for the West Midlands where it was not possible to do so before sign off; final outturn performance of the 2008/09 for the LAA; LAA quarter outturn for 2009/10; development and progress of targeted action plans, and; Working Neighbourhoods Fund approvals to date.

Laura Terry advised Members of the current LAA and performance indicators whose targets were being refreshed due to the recession. She also highlighted two performance indicators that were rated 'red' following the results of the 'Place Survey'.

The Panel discussed national indicator 4 'percentage of residents who can influence decisions in their locality'. Members discussed now it was very important for local residents to be involved in decisions that affected them from an early stage and called for work to be undertaken to improve performance in this key area.

Resolved:

That Walsall Partnership be informed that the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel are disappointed with the outcome of national indicator 4 'percentage of residents who feel they can influence local decisions' and call for urgent action to be undertaken to improve residents' perception of the Council and its partners in this important area.

26/09 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL OUTLOOK AND BUDGET PROCESS 2010/11

Members were briefed on current funding issues, the medium term financial outlook and the budget process.

Dan Mortiboys highlighted the current financial position and explained that the recession was having an impact on the Councils budget for 2009/10. Currently an overspend was forecast due to loss of income from a number of areas. If council tax or government grants did not increase over the next five years then a funding gap of up to £50m could emerge.

Dan Mortiboys gave a presentation on the process for agreeing the 2010/11 budget highlighting proposed protected services and efficiency savings by directorate.

The Panel discussed the need to share the delivery of services with partners and the need to develop common information technology platforms to enable improved joint working. Tim Johnson noted that property was a key area where money could be saved with partners.

27/09 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10 AND FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered their work programme for the year ahead and the latest forward plan of Cabinet key decisions.

Craig Goodall highlighted items for inclusion on the Panels work programme.

The Panel discussed the following items from the forward plan:

72/09 Heritage Centre for Walsall

Tim Johnson reported that capital money had been allocated to fund this project.

73/09 Leisure Centres

The Panel discussed this item and how the approach to modernising the Councils delivery of leisure centres linked with regeneration.

Resolved:

That the following items be added to the Panels work programme for the meeting scheduled to take place on 3 November 2009:

- 1. Joint Core Strategy;**
- 2. Corporate Asset Management, and;**
- 3. Economic Wellbeing – responding to the recession and planning for recovery.**

28/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted the date of the next meeting as 3 November 2009.

The meeting terminated at 7.51 p.m.

Chair:

Date: