

AT A MEETING
of the
**COMMUNITY ORGANISATION, LEISURE AND
CULTURE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE
PANEL**

held at The Council House, Walsall on
Thursday 6 October 2005 at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Towe (Chairman)
Councillor Phillips (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Ault
Councillor Beeley
Councillor Beilby
Councillor Bott
Councillor Burley
Councillor Cassidy
Councillor Woodruff

APOLOGIES

Apologies for non attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Arif.

SUBSTITUTIONS AND CHANGE OF MEMBERSHIP

Members were notified there were no changes in membership.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest indicated or party whipping identified at the meeting.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 4 AUGUST 2005

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 August 2005, a copy having previously been circulated to each member of the panel be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

NOTES OF GREEN SPACES WORK GROUP 26 SEPTEMBER 2005

Councillor Towe advised that it is important for significant numbers of members to attend the scrutiny work groups to make the scrutiny process effective. He voiced

concerns that no members were able to attend the Green Spaces Working Group and acknowledged there were special circumstances why this was the case. He asked if any other members of the scrutiny panel wished to join the Green Spaces Working Group. Councillor Bott and Councillor Beeley agreed to become members of the working group; Cllr Beeley requested that meetings take place in the evenings as he was unable to attend daytime meetings.

It was AGREED:

That Councillor Bott and Councillor Beeley be included in the membership of the Green Spaces Working Group.

Tim Challans outlined the notes of the working group that had previously been circulated. He advised that the consultants had been in attendance at the first meeting and had given a presentation highlighting the purpose of the Green Space Strategy and rationale behind the piece of work. The consultants outlined the project brief and the methodology that would be used to establish the evidence of the audit and assessment and how analysis and recommendations would lead to the draft strategy.

Tim Challans highlighted the importance of this piece of work indicating that attainment of Green Flag Awards for excellent parks and green spaces could be an outcome for Walsall Council inline with the vision for 2008 and highlighted that the consultants had indicated there were some parks in the Walsall Borough that were near Green Flag Award standard. He said that numerous other pieces of green land were of a poor quality and that the assessment would identify these issues.

Tim Challans advised that a household survey had been carried out recently and that the next meeting of the work group would be looking at the results of the household survey and of the audit assessment. He advised that the consultation document and information would inform the process in helping to organise the way Walsall manages its parks and looked at in parallel with the structure for ground maintenance services.

He said members should be conscious of Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) and various guidance and documentation surrounding green spaces and that standards should be taken on board because public require a bigger presence in parks.

He summarised that essentially the working group and the consultation document would be looking at parks in a different way and focusing on: -

- How we manage anti-social behaviour in parks.
- How we can reorganise staffing in parks.
- Working with friends groups to give local ownership to the people in their local areas.

There followed a period of questions and comments.

Councillor Phipps and Councillor Burley felt that the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships should have been consulted much earlier in the process. They were

advised that this is a very early stage of the process, the consultations are due to take place in October/November and it is planned for work groups to be taking place with Local Neighbourhood Partnerships.

Councillor Bott said he had great reservations about the condition and suitability of parks in Darlaston, in particular, in George Rose Park. Members discussed alternative and additional support in parks and discussed wardens and rangers in areas such as Sandwell. The chairman, Councillor Towe advised that these are the types of issues that would arise from the consultation and would be built into the strategy to develop ways of addressing these problems.

After a further period of consideration members received the notes of the Green Spaces Working Group on 26 September 2005 and agreed to include Councillor Beeley and Councillor Bott in the membership of the Green Spaces Working Group.

NOTES OF PROCUREMENT WORK GROUP 26 SEPTEMBER 2005

Members considered the notes of the working group previously circulated: -

(see annexed)

Councillor Towe advised that the Procurement Work Group had met and gained an understanding of how procurement works at the first meeting. He said members welcomed the opportunity to be included from the very beginning of the Leisure Management procurement process and were keen to be engaged at each stage of the process and gain further understanding of each stage of procurement. He said that scrutiny can make a difference to the performance of the service and to the services to the public by scrutinising the procurement process.

Councillor Towe asked the Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture 'if Leisure Management' would also include Community Associations that provide leisure services. Tim Challans said that officers were considering including community associations that are major providers of leisure services. The chairman asked if any other members of the scrutiny panel were interested in becoming members of the Procurement Work Group. There were no further nominations for membership of the work group.

It was AGREED:

That the notes of the Procurement Work Group be received.

NOTES OF COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION WORK GROUP 14 SEPTEMBER 2005

The notes of the Community Association Work Group were received.

COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION WORK GROUP REPORT

The chairman, Councillor Towe thanked members of the Community Association Work Group for their excellent work in preparation of the draft report before members

this evening and asked Councillor Phillips as lead member of the work group to outline the document.

Councillor Phillips said that the report before members tonight made a number of recommendations. She said there had been excellent work going on in community associations in the borough and the report had identified this and made recommendations to cabinet to identify further funding. She said that the important issues within the report were about identifying the needs in the community and that excellent services are provided but more funding is required. Councillor Phillips asked for any further comments from the scrutiny panel on the draft report of the working group.

Councillor Bott congratulated officers and members of the work group. He said it was one of the best reports he had seen for a long time. Councillor Phillips welcomed his comments and said it had been quite an interesting piece of work to identify the funding gaps and look at variances in rent charges in school buildings. Councillor Bott said that Darlaston Community Association was probably one of the poorer performing community associations in the borough and he welcomed this report because of its honesty in recognising this fact and to encourage the Darlaston Community Association to put together a business plan for providing a better service to the community.

Councillor Burley requested that the minutes of the Community Association Working Group were amended to identify her apologies. She welcomed this report as a clear no nonsense document that showed how community associations work; she said that she felt there should be further guidance within the document to ensure that all community associations are run along the same lines and that this should be part and parcel of the business plan for community associations. She felt there should be an accountable body and that decisions should not be made by a handful of people on behalf of the organisation. Councillor Phillips felt that the recommendation 4 relating to the appropriate quality control addressed this issue. Councillor Burley felt that the recommendation needed strengthening so that it was not just left to the manager of a community association but to a proper management board and that the council should impose guidelines on community associations giving guidance how they should be run.

Jamie Morris, Executive Director advised that the council can use leverage to impose minimum standards. He advised that the council really impose across the board guidelines for the running of community associations. Councillor Burley felt that this was not strong enough.

Jamie Morris reaffirmed that the council can use leverage and because they are held in council buildings the authority can seek to encourage having a common approach.

Tim Challans, Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture advised that Community Matters' sets national guidance and that community associations have agreed that standards should include appropriate management standards.

Councillor Bott asked for clarification if the schools had agreed to standardise rents to community associations. Tim Challans, Assistant Director advised that the

Community Association's Federation had rejected the council's offer of helping negotiate rents and had opted to negotiate individual rentals for school premises. After a further period of consideration it was:

AGREED

That a further workshop for the Community Association Working Group takes place to finalise the report taking into consideration the issues raised at this meeting and that all members of the scrutiny work group be encouraged to attend the workshop.

It was further AGREED:

That the recommendations relating to funding should be discussed at the budget consultation meeting scheduled to take place on 23 November 2005 and any recommendations to cabinet be made at that meeting.

COUNCIL FUNDING TO VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Councillor Zahid, portfolio holder for Local Partnerships was in attendance at the meeting to give a presentation in conjunction with John Pryce-Jones.

Councillor Zahid highlighted that the presentation focuses on:-

- how cabinet seeks applications for funding from local organisations
- how cabinet makes its decision on the allocation of funds
- how officers then ensure the council's funds are well spent.

Councillor Zahid made the following points about Council funding and the Councils relationship with voluntary organisations:-

- That this is only one aspect of how the council works with and supports the community and voluntary sector.
- That the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Framework clearly shows the importance of this relationship and we need to demonstrate that we are supporting the voluntary sector helping it to develop and strengthen its capacity to support community groups and to deliver services for local people
- That we need to also show future CPA inspectors that the authority is clear about its relationship with the sector and how we see it contributing to the vision for the borough and what we expect it to deliver in return for the council's support.
- That a recent seminar "Realising our Vision" held at Bescot Stadium demonstrates how the Community Empowerment Network, Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership and Walsall Voluntary Action work together to strengthen the voluntary sector.
- That the new Local Compact launched by Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership in partnership with other key partners is further evidence of the commitment, providing clear guidelines on how we should work together.
- That the commitment to working with Local Neighbourhood Partnerships is further evidence of council support for voluntary sector organisations with community and voluntary groups sitting on Local Neighbourhood Partnerships

as locally appointed partners, also working within theme groups and increasingly through the Local Community Forum being established by the Community Empowerment Network.

Councillor Zahid said that the purpose of tonight's presentation was to look in more detail at the process for applying for grants to voluntary organisations made from council funds. He stressed that the process is only one part of a much broader picture of support for the voluntary sector with support to organisations provided in kind through seconded staff and subsidised premises with other funding for the provision of specific services, for instance, from Social Care or from Lifelong Learning with support to organisations to identify external funding from Lottery, European Funding or other sources, such as, landfill tax credits. He advised that overall council support for the voluntary sector amounts to around £7.5 million a year.

John Pryce-Jones outlined the process for applications in 2005/6. He stated that there was wide publication in a number of local papers and advised that it is an open process with any voluntary organisation being able to apply on an equal basis.

He outlined to members the criteria for allocation of funds highlighting the following points: -

- Support for the council's vision and strategic priorities.
- Not for profit organisations.
- Benefit for local people.
- Previous performance (where applicable).
- Uncommitted balances.
- Availability of funds.

John Pryce-Jones highlighted to members that organisations in their applications should show how they support council's priorities and that this can be expanded to ask precisely how they will support them.

He made the following points:-

- Uncommitted balance means funding allocated and banked with no dedicated project planned.
- More specific questions can be asked about how voluntary organisations are going to be involved with the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships and how their services are going to make a difference to the community.
- In clarification of availability of the funds members were advised that budget allocation is in the region of £500,000.00 and that actual applications can be for up to £1,400,000.00 doubling or tripling the amount of allocation.
- Members were informed that the number of applications in 2004/5 had doubled and it was suspected this could be due to the reduction in SRB Funding.

John Pryce-Jones circulated a list of the actual funding allocations: -

(see annexed)

Members were advised that the top three grants accounted for 75% of the total grants to voluntary organisations for 2005/6, that being the Citizens Advice Bureau, The Walsall Voluntary Action (formerly Walsall CVS) and the Volunteer Centre Walsall.

John Pryce-Jones advised that the authority has developed quite detailed Service Level Agreements (SLA) each service level agreement is drawn up and jointly agreed and signed to a set of general targets which are linked to the ability to monitor delivery of the services throughout the year. Members were advised that SLA's are monitored at quarterly meetings with the policy officers and colleagues discuss and address any problems that may occur.

There followed a period of questions by members of the scrutiny panel during which time the following issues were raised: -

1. What happens to applications which are declined?

Members were advised unsuccessful applicants are referred to the funding team as part of the advisory package given.

2. The Citizens Advice Bureau has a large percentage of the total allocation for the year, has this always been the case or just last year?

Members were advised that the Citizens Advice Bureau has always been the major recipient of voluntary organisation funding.

3. What is the difference between Walsall Voluntary Action (formerly Walsall CVS) and Volunteer Centre Walsall?

Members were advised that one is a vehicle and intermediary body and the other is the strategic infrastructure and collective capacity. Members were advised that £30,000.00 to the Volunteer Centre in Walsall is to help voluntary organisations approach fund raising applications differently in the future.

4. Do members have the opportunity to scrutinise performance of the Citizens Advice Bureau to see if they are making a difference and providing a worthy service to Citizens of Walsall?

Members were advised that there are quarterly meetings with policy officers.

Following a period of discussion members raised the following suggestions: -

1. Members queried whether there was another way of allocating funding in the future. Councillor Towe stressed that panel did not criticise the way it was currently being carried out but felt that just because this has always been the way was not necessarily the best way.
2. Members felt it important to think outside the box and to investigate alternatives that may have a more satisfactory allocation of funding across the bureau.

3. Councillor Zahid questioned whether there was a danger of subjectivity he said that currently officers have a stringent criteria and it was part and parcel of the allocation of funds from cabinet. The chairman appreciated that the current procedure was stringent, however, felt that there was an opportunity for scrutiny to have a look at this differently and with the modernisation of local government perhaps include the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships in the allocation of voluntary funding to local communities.
4. Members discussed the possibility of separating large funding grants and small funding grants and have two separate pots of money. Members recognised that borough wide funding pots, as such, the Citizens Advice Bureau and local pots of money offered to Local Neighbourhood Partnerships to determine the most worthy local voluntary organisation.

Members further comments

- Councillor Burley voiced concerns that there was a duplication of effort for many voluntary groups and asked if any work can be done to encourage groups to amalgamate a number of voluntary organisations under one umbrella to direct adequate resources.
- Councillor Zahid recognised this concern and said that this was an ambition for most members in local communities but that it was a very delicate balancing exercise between local organisations. Jamie Morris clarified that this was the type of work that the Walsall Voluntary Action Group was trying to get off the ground at the moment to help local organisations set up constitutions, payrolls etc. He felt this could be a very positive piece of voluntary work on a borough wide basis. John Pryce-Jones clarified that the voluntary sector had identified this as being a problem at their vision event in January and that there was a duplication of applying all over the place for funding. David Martin agreed that this was part of a broader agenda; he referred to Old People's Day Services separate facilities and how community organisations provided facilities for older people. Members agreed it was important to look at the whole picture.
- Councillor Mrs Beilby agreed that it was important to have another look at the way this funding was allocated.
- Councillor Burley agreed stating that the process needed to be looked at as currently it was a deterrent to smaller voluntary organisations; vv the form being too complicated to complete for a small grant.
- Councillor Towe readdressed the question of the performance of the Citizens Advice Bureau and who scrutinises and monitors the performance of the Citizens Advice Bureau. John Pryce-Jones confirmed that colleagues in the policy unit regularly hold meetings with the Citizens Advice Bureau and that finance and audit sections have meetings to determine financial matters.
- Councillor Ault voiced concerns that some organisations issued grants in 2005-6 have not been heard of not been heard of members wanted to know how one organisation is allocated a grant whereas another similar organisation is not.

Members raised a number of other queries and suggested that it was important to monitor the process and see how the grants are allocated for this funding year.

Councillor Towe voiced concerns that every organisation has to go through the same process, the same level of application, the same service level agreement; he asked why everyone had to go through the same detailed process and queried whether if the application form for smaller applications was made simpler more local voluntary organisations would apply for local funding. Councillor Towe suggested banding applications the following points were discussed:-

- David Martin advised that in some other local authorities there were two different pots of money for small grants and major grants.
- Councillor Burley felt it was important to explore looking at two different banding pots of money with different application forms and service level agreements depending on the amount of grant.
- Councillor Beeley asked how many organisations had applied for money in 2005/6 and was advised that 62 organisations had applied for grants. Out of 62; 19 organisations had been granted a total of £514,719.00.

After a further period of discussion it was AGREED:

- That a workshop be arranged to look at alternate processes for distribution of funding to voluntary organisations.
- The purpose of the workshop was to make recommendations on how to change the process for future years funding allocations.

There was a suspension of the meeting for a comfort break at 7.30 p.m. – 7.40 p.m.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Members were circulated copies of the notes of the workshop 28 September 2005 and a document entitled “Performance Measure Shortlist” which sets out for members consideration a list of five performance measures from which the panel can select one to scrutinise in more detail at a future panel meeting.

The performance measures are: -

1. BV126 - Burglaries per 1,000 population.
2. BV178a – Percentage of total length of footpaths and other rights of way which were easy to use by members of the public.
BV178b – Uses the countryside agency methodology for collection (yes/no).
3. BV119e – Satisfaction with parks and open spaces.
4. BV12 – Number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence.
5. BV170a – The number of visits to/usages of museums per 1,000 of population.

Councillor Towe introduced the documentation and advised members that the performance measure workshop had been a very worthwhile experience. Members left the workshop with a better understanding of performance measures. He advised that a number of key questions had been asked and answered in the workshop situation. He advised that members had openly discussed their views on performance and considered performance measurers within the remit of the panel.

Members considered the five performance measures highlighted in the document circulated.

Councillor Burley identified question four; the BV12 number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence. Members considered the reasons why officers had suggested scrutiny of this particular best value performance measure:

- A statutory best value performance indicator also used in the Beacon Index as a measure of our corporate health.
- The quarter one performance position compared to the same period last year had worsened through an improvement on the 2004/5 outturn.
- Whilst there had been surpassed improvement in this performance indicator there are reporting issues impacting and compliance with sickness management guidance that needs to be addressed to make sure the correct information is being reported.

Members outlined the reasons for suggesting that this was the best performance indicator to scrutinise: -

- Councillor Phillips stated this performance indicator had been scrutinised previously. Members needed to establish whether it was the same group of employees on long-term sickness or whether the group of employees had varied.
- Councillor Ault suggested clarification was needed whether the indicators were due to long-term sickness or one day sicknesses.
- Councillor Burley suggested that it was essential for members to identify what it is that we are doing wrong; are we not addressing the sickness management process, what actions can be taken to reduce sickness.
- Councillor Bott asked questions relating to the DDA funding. Jamie Morris agreed to respond to Councillor Bott outside this forum relating to the disability grants, disability access funding.

Jamie Morris asked for clarification exactly what members were requesting officers to carryout. Members confirmed that they wanted to know :-

- the process
- the mechanics of how this performance indicator works
- what we are doing to improve the performance
- what measures are being taken.

Councillor Towe summarised by saying we are monitoring performance but how we make improvements; we want to know if they are making a difference.

AGREED

It was agreed that BV12; number of days/shifts lost due to sickness absence would be reported back to the meeting of this panel on the 8 December 2005.

FIRST STOP SHOP

A briefing note was submitted to members relating to the first stop shop and the feedback on the users survey and visit by members.

Members who had visited the first stop shop had been very impressed with the facility; the following comments were recorded: -

- Councillor Bott asked when the people of Darlaston would have their local first stop shop.
- Councillor Phillips indicated that she had arrived early to the visit and had witnessed a blind man being pointed in the direction of a desk rather than being led. She requested an investigation be carried out relating to this.
- Members reported that waiting times were too long.
- Councillor Burley asked how do we illustrate to people where to go.
- The council tax desk had been closed before 5.00 p.m. on one occasion.
- Councillor Bott requested clarification if there was an interpreter on site.
- Councillor Bott requested clarification on how long a customer would wait for braille.
- Councillor Ault asked that VDU writing on a rolling board in the one stop shop.

In response to members questions and comments Jamie Morris advised that the waiting time for services was currently being addressed but that officers had not yet resolved the situation. Karen Adderley advised that an organisation has been engaged and a contract is in place for interpretation services.

After a further period of consideration members requested a report back from the officers. The report should identify the current position with the following issues: -

- Language and visual language displays.
- Complaints and satisfaction level for blind and deaf users of the first stop shop.
- An explanation why council tax desk was shut prior to first stop shop closing hours.
- Information about braille facilities at the first stop shop.
- Further information about the deaf centre being used as a first point of contact for the first stop shop for deaf clients.
- Further information about district centre first stop shops.

AGREED

Members thanked Karen Adderley for the information provided and agreed that a report back to the meeting on the 8 December 2005.

CITIZENS PANEL

Karen Adderley referred to information previously circulated: -

(see annexed)

Members were invited to ask questions.

- Councillor Ault asked if the application or questionnaire was too complicated and did we feel that an average person would be able to complete it or would want to complete it. Members were advised that officers had brought expertise to find the level of questionnaire that would suit all abilities. Councillor Ault still felt that this was a complicated form and that some members of society would need help to fill the form in.
- Councillor Burley felt the letter accompanying it should be rephrased
- Councillor Towe stated that we need to look at the process and suggested that all members of the panel complete the survey and return it with comments to Debbie Breedon in the scrutiny team and that all comments be fed back to the next meeting on the 8 December 2005.
- Members voiced concerns that the mapping sheet circulated to members highlighted that not all areas were returning questionnaires.

AGREED

Members to complete the questionnaire, return it to the scrutiny office and feedback be given to the next meeting.

FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS - 2005

Members were asked to identify any issues for further information from the forward plan for key decisions.

120/04

Councillor Burley requested further information on item 120/04 – Putting the Citizen First Project - the project seeks to transform service delivery in a wide range of service functions through a strategic partnership with the private sector.

Councillor Burley requested where the council is with the project. Jamie Morris advised that the report would not be going to cabinet on the 19 October 2005 as indicated on the forward plan of key decisions. He did, however, state to members that when officers felt sufficiently forward then he would progress a process between cabinet and scrutiny to ensure that the issue of putting the citizen first project was properly scrutinised.

Councillor Burley requested clarification whether employees would stay with Walsall Council until the contract had been signed and was advised that that was the case.

Jamie Morris suggested that a scrutiny workshop should be arranged to give consideration to the process for scrutinising the putting the citizen first project.

99/05

Councillor Towe referred to item 99/05 – the Library Service Review shown on the forward plan key decisions to be considered on the 9 November 2005. Councillor Towe requested clarification of the current position; he informed members that Sue Grainger had attended the scrutiny panel in January 2005 and suggested that following the cabinet meeting on the 9 November 2005 Sue Grainger be invited to

scrutiny to outline in detail the report to cabinet for members to be given opportunity to discuss the improvement plan from the library service review.

Councillor Bott referred to the agenda for the meeting, in particular that Walsall Council encourages the public to exercise their right to attend meetings of Council, Cabinet and Committees. Councillor Bott asked the chairman why there were no members of the public in attendance at the meeting tonight with so many key issues asset out on the agenda. The chairman asked officers to comment. Members were advised that the scrutiny team currently undertaking work to raise the profile of scrutiny and that early notification of meetings and press releases were part of that plan to inform the public of date, place and subject of the meeting. Members discussed the lack of public attendance and the agendas and agreed that further work to promote the work of scrutiny should be undertaken.

AGREED

That Sue Grainger be invited to the next meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.35 p.m.