

DARLASTON NORTH/BENTLEY/DARLASTON SOUTH AREA PANEL

Tuesday, 27 January, 2015 at 6.00 p.m.

**In the Council Chamber at Darlaston Town Hall, Victoria Road,
Darlaston**

Present

Councillor Burley (Chair)
Councillor Chambers (Vice-Chair)
Councillor James
Councillor Underhill

In Attendance

John Batchelor - Interim Area Manager
Kate Bowers - Neighbourhood Services
Jo Lowndes - Neighbourhood Services

86/15

Apology

An apology for non-attendance was submitted on behalf of Inspector Keane (West Midlands Police).

87/15

Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November, 2014, a copy having previously been circulated to each Member of the Panel be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of the word "site" after the words "Darlaston Multi-Purpose Centre" in Paragraph 3 on page 7.

88/15

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Burley declared an interest in the funding application made by Darlaston Town Football Club as she was a Director of the Club and took no part in the discussion or voting thereon.

Councillor Chambers declared an interest in the Darlaston Town Football Club funding application as he was a Director of the Club and took no part in the discussion or voting thereon.

89/15 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

90/15 **Funding Report**

The joint report of the Interim Area Manager and Area Partnership Manager was submitted:-

(see annexed)

The Interim Area Manager (John Batchelor) enlarged upon the report and explained the projects contained therein.

Darlaston Town FC - Bentley Leisure Pavilion

The Interim Area Manager reported that a request had been received from Darlaston Town Football Club for funding in the sum of £1,600 to furnish and equip Bentley Leisure Pavilion to ensure that the community asset remains fully utilised by the community for a range of community, sports, social and local business purposes. A Business Plan was being developed for the site and match funding of £8,645 was to be provided by the Football Club from reserves and generated income.

John Batchelor indicated that there was concern that the pavilion could have been left empty and open to vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Underhill stated that she was pleased that Darlaston Town Football Club had taken on the running of the Centre and hoped to extend its use to weddings and other corporate events.

After further discussion it was,

Resolved

That funding in the sum of £1,600 requested by Darlaston FC for improvements to Bentley Leisure Pavilion be approved.

Sustainable services community consultation

The Interim Area Manager reported that a project designed to improve knowledge of community needs and wants, especially of those who do not currently use Moxley People's Centre, was to be made. An independent research organisation would undertake a local community consultation of approximately 300 residents and funding in the sum of £1,750 was sought for this proposal. Match funding of £1,750 was to be provided from community hubs funding.

Councillor Burley referred to the fact that Moxley People's Centre was currently being run by an Interim Manager. She asked who it was. Councillor James replied that the Manager was a secondment from Manor Farm for two days a week.

Councillor Burley asked what form the research would take and what area it would cover. John Batchelor replied that it would involve door to door interviews and would cover an area surrounding the centre.

Councillor James commented that he had held discussions with the Interim Manager and it appeared that the Centre was under performing on diversity and was also failing to attract residents from the wider area. He felt that the proposed consultation exercise would help to address these problems.

John Batchelor stated that it was good that grants to Community Associations were not to be reduced as part of the budget process.

Members felt that the funding should be supported provided assurances were given that the Centre would support day care and disabled users of the facility.

Members also felt that the organisation carrying out the consultation exercise should be independent and that the sample should be larger than the 300 proposed as it was felt that 300 would be too small to be representative of the people of Moxley.

Councillor James felt that emphasis should be placed on the under 25's as they had lost out in the last few years. He felt that young people were disengaged and every effort should be made to win them back.

Members asked who would be informed of the results of the consultation exercise. They asked that the Panel be advised of the results.

John Batchelor advised the meeting that Walsall Voluntary Action would be inviting tenders from suitably qualified persons to carry out the consultation which would be arranged through their procurement process. Councillor James felt that the WVA and not Moxley People's Centre should select the successful tenderer.

Councillor Burley asked how community hubs could match fund the consultation exercise in the sum of £1,750. Kate Bowers replied that the funding came from existing monies and not from the new community hubs.

Councillor James reminded the meeting that funding needed to be spent by 31 March, 2015 or it could be lost. Councillor Burley felt that the exercise must be inclusive and not exclusive.

Councillor Chambers suggested that the specification should be drawn up by the Local Authority.

Members questioned the timeframe for the exercise. Councillor James felt that the work should start no later than one month after the tender process was complete.

After further discussion it was,

Resolved

- (1) That approval be given to funding in the sum of £1,750 for the sustainable services community consultation regarding the use of Moxley People's Centre, subject to the caveats referred to above;
- (2) That a report on the progress of the consultation exercise be referred to the March meeting of the Panel.

Projects approved

Councillor Burley referred to the Darlaston Winter Lighting Scheme which the Area Panel had supported with a grant of £2,000 provided that local businesses also contributed. She asked if this had happened. John Batchelor replied that business sponsorship had not reached the levels hoped.

Councillor Burley requested that a report on the level of business sponsorship for the Darlaston Winter Lighting Scheme be submitted to the March meeting of the Panel.

The way forward for Area Panels

An Area Partnerships Delivery Plan 2014-15 was circulated to Members present at the meeting:-

(see annexed)

Kate Bowers - Interim Head of Communities and Public Protection, enlarged upon the Delivery Plan for the benefit of the Panel. She advised the meeting that the re-structuring of Area Partnership Teams was now complete. Two new Area Managers, Laura Terry and Vanessa Croft, had been appointed and existing Area Managers who had been in post for some 2 - 2½ years were being moved to new areas to freshen things up. Each Area Panel had different challenges so a fresh approach could be rewarding. She conceded that continuity was important but felt that a new Manager could bring fresh innovation and problem solving skills to an area. She informed the meeting that Nicola Holmes would be the new Area Manager in Darlaston as John Batchelor would be leaving the Interim Area Manager role at the end of January.

Councillor Chambers asked if Nicola Holmes would be dedicated to the Darlaston Area Panel alone. Kate Bowers confirmed that she would. She added that there would be some crossover, however, as Nicola would be working with the hubs. It was essential that best practice was shared if the hubs were to be delivered as proposed.

Councillor Burley commented that there was only one hub operating in the Darlaston area at present at Moxley. She questioned whether Bentley and Darlaston North would be having its own hub or whether it would have to share the Moxley hub. Kate Bowers replied that there were two hubs at present at Moxley and Ryecroft but more would be rolled out across the Borough.

Councillor Chambers referred to the fact that the Darlaston area comprised a conglomeration of unique communities, so in an ideal world, Bentley, Darlaston, Moxley and Fallings Heath would all have hubs.

Councillor Chambers asked when Nicola would commence her duties. Kate Bowers replied from 1 March, 2015. Councillor Chambers asked if Nicola could be involved in the area before 1 March so that Members could introduce her to key personnel in Darlaston. Councillor Burley asked what would happen during the interim period. Kate Bowers replied that the rest of the team would assist with work until Nicola took over.

Councillor Burley referred to the fact that Members had enjoyed a good working relationship with John Batchelor and she hoped that the same would apply to Nicola.

Jo Lowndes (Area Partnerships) reported that Nicola was currently the Area Manager for Willenhall and had recently returned from maternity leave but she would contact Councillors over the coming weeks.

Councillor Burley felt that Nicola should be involved in Darlaston as soon as possible to aid continuity.

Resolved

That the Area Partnerships Delivery Plan 2014 - 15 and the verbal report be noted.

91/15

Area Manager's Update Report

The report of the Interim Area Partnership Manager was submitted:-

(see annexed)

John Batchelor enlarged upon the report for the benefit of the Panel and drew attention to the following:-

- Roadworks in Darlaston were continuing and the Council's Highways Department was producing a newsletter to provide residents with information on progress;
- Car cruising had been outlawed in a High Court judgement. A three year injunction prevented street racing and driving in convoy (as few as two vehicles) covered the whole of the Black Country. The Black Country Route had been identified as a hot spot. The ban could not be enforced until appropriate signage had been erected but this should be completed by the beginning of February;
- Anti-social behaviour at ABC Park had been addressed by partners and a camera had been installed by WHG to monitor anti-social behaviour and gather evidence of the illegal use of motorcycle and quad bikes in the park;
- The Bentley Youth and Community Centre in Wilkes Avenue had been renamed the Bentley All Ages Activity Centre following consultation with youngsters who used the premises;
- A gift shop specialising in goods for people with dementia had opened in King Street, Darlaston. It was the first of its kind in the country;
- Connecting Communities (C2) a Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group led initiative to develop a community focussed partnership to drive improvements had been set up. At an event in Autumn 2014, three key priorities had been set up:-

Environmental (fly tipping, dog fouling, litter)

Anti-social behaviour (lack of social activities for children and young people, motorcycle/quad bikes)

Public service (parking around schools and transport links)

John Batchelor reported that Denise Perry had been involved with this initiative and would carry on with it when he left.

Members confirmed that the three priorities highlighted were constantly raised by local residents and were a regular source of complaint.

Councillor Underhill felt that activities for young people were provided in Darlaston but the take up was disappointing as youngsters did not want to take part in organised activities. John Batchelor replied that, in his opinion, activities for youngsters in Darlaston were well attended but they would be adversely affected by budget cuts as in Bentley alone, half of youth funding would be lost.

Councillor Underhill referred to the recent refurbishment of play equipment at ABC Park and commented that it only catered for younger children. She asked if something could be provided for older children.

Councillor Burley referred to complaints from local residents concerning noise emanating from the play area. She added that it was hoped to provide additional facilities for older children further away from adjoining homes.

After further discussion it was,

Resolved

That the report be noted.

92/15

Development of the former Servis site

A local resident reported that the former Servis site was to be used for more housing. He was concerned that industrial sites were being turned over to housing and there would be nowhere for firms to locate to as the economy grew.

Councillor Underhill referred to the fact that the Government had provided money to decontaminate industrial land so that it could be re-used for industry but companies preferred to go to fresh sites rather than coming to Darlaston. She felt that housing might provide the answer to the development of these reclaimed sites.

Resolved

That the verbal comments be noted.

93/15

John Batchelor's last meeting

Councillor Burley referred to the fact that this was John Batchelor's last meeting as Interim Area Manager for Darlaston. She thanked him for his efforts on behalf of Darlaston and wished him well for the future. Members concurred with her remarks.

94/15

Dates and venues for future meetings

The dates and venues for future meetings of the Panel were submitted.

Resolved

That the dates and future venues of meetings be noted.

Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.20 p.m.

Chairman

Date