

NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 4 September 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor C Towe (Chair)
Councillor C Creaney
Councillor P Bott
Councillor R Martin
Councillor M Mushtaq
Councillor J Phillips
Councillor D Pitt

Other Members present

Councillor K Chambers

Officers present

Jamie Morris	Executive Director – Neighbourhood Services
Keith Stone	Assistant Director - Built Environment
Tim Challans	Assistant Director – Leisure, Culture and Lifelong Learning
Nozmul Hussain	Director, Safer Walsall Partnership
Alison Jarrett	Head of Service Finance
Stuart Wootton	Finance Manager - Regeneration & Neighbourhood Services
Julie Gethin	Head of Neighbourhood Partnerships & Programmes
Andy Ody	Manager - Grounds & Street Cleansing & Markets
Angela Walker	Scrutiny Officer

19/08 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor V Woodruff and Councillor L Beeley.

20/08 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

21/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

22/08 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 29 JULY 2008

The Chair asked Members whether they had received a copy of the Place Survey, as resolved at the last meeting. Members stated that they had not received this document and the Panel asked that this be sent out to Members as agreed. Angela Walker agreed to pursue this with Vanessa Holding and issue to Members.

Members also stated that they had not received a copy of a briefing note on the strategy to recruit additional school crossing patrol staff, as resolved at the last meeting. Jamie Morris agreed to pursue this and ensure a briefing note is issued to Members.

In response to a Member's question on the provision of free swimming to under 16's and over 60's, as discussed at the last meeting, Tim Challans stated that £79,000 of funding would be received to cover the cost of the over 60's free swimming. For the 16's and under, it is estimated that funding of approximately £138,000 could be received to offer free swimming. Funding will commence in April 2009 and Members were informed that residents entitled to free swimming would be able to attend any public swimming session.

Resolved

That:

- a) the minutes, of the meeting held on 29 July 2008, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record;**
and;
- b) a copy of the Place Survey be sent to all Members of the Panel for information;**
and:
- c) a briefing note be sent to Panel Members on the strategy to recruit additional school crossing patrol staff.**

23/08 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The Chair outlined a course on 'Building successful and responsive Overview and Scrutiny'. Members commented that they would prefer for seminars and courses to take place locally in Walsall rather than in Birmingham or London.

24/08 FORWARD PLAN

119/07 Decriminalised parking enforcement operational framework

Keith Stone reported that the implementation of this scheme has been delayed due to bad weather. Before the scheme can go live, the yellow lines must be re-painted on roads throughout the borough, which requires dry weather. Contingency options are being investigated to ensure the impact of this delay is minimalised, such as options to send the statutory letter to the Department of Transport before the lines have been re-painted. Keith Stone assured Members that he was confident that by the October meeting of the Panel a positive progress report would be available.

15/08 Sustainable travel to school strategy

Members were informed that the sustainable travel to school strategy would be presented to the Panel in October

Gating Orders Policy

Members were informed that this item would be presented to the Panel in December

25/08 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR WORKING GROUP

The Chair informed the Panel that Item 11 on the agenda – Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group - would be taken before item 7. The Chair updated Members on the working group meetings, which had taken place so far and explained that the notes of the meeting of the working group that took place on 28 August, had been tabled for Members for their information and comment.

The Chair reported that he had met with the Chief Superintendents of the two OCUs in Walsall on Tuesday 2 September who expressed concerns that they had not been involved in the working group thus far. The meeting concluded with a positive agreement to look at the best way for the Superintendents to be involved in the group in future.

The Chair also informed Members that the working group had visited the Young Person's Information Centre (YPIC) in Blakenall and that a detailed report on the visit would be circulated to all Members prior to the next working group meeting. Members of the working group stated that the centre had allayed the fears of residents in the area who were against it being built and that it had been a very positive influence in the area.

A Member stated that he had concerns over the sustainability of the centre and that a business plan and exit strategy are needed for when the current funding ceases.

The Chair informed Members that a neighbourhood watch chairs meeting would be taking place on 15 September at Walsall Police Station and that all Members are invited.

Nozmul Hussain stated that there would be a number of co-opted members on the group, including members from Children's Services and Walsall Housing Group. The Fire Service have also expressed an interest in joining the group and a response is awaited from the Primary Care Trust.

Members were informed that an Anti-Social Behaviour training event would be taking place on 18 September and that all Members are invited. A Member expressed concern over the short notice given for the event but accepted that there was a need to move forward with the issue.

26/08 COMMUNITY COHESION STRATEGY

Julie Ball explained to Members that a workshop took place on 2 September to gather Members feedback on the strategy. Members were informed that the strategy was developed in partnership and is designed to compliment the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

Julie Ball delivered an interactive presentation based around some of the questions on communities asked at the Citizens Panel in March 2008. Members participated by

using the interactive voting buttons provided on each of the questions asked of the Citizens Panel.

Members feedback that they liked the voting buttons and agreed that these would be a useful tool at LNP meetings.

The Chair asked how the council would be addressing the poor working with the third sector identified in the report. Julie Ball responded that the partnership are commissioning to address the issue and that a voluntary sector strategy is under development.

Members asked for further information on the identification and development of community leaders in Walsall. Julie Ball stated that a scheme to recruit potential community leaders from all backgrounds was funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). This scheme is designed to support young people to become leaders of the future and to develop and keep their skills in Walsall.

In response to a Member's question, Julie Ball explained that there are plans in place to mitigate the difficult circumstances in terms of maintaining cohesion, which arise when services are taken out of an area. Members were informed that gaps left by services being removed would be filled and that community assets would be built into the programme for remodelling communities.

A Member enquired what was planned to get people back using parks. Tim Challans explained that one of the pledges for this year is around improving security in parks, but that there is also a bigger community issue about reclaiming spaces. Julie Ball suggested that Members could look at designing some events to take place in local parks as part of their LNP's. Jamie Morris stated the importance of maximising the potential of community assets such as parks, schools and libraries and how they can be best used to make up for any services which are removed.

Members discussed the funding coming into the borough's schools through the Primary Capital Programme and Building Schools for the Future and this should be an opportunity to ensure new school buildings cater for the wider community.

The Chair enquired about the "twinning" projects between schools, as outlined in the strategy. Julie Ball explained that Walsall College was interested in being involved in this project and that the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) would be approached for support to take this forward. Members heard that a Walsall event on community cohesion would be held, involving keynote speakers; however the date for this was still to be confirmed.

27/08 HIGHWAYS REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE PARTNERSHIP

The Chair informed the Panel that Item 10 on the agenda – Highways repair and maintenance partnership - would be taken before items 8 and 9.

Keith Stone explained that the selection of a contractor to deliver a highways repair and maintenance service for the Council was close to completion. The bids have been received and a quality evaluation completed. The cost evaluation process will be completed once clarification is received from each bidder on their responses. Despite

this slight delay, Keith Stone assured Members that the project is still on track to be considered by Cabinet on 17 September.

Once the preferred bid has been considered by Cabinet, the detailed contract negotiations can begin, following which a formal Cabinet decision will be made on the supplier.

Members heard that a full report on the contractor will be presented to the Panel on 16 October. In response to a Member's question, Keith Stone stated that the contract will be a minimum of 4 years in duration, although the planned start date of 1 November is under threat due to delays. The project will be updated to inform the new planned start date.

Resolved:

That:

A report on the preferred supplier will be presented to the Panel at its meeting of 16 October 2008.

28/08 FLY TIPPING IN WALSALL

Andy Ody introduced the presentation and explained that the aim is to address the queries raised by Members at previous meetings. Members were shown slides of the borough, which identified where the fly-tipping hotspots are and the trends between 2006/07 and 2007/08 in fly-tipping levels.

A Member asked why there is no surveillance present in Harrowby Road, Moxley, to prevent fly-tipping, as this is a particular hotspot. Andy Ody explained that surveillance does take place in this location, but that the demolition of buildings in the road had made it difficult to locate cameras. Work is ongoing to improve the level of surveillance in this location as it is often difficult to get the registration numbers of vehicles involved in fly-tipping incidents.

The Chair asked why it was difficult to get the registration numbers of such vehicles. Andy Ody responded that it can be due to a number of reasons, including the reflection of sunlight in the image, the camera picture not being clear etc. The surveillance equipment is often visible in a location, which has proven to move the problem on further down the road where the camera can not capture. Members heard that the Council has to apply for a licence to conduct covert surveillance.

Jamie Morris added that there will be fly-tipping prosecutions coming to court over the next few weeks. Members were assured that media coverage will be given to any prosecutions as had been done in the past.

Keith Stone stated that there are four cases pending, two will be in court on 16 September. Andy Ody informed Members that on top of the court cases, there have been cases where people have been caught and have paid spot fines.

In response to Member's questions, Andy Ody explained that there could be no real correlation identified between an increase in fly-tipping and the introduction of the Council's charge to collect bulky items.

Members discussed the importance of communicating the availability of recycling facilities, which can be used for free as well as including this information in any press coverage relating to fly-tipping prosecutions.

In response to a Member's enquiry, Keith Stone explained that the number of brown bins was expanded last year and is reviewed annually. Keith Stone responded to a further question, informing Members that there are environmental health powers to force private landlords to remove fly-tipped waste on their land.

Andy Ody stated that the overall cost of fly-tipping in Walsall during 2006/07 was £144,000 and during 2007/08 was approximately £125,000.

Keith Stone informed Members that 240 statutory notices had been issued to private landlords and 683 fly tipping investigations had taken place during 2007/08.

Andy Ody detailed work that had taken place to engage residents through the introduction of "clean up days" and street champions, which were very successful.

Members discussed wheelie-bin cleaning companies and the debris left after they have cleaned the bins. Keith Stone stated that all instances need to be reported to the contact centre. Members were informed that the bin cleaning companies do not have to be licensed and that an agreement is made between the company and resident, therefore if a bin was damaged, the resident would have to discuss with the company in terms of claiming costs for a replacement. Jamie Morris added that if the Council were able to identify the bin cleaning companies, a letter could be sent to them regarding the littering problem and damage to the bins.

The Chair asked that the help desk telephone number be noted – (01922) 65 3344.

Resolved:

That:

a) Fly-tipping prosecutions should be widely publicised;

and

b) Free recycling facilities within the borough should be publicised.

29/08 BUDGET SETTING 2009/10-2011/12

The Chair provided the context to this item and explained that there was too much information to go through the pack in detail. Members were asked to approach Alison Jarrett outside of the meeting with any individual issues.

Alison Jarrett explained that at the next meeting of the Panel, Members will be asked to make recommendations on the budget and the pack had been provided at this early stage to give context to the budgetary proposals.

A Member stated that he much preferred this approach as it gave a more holistic picture of the process and provided better presentation of the information.

Members stated that the key information they would like to be presented with for the next meeting was as follows:

- How spend is prioritised
- Minimum standards
- Outcomes and value for money compared with other local authorities
- What is already being spent and where
- Areas of concern
- Challenges
- Link into Anti-social behaviour

Jamie Morris agreed that a directorate overview would be provided for the next meeting of the Panel.

Resolved:

That:

A directorate overview budget report will be provided for Members for the next meeting of the Panel

The meeting terminated at 8 pm.

Chair:

Date: